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Is Where Those Who Believe Are Moved To Glorify God Acts Chapter 12

I trust that by the time we finish going through the study of the Book of Acts, you have some facsimile of understanding about the purpose of the Book of Acts. I trust that will be true. In the Book of Acts, often referred to as the Acts of the apostles or the business or the work of the apostles, God lays the foundation for the church. We are watching the foundation of the church being laid. We realize that God is doing this through the power of His Spirit as well as directing us and giving the church, if I can put it this way, bones and flesh. It begins to not only breathe, but it begins to have standards. It begins to see where it is going. As we go through the Book of Acts, we read about the power of the church in which God declared to Peter, "I will build my church upon your profession of faith, upon your confession of Me as Lord. We will build the church." The cornerstone is set on Jesus

Christ. No other foundation can be laid except the one that is laid in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the prophets and the apostles will build upon that foundation. We see the structure going up. If you ever want to know what you really should be looking for in a church, then use the Book of Acts as your guide because the Book of Acts will give you the structure of the church, i.e., what it is about.

We will review briefly up to Chapter Twelve, focusing on the foundation that is being laid. In Chapter One, what is clear is that the foundation of the church must be a foundation of hope. That hope must be, or the confident expectation of the church must be, Jesus Christ and His return. Our hope is fixed on His return. It is not fixed on our ability to make this world better. It is not fixed upon our prowess or our methodology or anything else. We are looking forward to Jesus Christ's coming. We are fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith; and we look forward to His coming. Someday that will happen. Revelation 19 gives that marvelous picture of Christ physically returning to earth. As it was stated so clearly in

Acts Chapter One, in the same way that He went up, He will be coming back down. Scripture is quite clear about the physical appearance of Jesus Christ as He returns. The reason I stress that is because there is some teaching that is going on that we are ushering in the kingdom of God. That is just not true. Christ will usher in His kingdom. We are standing firm until He comes. and our hope is that He will come.

(I Thessalonians 4:16) “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.”

(I Thessalonians 4:17) “Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we always be with the Lord.”

We are waiting for him.

Then the Second Chapter establishes the power of the church. It is clear that the church is empowered and

enlivened by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Christ's power is evident when Christ is proclaimed. It is evident when we begin to submit to that marvelous Gospel. I think the way that it is put in Second Thessalonians is that we are to obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What does he mean by obey? Well, the command of the Gospel is to believe. That is the crisis point where you and I come to make a decision to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. We put all of our trust in believing that God is good. One of the reasons why we submit to everything that He tells us is that we are convinced by virtue of the cross alone. The evidence is there. God is not asking us to believe blindly. The evidence is there. God loves us and gave His Son for us and has defeated death. Do you believe that He loves you? Well, the evidence is there. It is irrefutable. Yes. I believe. God gives His grace and His loving kindness to us. That is the power that we begin to receive. If we receive this Gospel, the Spirit of His Son begins to indwell us. We just cannot help but talk about it. One of the ways that you know that you are filled with the Spirit of God is that you are bold

about speaking the name of Jesus Christ. If you are going around doing good deeds but are not proclaiming the name of Christ, that is you acting in your own strength. Congratulations because you have your reward on the earth. However, there is a reward for those who will proclaim the name of Jesus Christ. This is by virtue of the Spirit of His Son who dwells within us. We cannot keep quiet about His name. We are empowered and enlivened by His Spirit.

Chapter Three shows us that we serve in and by the name of Christ. There is no other name. He will state that in Chapter Four. There is no other name that I can give you by which you must be saved. Chapter Four ties in with Chapter Three.

In Chapter Four, we find confidence in the authority of Jesus Christ. It is only in the name of Jesus Christ where we find that confidence. We begin to understand and believe that it is to His authority that we must submit. No other. We might even go against governing authorities but not because we want to or want to rebel against

governing authorities. Our desire is to obey our government leaders. But if what we have to do goes against Christ, we cannot do anything else other than to obey Him.

Chapter Five tells us that the church is to be the guardian of the truth. We must guard the truth. This is one of the main purposes of the church. Paul will write about this as he writes to Timothy. We will reemphasize the fact that we are the pillar of the truth, the church.

