

The Nearness of God

Acts 12:1-19
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The Big Idea: The imperfect believers in the early Church prayed for two of their pastors and saw two dramatically different answers. James is executed while Peter is released. In both circumstances God was near to the families and the people of God.

Acts 12 (ESV)

12 [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.

[18] Now when day came, *there was no little disturbance among the soldiers* over what had become of Peter. [19] And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and *ordered that they should be put to death*. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there.

Two Major Truths to Know and Carry With Us:

1. Although God is always good and all-powerful, sometimes some of His choicest servants die before we thought they would.
   - Those who teach that it is always God's will to deliver us from sickness, tragedy, and death teach a false doctrine not found in the Bible.
   - God does not love us less when He allows tragedy into our lives.
   - One part of a Biblical view of death is to consider the eternal perspective, not just the temporal perspective.

2. Because God is both good and all-powerful, He can easily deliver His servants from suffering if that is what He chooses for us (His will).

   - ✓ God is glorified when we are acknowledge our helplessness and are totally dependent on Him.
   - ✓ Sometimes God waits until the last moment to deliver us so that we will be motivated to pray.
   - ✓ God is not limited by the prayers of His people, but He works through our prayers to teach us to trust Him.

God's sovereignty in protecting his work in the world is not limited by our ability to understand it, to interpret it, or to act on it intelligently.
- Kenneth Gangel