

Persecution, Prayer, and the Power of God

Acts 12

MAIN IDEAS

- The mission of God cannot be stopped regardless of foe
- God's power reveals His glory
- There is power in earnest prayer
- God is not limited by the prayers of His people, but he works through our prayers to teach us to depend on Him

Though James is not the first Christian to be martyred, he is the first of Jesus' twelve disciples to be killed for proclaiming the Gospel. What does this tell us about those who face persecution? Consider also John 15:18-16:4, John 16:33, 1 Peter 4:12-19, Mark 10:35-40

Read Acts 12:4-11. What do you notice about the conditions of Peter's imprisonment? Why might the need for chains and sixteen soldiers/guards be significant?

How does Peter appear to handle his imprisonment? What can this teach us? Consider Matthew 10:26-33, Matthew 11:25-30, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, Psalm 91

What significant details do you notice about Peter's escape from the prison? What does this tell us about the power of God?

Reference Acts 12:5 and 12:12.

- What are Peter's fellow believers doing while he is imprisoned?
- In what way are they praying?
- Where else in Scripture do we see this attitude of prayer? Consider the times and ways Jesus prayed in addition to Matthew 6:5-15, John 15:1-8, 1 Peter 4:7, Colossians 4:2-4
- What can these experiences teach us about prayer?

Read Acts 12:12-17. Why might Peter have gone to Mary's house at all when he did not intend to stay there?

Compare Rhoda's response to Peter's appearance to the response of the others. Why didn't they believe it was him even though they had been earnestly praying on his behalf? What can we learn from this?

Acts 12 begins and ends with the death of two different men: James and Herod. Contrast those deaths. Consider what happens to the persecuted and those doing the persecuting throughout Scripture.

How do we see God's mission accomplished in spite of continued persecution of the early church? Reference Acts 12:24-25.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

In this chapter of Acts, we see persecution of two disciples of Jesus. One is martyred and one is rescued. This is one story of many in Scripture that causes some to question the character of God. How would you respond?

While it may or may not be persecution, we have faced and will face trials and hardships of many kinds. The world will sometimes look out of control and there will be heartbreak, loss, and suffering. In these times, how do you respond and do you trust God's sovereignty in the midst of it? Is there anything about your response to hardships that needs to change?

What are you willing to sacrifice to share the Gospel and advance the kingdom of God?

Examine your prayer life. Does it align with what Scripture teaches and models? What changes, if any, do you need to make for it to align?

Have you ever prayed for something/someone for an extended period of time? What did God teach you through that experience?

GROUP RESPONSE

Share any experiences where you have witnessed God's sovereignty and power at work through difficult circumstances.

Share a time you have witnessed or experienced the power of prayer.

Commit to spending time in earnest prayer for one another.

As a group, consider documenting the ways you have seen God working through trials and answering prayer (creating your group's own Ebenezers).

REPRODUCE

Seek out a person and/or situation your group or you personally can pray for earnestly and consistently. Remain steadfast in prayer and follow-up with this person or situation to see how the Lord is working.

KEY VERSES

From the sermon:

- Acts 12

Additional verses from the study:

- John 15:18-16:4
- John 16:33
- 1 Peter 4:12-19
- Mark 10:35-40
- Matthew 10:26-33,
- Matthew 11:25-30
- 2 Corinthians 4:16-18
- Psalm 91
- Matthew 6:5-15
- John 15:1-8
- 1 Peter 4:7
- Colossians 4:2-4