Then in Chapter Six, we believe that the church is managed by Spirit-filled followers of Christ. The church is not managed by people who have prowess or ability in business dealings. We are not managed by people who are necessarily well educated. I trust that maybe some will be. That would be nice. Those are not the things that we are looking for though. What would I be looking for? Those who are Spirit-filled. Once again, how do you know that somebody is Spirit-filled? Galatians talks about the fruit of the Spirit of Christ :

(Galatians 5:24) “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; against such things, there is no law.”

Notice that it talks about the fruit of the Spirit with “fruit” being singular. I have heard some people say, “Well, I have love, but I do not have patience.” I tell them that is impossible because First Corinthians 13:4 says that love is patient. Therefore, it is impossible for you to not have patience if you have the love of Christ. All these together are the fruit of the Spirit. We can see the evidence of Christ in us. We believe that the church should be managed by those who are Spirit-filled and following Christ, not only in the sense that they are talking about Him, but they are actually imitating Him.

We believe according to Chapter Seven that the church is led by courageous proclaimers of Christ. I know that it almost seems at this juncture that we are being redundant in the sense that we continue to use the name Christ. And you are absolutely right. That is exactly what

we are doing. We are being redundant. Christ is being redundant because He is the focus of everything that we do. We proclaim Jesus Christ. Do you remember what Chapter Seven is about? Obviously, you do. I can see it on your faces. It is about Stephen being stoned. As he stands up boldly before the Pharisees and the Jewish leaders, he is not bending. He is not. He is not yielding. You step back and go, “Now I know why this man was called to be a deacon in the church. It is because he is not afraid to proclaim the Gospel.” The church is led by courageous proclaimers of Christ.

In Chapter Eight, the church is moved and directed by the Spirit to share the Gospel of Christ. This is not repetitive. The emphasis of this chapter explains the whole reason why the church is moved in any direction. The whole reason why we do anything is to proclaim the Gospel. If we are just doing a good deed, that is not our calling. There are a lot of people doing good deeds out there. God has called us to point to Christ. It is all about the Gospel. We proclaim the Gospel. If the Spirit of God is in it, then

the Gospel will be proclaimed. If the Spirit of God is not in it, then it will not be. It is pretty easy to tell the difference. In Chapter Nine, the church is the agent of affirmation and advocacy for all who will believe in Christ. We encourage those who believe in Christ. We affirm those who believe in Christ. We come alongside them. We are their advocates. We build them up. We come alongside those who we know to be our brothers because of their love for Christ. No other reason: not because we have the same personalities, not because we have the same likes as far as this world is concerned--but we are united because that person loves Christ. We simply come alongside them. Nobody asked us to. We just do it. It is the nature of Christ to do that.

In Chapter Ten, the church is the venue by which the disciples of Christ are guided and united. We live in a day in which there are a thousand and one parachurch organizations. But God has established the church as the authority. When I come in contact with a parachurch organization, the first thing I ask is, "Under the auspice of

what church are you working? If you are not under the auspice of a church, then what is your foundation?" "I do not know." The organization does not have to be under me. It does not have to be under this church. It needs to be under a church. It needs to be under a church of elders who are Spirit-led and Spirit-filled, who are directing the work according to the Gospel. It does not mean that other people cannot proclaim the Gospel without the church, but God has established the church for this reason. You might say, "Well, would it not be nice to support all these agencies that take in orphans?" I would say, "Yes, but wouldn't it be nicer if they had families?" God has established the family. He did not establish orphanages. Now, are orphanages bad? No. Can children be helped in an orphanage? Yes. But what is the best? The best is always that they are in a family. The same thing is true of the church. God will work through anyone. God is gracious, but God has established the church for these things.

In Chapter Eleven, the church is unreservedly non-prejudicial. The way that Paul puts it in Corinthians, (II Corinthians 5:16) “Therefore, from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him in this way no longer.”

It does not matter where they are from. It does not matter what their background is. We are unreservedly non-prejudicial by virtue of submission to the Spirit and the word of Christ. God says, “If I say they are welcome, they are welcome. If I put my seal on them, they are welcome.” The love of Christ is His love. It breaks down all barriers. How wonderful it is that God unites us. We are no longer Jew or Gentile, bond or free, for God has united all under His Son, Jesus Christ.

