

What Happens When A Church Prays? (Acts 12:5)

Acts 12:1-17

[1] About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. [2] He killed James the brother of John with the sword, [3] and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. [4] And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. [5] So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

[6] Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. [7] And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands. [8] And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." [9] And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. [10] When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. [11] When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

[12] When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. [13] And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. [14] Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. [15] They said to her, "You are out of your mind." But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!" [16] But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. [17] But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers." Then he departed and went to another place.

The Apostle Peter was in prison, guarded by sixteen soldiers and even sleeping between two soldiers. He was bound with two chains, and sentries were standing guard at the entrance. Peter was waiting to be executed the next day by orders of King Herod, the Roman governor over Palestine.

Peter appeared to be in a very desperate situation. Yet even in this situation, Peter had such a peace within that he was able to fall asleep. He was *ready* to meet GOD and he was *prepared* to meet God!

What about you? Are you asleep as a Christian? Would you be so prepared to meet GOD that you could sleep knowing you were going to die the next day? There would be no eleventh hour reprieve for Peter, no last minute pardon - or so he thought.

As the Scriptures describe these events, the author of Acts, Luke, knows something that Peter and the guards and King Herod do not know:

Acts 12:5

[5] . . . but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

This story was included in the Scriptures not just to provide a biographical slice of Peter's life – rather it was placed in the New Testament to remind the church of their responsibility to pray and the power that is available to the church when she does pray.

What can we learn from a church that prays?

1. *People's needs are met.*

Just as Peter was in prison, many people are locked up in their own cell.

A cell that is not:

1. *Cold and dark cement.*
2. *Surrounded by steel bars.*
3. *Having a stained toilet in the corner.*

But it is nevertheless a jail. There can be many types of prison. A person can be in a prison of:

1. *Pain.*
2. *Emotional rejection.*
3. *Physical hardship.*
4. *Spiritual suffering.*

Others are in chains of confusion—either through:

1. *A loss of job.*
2. *An unhappy home life.*
3. *An unfulfilled vocation.*

Others are bound by their own inadequacies or inferiorities. These are people that are hurting and in **desperate** need of prayer – just as Peter was. Because the early church prayed, Peter was released from his prison.

Miraculously, the chains fell off and he walked out of the prison through two sets of guards without even a fight.

It is interesting that the main character of this story doubted. Peter's faith was imperfect (see Acts 12:9) – he thought he was seeing a vision. Even the church's faith was imperfect (see Acts 12:14-15) – they did not believe the report that Peter was standing outside the gate even though that is exactly what they had prayed for! They thought the servant girl, Rhoda, was out of her mind when she reported it, and she thought she was seeing an angel.

It was not the perfect faith of a powerful church that rescued Peter from prison. The believers praying for Peter's deliverance did not even have enough faith to leave the front door unlocked!

Those believers did not know for sure what God *would* do for Peter, but they knew what God *could* do, and their imperfect faith, coupled with fervent, persistent prayer - moved the hand of God.

We should not ridicule the early church for their unbelief. We are often in the same position. Their strange mixture of faith and fear should inspire us to continue praying earnestly even though we may not have perfect faith - God can work in spite of our imperfect faith.

Have you ever prayed about something then doubted if God could do something about it? Perhaps, you prayed for a job but saw no way that you could get it - but you did! Or, perhaps you prayed for a certain outcome at work or at home - "But there's no way that will happen," you thought.

And then . . . It happened just as you prayed! Maybe not in your timing, but nevertheless, the results were what you had hoped for!

What the early church did for Peter –

1. *The modern day church can do for those people around us who are imprisoned.*
2. *And if we are the one's imprisoned, we too can experience freedom from the chains that bind us.*
3. *But first we must pray!!*
4. *And if we will pray, God has a lot of surprises in store for us!*