

Restore Small Group Questions - Acts (Week 21) — “Gaining Traction” — 6/29/2025

Scripture (NIV) - Acts 12:1-24; Luke 22:44; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

INTRODUCTION - Everyone loves an underdog...we are familiar with underdogs in sports competitions, in the movies, in politics, etc. but, in our study of the early church, we see a lopsided underdog story between the Roman empire and Early Christianity. Despite the vast difference between the capacity of the Roman empire to overwhelm the early church, there was a moment where the Jesus followers began to gain traction....when the Christians showed up on Rome's radar and God radar!

SCRIPTURE AND KEY POINTS:

- I. **On Rome's Radar** - Up until this point in the story of the early church, Rome could have cared less for Jesus and His followers, but Christianity was on the verge of a social and cultural revolution and Rome got on board with the Jews and began persecuting Christians.
 - A. **Acts 12:1-4** - *"It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. 2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. 3 When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. 4 After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover."*
 - B. King Herod initiated the Roman persecution of Jesus' followers with the death of James, the brother of John, and arrested Peter for trial. Herod targeted the Christians to appease the Jews...took the easy path to solve a problem. Previously, Herod's grandfather killed babies because of his paranoia, need to maintain power, appeasement, and to keep peace. King Herod's targeted attack on the Christians brought Rome into the fray with the Christians as the underdog.
 - C. Two Thoughts:
 1. James was given one sentence in the Book of Acts concerning his death, while Stephen was given a large section of scripture describing his death.?????
 2. Following Jesus is difficult and we often get more than we can handle in life, love, and spiritual warfare.....contrary to popular belief. God wants us to depend on Him to overcome oppression, persecution, and when things get real. Enter God!
- II. **On God's Radar** - We have a choice to make when life gets difficult; Run away from or Run to God.....and when we run to God, we get on God's radar and get His attention.
 - A. **Acts 12:5-17** - *5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. 6 The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. 7 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists. 8 Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. 9 Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. 10 They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him. 11 Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen." 12 When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of*

Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. 13 Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. 14 When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!" 15 "You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel." 16 But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. 17 Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this," he said, and then he left for another place.

- B. Peter thinks he is in a dream —an angel wakes him up and removes the chains and tells him to get dressed —he walks unarmed past 16 guards and the prison gates open on their own and the angel departs. Peter is in disbelief but realizes he has been rescued. Meanwhile, many people were gathered to pray for him through the night. Prayer and asking God to intervene are linked in this story. When powerful prayer was employed, God moved powerfully.....something that we should embrace in all our prayers; crisis or not! Here are the ingredients in powerful prayer

1. **Passionate** - Deep degree of heart-felt intensity -
 - a) Luke 22:44 - "And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."
 - b) 1 Peter 1:22 - "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart."
2. **Persistent** - Insistent, repetitive, and continuous prayer. Pray and not give up until there is an answer and continue to trust in God.
3. **Partnership** - Praying together with one heart for accountability, for bearing one another's burdens, for synergy and focus and for multiplied effectiveness.
4. **Powerful Movement** - Supernatural movement of God that surprises. Peter kept knocking and the people kept praying and when they saw him, they were astonished. If you ever waiver in Full Faith....pray anyway!

III. **Rome Vs. God** - After faithful following and passionate, persistent, and partnering prayer...it's like God said, "I'll take it from here". The Lord struck Herod down because Herod chose to give himself the glory and not God. Herod chose arrogance. The IRONY is that instead of Peter being killed by Herod, Herod was killed by Peter's God.

Acts 12:18-23 - "In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. **19** After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed. Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. **20** He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. After securing the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply. **21** On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. **22** They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." **23** Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died."

CONCLUSION - God handled what the church couldn't; He knew they trusted Him and the church continued to flourish and spread. God was in control because of the total and complete dedication to Jesus to do whatever it took to make the gospel 'the most important thing' in life.

Acts 12:24 - "But the word of God continued to spread and flourish."

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 - *“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, **4** that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,”*

We must stay the course and depend on God in fervent prayer!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS -

1. Do you think that many political figures in America are ready to persecute Christians if it will make them more politically popular? What drives them to this perverted thinking?
2. This week’s study shows us that the work of God continues without hindrance, in this case, the powers of Rome could not impede God’s plan to grow the church. Can you think of a current hindrance (or hindrances) that attempt(s) to hinder God in our world today? What does it look like and what is the impact?
3. Discuss the power of prayer. Why don’t we exercise that power to ask God for what we desire? What does this say about our reliance on God or lack of it?
4. What lessons should we learn from this episode in Acts 12 about faith, prayer and trust?
5. What are your thoughts about the saying that “God will never give you more than you can handle”? Is that true or not true? What does this say about our dependence on God in all things?
6. Discuss the ingredients of ‘powerful prayer’ — passion, persistence, partnership and supernatural movement of God. What ingredients are potentially lacking in your prayer life?
7. Have you ever been surprised that God actually answered your prayers?
8. Do you believe that there is nothing more important than the Gospel of Jesus; His death, burial and resurrection (**1 Corinthians 15:3-4**)? How should that motivate your spiritual and personal life? What needs to be left behind to make that happen?