Once again, Chapters One through Eleven begin to establish the foundation of the church and what it is about. We look in Chapter Twelve and find a very interesting chapter. The heading that we will put on this one is that the church is where those who believe are

moved for one purpose which is to glorify God. There is a great psalm which starts off:

(Psalms 115: 1) “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, But to your name give glory Because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth.”

(Psalms 115:2) “Why should the nations say, ‘Where, now, is their God?’”

The declaration within the Psalms is fundamentally this: why should we be quiet about Whom we worship? Yet, often Christians are very silent about the God Whom they worship. They will often take credit for the things that they have done when God should be glorified through His Son. This chapter emphasizes that the Son of God is to be glorified. It also emphasizes why the church does what it does and how God works through the church for that purpose. Let me say this in regard to that: God's people are not moved for the purpose of avoiding trouble. I think that our thoughts are that we will come to church, pray and ask God to keep us from trouble. That is not our goal. Our goal, as Paul will say in Philippians,

(Philippians 1:20) “according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”

That is our goal. Sometimes it means that we will lay down our lives. That is the goal. The goal is that we glorify God in what we do. Unfortunately, I think often our pursuit is to please men. The pursuit is to look successful. Think of all the venues and the way that man tries to, in some way, perceive what the church should be. But the church is here for one reason. It is not to elevate itself. The church is here to glorify God. If you are thinking in terms of, “Well, you know, we gather together to pursue the place and the path of least resistance.” You need to understand that this is not our goal. We are not necessarily looking for the best buy. We are not necessarily looking for the easiest road. These are not our goals. Many times, the things that we preach go against pragmatism altogether. They go against logic. Our goal is not to be completely logical about everything. Our goal is

to ask one simple question. Will this glorify God? It is the Spirit of God Who keeps moving the church for that one purpose. That is why we are moved. He is keeping us out of the realm of trying to gain an advantage for ourselves. In this chapter, we will start off with James' death. Almost immediately, Herod will take James' life. Then we will go into Peter being arrested because Herod goes, "Everybody is happy about me killing James. Maybe I can kill some more Christians." Of course, the politicians are always looking to get support, so he pursues Peter and has him locked up. Peter is locked up and then gets released through the power of an angel of the Lord. The church is praying specifically for him according to what we understand in the text. The chapter will end with Herod actually dying in a very horrific and sad way. It takes us to the extreme. The point of the chapter is that the church is called to glorify God, and God is going to glorify Himself to the church. What we also will be looking at are the fringe benefits of God being glorified. That is to say that I think sometimes our thoughts are, "Well, if God is glorified,

then I will be the loser.” What God is going to demonstrate is that when you glorify God, you win. When God is glorified, you win. We will begin to see the working of God in the lives of those who are His. It starts off this way:

(Acts 12:1) “Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them.”

Do you think that it is a mistake that Herod just so happens to do this at this particular time? It reminds me of Peter in Chapter Ten. It was “about that time” that he goes to this city. It was “about that time” that this girl falls sick and dies. I think you are understanding the cues here in Scripture that when it says, “about that time”, it means that God is orchestrating everything. His timing is impeccable. About this time, Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church. What are we talking about? We are talking about the church. Right? We are talking about the church. That is what this book is about. What is happening to those who belong to the church?

What will happen is that God is going to move the church for the purpose of glorifying His name.

(Acts 12:2) “And he had James, the brother of John, put death with the sword.”

(Acts 12:3) “When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of (the feast of) Unleavened Bread.”

Talk about déjà vu. Right? Unleavened bread, the Feast of the Passover is the time when they crucified Jesus. Is this a mistake? No. It is almost as if God is reminding them of the torture of His Son, Jesus Christ. This is some years later, but the fact that it happened on this particular day is a good reminder. What we read about James is very sad to us. We read that James' life is taken. We do not know how much pain he went through, but obviously there was great sorrow over the loss of James. We read about James as one of the apostles. Right? He is actually the first apostle to die. James at that time is an evangelist. He is one of the twelve, and he is the first to die as a martyr. He is the brother of John. These are the Sons of Zebedee--

Peter, James and John--the three who were always together. They are the main three of the twelve. These are the ones who were able to go up to the Mount of Transfiguration and to see things that some of the other disciples did not. These were the closest to Jesus Christ. At first when we read something like this, we almost have to say, "It does not look like a good thing here. This does not seem to be working out well." I would probably agree with your first perception. However, nothing could be further from the truth. God is not only glorifying Himself, but He is giving desires from the heart. "We often quote (Psalm 37:4) "Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart."

This would be another way of bringing glory to Him because you are really saying that He is worthy of my delight. I submit to you that James is getting a desire of his heart. One of the passages that we can look at regarding this is found in Matthew

(Matthew 20:20) “Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him.”

It is hard to perceive a loss of anyone as being a beneficial thing.

(Matthew 20:21) “And he said to her, ‘What do you wish?’ She said to Him, ‘Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left.’”

Watch the phrase here, what do you wish? Remember that we are talking about desires. What is the desire that you have?

(Matthew 20:22) “But Jesus answered , ‘You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?’ They said to Him, ‘We are able.’”

(Matthew 20:23) “He said to them, ‘My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right hand and on My left, this is not mine to give, but it is for those who have been prepared by My Father.’”

(Matthew 20:24) “And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers.”

Now watch verse 25.

(Matthew 20:25) “But Jesus called them to Himself and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.’”

“Subdue others under their power” would be the best way to explain “Lord it over them”. Their great men use their positions to take advantage over them.

(Matthew 20:26) “It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant.”

(Matthew 20:27) “and whoever wishes to be the first among you shall be your slave;”

I do not think it is a mistake that, as you look at verse 20, their father is interjected within the text. She is identified as the mother of the Sons of Zebedee. You see that? If you were to go back to the Hebrew, it is a Hebrew name in and of itself. We need to go to the root of the name which

is literally talking about Jehovah's gift. In a way, it makes reference to a reflection of the gift of Jehovah. In other words, they are patterning their lives after their mother. Now, is this really a wish of the boys? Mark gives us a different side to this.

(Mark 10:35) “James and John came up to Jesus saying, ‘Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.’”

Do you see how it starts off there? The order of the names is always significant. For instance, if you read a text that says “Peter, James and John,” it is saying that Peter at that moment is closer to Christ than James and John. It is giving you an order. When it talks about Peter, James, and John or when it talks about Peter and John, it is telling you not only the characters who are involved, but how they are involved. The first has a leading role or the other one has a more subservient role. Whoever is named first has the leading role. Who is first? James. Mark records that this is James' wish. It starts off, if you read with me,

(Mark 10:35) “James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus saying, Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.”

(Mark 10:36) “And He said to them, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’”

(Mark 10:37) “And they said to Him, ‘Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory.’”

(Mark 10:38) “But Jesus said to them, ‘You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am being baptized?’”

(Mark 10:38) “They said to him, ‘We are able.’ And Jesus said to them, ‘The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized.’”

Now granted, they did not know what they were in for; but mark it well. This was the desire of James, and God is going to give James the desire of his heart. I cannot help but perceive that James was seeing the position as a

glorious position by virtue of his being next to the King. “I will have all this stuff,” you know. He is just like any one of us. These are like those whom Christ calls babes. Right? They were very transparent. I would like that position. But God is going to move in James' life so much so that He is going to help him see what that position is really all about. It is interesting that it will never thwart James' desire. I will give you another example in the Old Testament. We are not going to turn there. But if you just think about Moses, what was his fundamental desire? His fundamental desire was to rescue his people. God is going to give him the desire of his heart. It will take forty years to train him, but God will train him after he murders somebody and everything goes all wrong. God will bring him back to that original desire and say, “Okay, let's go rescue them.” He will give him the desire of his heart. In Revelation 3, read what it says here within the passage about the church at Laodicea. The people in the church at Laodicea are perceiving themselves as rich and having lots of things. God says:

(Revelation 3:18) “I advise you to buy from Me gold refined from fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.”

God is saying that they obviously do not know what is valuable.

(Revelation 3:19) “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore, be zealous and repent.”

(Revelation 3:20) “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.”

(Revelation 3:21) “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”

That is pretty wild, isn't it? How will that happen? If you look within the passage, it will come about through difficulty. James will get there, and God will grant him his wish. One of the greatest things that somebody could

ever have is the ability to die for the sake of Christ. There is great reward in that. I believe that James embraced it, and I believe God gave him his wish. I have often made reference to my sadness in hearing of the death of my brother. It was not until several months after his death that my sister-in-law came up to me and asked, "Have you read your brother's diary?" I said, "I did not even know he had a diary." She said, "Yes, he logged in it every single day." Can you imagine logging in? I am not a writer, so I cannot even imagine doing that. It shows how different brothers can be. But he would log in every day and sometimes share his thoughts. Toward the end of his life, even though he did not know that the end was near, he started writing, "I just want to go to heaven." This would be his repeated theme every single day. During his last month, he stopped writing; and within that month he was gone. I believe, looking back, that God gave my brother the desire of his heart. We do not know what people are going through. We do not know what they are struggling with, but we know that God knows their hearts. If you are

God's child, He loves you. He is not planning anything bad for you. What He is doing is glorifying His name at the same time He gives you the desires of your heart. Only God can really do that. I am glad it is not up to me to decide. If you look in the Gospel of John Chapter 21, Peter is standing with Christ. Jesus is telling Peter that he will suffer an interesting death for the sake of glorifying God. What we know historically is that Peter actually chose how he was to be crucified. Peter will choose. It will be Peter's desire.

(John 21:18) “Truly, truly, I say to you that when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you and bring you where you do not wish to go.”

(John 21:19) “Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, ‘Follow Me!’”

(John 21:20) “Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; the one who also had

leaned back on His bosom at the supper and said, 'Lord, who is the one who betrays You?'"

(John 21:21) "So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, 'Lord, and what about this man?'"

(John 21:22) "Jesus said to him, 'If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!'"

What is clear is that God has a different path for different ones. God will call some to glorify His name through their death. He will call others to glorify His name through their life. It is for that very reason in this particular text in Acts that we will see one die, and we will see one escape. There is no discrepancy here. It is God not only fulfilling the desires of hearts, but it is God glorifying Himself through James' death, and God glorifying Himself through the salvation of Peter. God is working in their lives, and He knows what people need to see. He knows what certain people need to see in order to glorify Himself. I often think of Philippians Chapter One where Paul says, "Here I am in prison, and guess what? More of the Praetorian Guard are hearing the Gospel." The Praetorian Guard is

composed of the upper echelon of Roman society. These are the ones who ultimately become the senators and, in some cases, the Caesars. Paul says, “Many from the Praetorian Guard are receiving Christ because of my imprisonment. Now, you might ask why that would be true. The reason is that the Praetorian Guard admired somebody who was willing to suffer for something. That was a badge of courage to them. When they saw somebody suffering and going through difficulty but not flinching, they are going, “Now that is a soldier. God was bringing soldiers to himself through the example of Paul in prison. He had to be there. God was glorifying Himself through that imprisonment. In Acts chapter 12, we will see Peter being released, and God will be glorified through his release. It is noteworthy that you do not see the church in any way praying for James to be rescued. But you will see them praying for Peter. Why is that? You begin to understand that God begins to move through His Spirit to cause people to gather together in unity to pray for an urgent need. God says, “Now, I want this one

released. I want this one to come home.” There is very little explanation at this juncture about what happens to James because we have already seen what happens to somebody when they die in the name of Jesus Christ, *i.e.*, Stephen. The heavens were opened, and Jesus is standing up at God’s right hand. So there is no fear of death. This man is coming to a celebration, and he is getting exactly what he desired. God is being glorified. If you look with me in chapter 12

(Acts 12:3) “When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.”

Herod is trying to please the people. Right? But the church is seeking to glorify God. What a significant contrast!

(Philippians 1:20) “according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”

Whether by life or by death, that I might magnify Christ in my body. That is the goal of the church. It has no other goal. That's it. We are not necessarily praying all the time for somebody. This is why you cannot establish healing services. There are times when the person being healed would not bring glory to God. That is not the will of the church. The will of the church is not just that somebody be healed. The will of the church is that healing brings glory to God or the sickness brings glory to God. In the case of Paul, his difficulty with his vision caused him to stop in Galatia. They were forced to minister to him and brought about a relationship that he would not have had had he not had the problem with his eyes. God was going to use that. He will use the thorn in the flesh in Paul to lead Paul where He wanted him to minister. God will use whatever we have in our lives. Our desire when we come before God should be, "Whatever happens, God, just let Your name be magnified. I can just hear the whisper of God, "Son, if you do this, I will give you the desires of your heart."

Connie and I were talking the other day about how many wonderful things God has given us. They were undeserved, but God has given us the desires of our hearts. I believe He wants to give me more. I actually have seen these things come to flourish. Looking in the passage, Herod is looking for ways to please the Jews. By the way, remember what Herod means. It means hero. The world is full of heroes. Herod proceeded to arrest Peter also. That was during the Feast of the Unleavened Bread.

(Acts 12:4) “When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people.”

Herod had sixteen soldiers to guard Peter until, ultimately, he would be killed.

(Acts 12:5) “So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.”

Any mention of a prayer for James, or how about Stephen? Any prayer for Stephen? See, the Spirit of God affirms what He wants done. He knows what is best for everyone.

(Acts 12:6) “On that very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison.”

That is an accident, isn't it? On that very night, Peter was sleeping. How could you sleep knowing that you will die the next day? That is an amazing thought. Peter is now sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door. He obviously cannot escape. Right?

(Acts 12:7) “And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter’s side and woke him up, saying, ‘Get up quickly.’ And his chains fell off his hands.”

Peter was sleeping!

(Psalm 127:2b) “...For He gives to his beloved even in his sleep.”

Go to sleep, Peter. Everything will be okay. It really demonstrates his faith in God. The angel of the Lord actually has to strike him on his side to wake him up. Even when he does that, Peter is going, “What? What? Is this a vision? Am I dreaming?” He is probably thinking that he is sleepwalking.

(Acts 12:8) “And the angel said to him, “Gird yourself and put on your sandals.” And he did so. And he said to him, “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.”

His chains fell off, and the angel actually had to tell him how to dress. Did you see that in the text?

(Acts 12:9) “And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.”

(Acts 12:10) “When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and

went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.”

Those were huge gates. There is no way those things could open by themselves.

(Acts 12:11) “When Peter came to himself, he said, ‘Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.’”

Obviously, the Jewish people were expecting to have him killed. When it says “angel of the Lord”, is that Jesus, or is it just an angel? What it means is a messenger of the Lord. That is the best way to put it. Many times in the Old Testament, that is the title used for Christ. I would have no problem with it being Jesus, but all it means is a messenger of the Lord.

(Acts 12:12) “And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.”

We know that this is the house with the upper room where the 120 gathered at the beginning of Acts. They are still meeting here. The church is meeting. At this point in time, they have gathered together for one purpose, and that is to pray.

(Acts 12:13) “When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer.”

According to verse 5, what have they been praying for? We know what they are praying for. We know that this is a large house because otherwise it would not have a gate and a courtyard.

(Acts 12:14) “When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate.”

Have you ever been that excited? “Honey, would you open the door? You cannot leave the kids outside, you know.”

(Acts 12:15) “But they said to her, ‘You are out of your mind!’ But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, ‘It is his angel.’”

Now, they have been praying for him to be released, yet they think that she is out of her mind for telling them that he is outside their door! He could not have been released. God could not be answering their prayers. This conveys that, when God is glorified, as Paul will so succinctly put it in Ephesians 3:20, God will do above and beyond what you could ask or think. Put another way, when God is glorified, you will be amazed at what He does for you. There are some fundamental principles in this. What we are seeing is that the Spirit of God is bent on glorifying God. When that begins to happen, things beyond your imagination begin to occur, and God begins to work. He gives us the desires of our hearts. He goes beyond what we would ask or think. God gives to His beloved even in his sleep. God will ultimately lead us to testify of His salvation as He begins to work. When they told her that it was Peter's angel, I am saying to myself, "Well, if it is his angel, you do not need to open the door."

(Acts 12:16) “But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed.”

Will God amaze you? God will amaze you.

(Acts 12:17) “But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had let him out of the prison. And he said, ‘Report these things to James and the brethren.’ Then he left and went to another place.”

Now this is James, the brother of Christ, not the James who was killed by Herod. Why did Peter go to another place? To bear witness to the salvation of God, to glorify God. That is how God moves the church to glorify Himself. It is amazing the things that He brings us through. What we will see when God is glorified is that He also defeats evil. How do we defeat evil? According to Romans 12, we defeat evil by doing good. What was the good that they were doing? They were praying for Peter. You could sit around and just talk about how bad the government is when your church gathers together. “Let's just talk about

how bad the government is. Herod is a terrible, terrible guy. The politics are terrible, terrible, terrible.” You could talk about everything that is terrible. Or, you could pray which is good! You pray for Peter. Ask the Lord. Do good things. Will evil be defeated? I think so.

(Acts 12:18) “Now when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers as to what could have become of Peter.”

When Scripture says, “there is no small disturbance,” guess what? There was no small disturbance. Big things were happening.

(Acts 12:19) “When Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away to execution. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there.”

This was Herod's ticket to fame amongst the Jews. He needed this for his political stability. They were happy when he had slain James, and they would be even happier if he slayed Peter. Understand that this was his ticket. Bad

things are happening now. They cannot find him. He examines the guards, and that does not mean that he looks in their pockets for things. It means he beat them to death. Not only does he examine them, but he ordered them to be what? Executed. When the Scripture says, “he went down,” it actually means he goes north because every place from Jerusalem is down. It does not matter if you go north or go south, you go east or west, it is down from Jerusalem. He goes down to Caesarea, which is north and on the waters. As you look at the passage, it should include verse 20.

(Acts 12:20) “Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one accord they came to him, and having won over Blastus, the king’s chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king's country.”

(Acts 12:21) “On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them.”

(Acts 12:22) “The people kept crying out, ‘The voice of a god and not of a man!’”

Now, what they are doing is highly manipulative. The reason that they are doing it is because they want something. That is what the text is saying. People are looking for something to use to get what they want. They are looking to use Herod. How do you win over a politician? You flatter. What is the greatest flattery to a politician? You are a god. Sure. That is the best thing to say.

(Acts 12:23) And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.”

What? This is how we know that the text is about glory. This is how we know this. It is about the glory of God. Herod did not give glory to God, and he was eaten by worms and died.

(Acts 12:24) “But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.”

The word will continue to grow where God is glorified. It will continue to be multiplied where God is glorified. If you look at the next verse, people will be moved to comfort one another because He is moving Barnabas back into Jerusalem for this very purpose at a very crucial time. They need that extra comfort within the body where God is glorified that Barnabas will give them. Great things happen. And this is what the past will tell us. I want you to mark Philippians 1:20. This verse is on my brother's tombstone.

(Philippians 1:20) “according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”

Do you see the word boldness there? What he is talking about is fearlessness, unfettered confidence about the proclamation of the Gospel. What Paul will go on to talk about is not only that, but that he is declaring the message without any apology or ambiguity. You know how we like to ease into something and want to shock

them? Go ahead. As you proclaim that message clearly, those who are coming will come. They will come. But Paul says with all boldness, “Christ shall even now as always” be what? “*Megalyno*”. That is where we get the word mega. “Christ shall even now be shown to be conspicuously great in my body.” Do you think that God was shown to be conspicuously great in the body of James? Yes. There are those who were in the audience who observed, “This man must believe in something true.” I am sure that they could see it on his face. If you have ever read Fox's Book of Martyrs and have ever gone through the stories of some of those church fathers who had given their life, they were begging. One of them--I cannot remember if it was Ignatius or Polycarp--but one of the disciples of John was begging to go in with the lion. He says, “I long to hear my bones crush.” It was his wish. These men were not victims. They were getting their hearts’ desire. God was granting it to them. Dearly beloved, they were not less for it. Peter was getting exactly what he needed for that day. But Peter will

ultimately lay down his life. John will live a long life, suffer great hardship on the Isle of Patmos, but will write that wonderful Book of Revelation for us. God will use him in different ways. Thomas will go all the way to India and give his life there. We believe that every one of the disciples, except perhaps John, died as a martyr. But they did it willingly because they all desired to follow Christ to the end. God will give them the wish of their hearts. I do not know what your desires are. Some of your desires are, "God, whatever it takes, bring my children to the Lord." God will grant you your desire if you glorify Him. Do not try to think about how you might make it happen. You just focus on glorifying Him. That is just a wonderful truth, isn't it?

Prayer

Father, we thank You for Your word and for calling the church to conspicuously demonstrate Your greatness. We are not apologetic about this. We are not confused or ambiguous about Your glory, and we will not be silent. As we begin to lift You up, the nations will know Whom we

serve. They will know Who means a lot to us. They will know about Your strength and Your power and Your might. Whether it is by our death or it is by Your rescuing us from death, we will talk about You. This is why You called us. We will do this in Jesus' name. Amen.