

Acts 12:3–19

I) Tell the Story

Substantial guard

- In prison, likely the quarters for the Roman garrison
- four squads of soldiers to guard him, made up of 4 soldiers, each for a 3 hour watch at night
- Peter was sleeping between two soldiers,
- bound with two chains,
- and sentries before the door were guarding the prison

Supernatural deliverance

- And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him,
- and a light shone in the cell, guards obviously remained unresponsive somehow
- He **struck** Peter on the side and woke him, saying, “Get up quickly.”
- And the chains fell off his hands.
- The angel said to him, “Dress yourself
- **and** put on your sandals.”
- “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.” And he went out and followed him.
- they had passed the first and the second guard: one at the door of the cell, one at the gate?
- iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord.
- they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him.

Unconscious participant

- He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real,

- but thought he was seeing a vision
- 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.” *Duh!*

Surprised and disbelieving friends

- 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.
- And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. 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. 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!”
- But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed.
- But motioning to them with his hand to be silent—perhaps a little distressed just having escaped from jail and now left standing in the street!

II) Contexts of the Story

This is certainly an endearing, entertaining, even exciting story. But let’s remember that these things take place in the contexts of circumstances and people’s own personalities.

External context, circumstances

- John, the beloved disciple, has lost his brother James. That’s the second casualty after Stephen.
- Herod has jailed Peter and is planning to kill him, essentially for entertainment purposes! “When [Herod] saw that [killing James] pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.” (3)
- Those whom Herod hopes to please are the disciples’ own people. This

proves that the persecution mentioned in chapter 11 is ongoing and perhaps increasing. “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.” (11)

Internal context, people

- Peter half-asleep, almost unbelieving, even as he experiences the event.
- Rhoda thoughtlessly leaving Peter in the street.
- Unbelief of the disciples *who had been praying for such an outcome!* “You are out of your mind” and “it must be his angel.”
- “But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed”—still! (16)
- “Then he departed and went to another place.” (17) Good reason to be afraid, so he left for an undisclosed place.

III) Lessons Learned from the Story

1) Our stories are incomplete unless they include eternity

James’ death was certainly disheartening, saddening. But what do we find them doing? Giving up? Running away? No! As I mentioned on the sermon on hardships, there are only two options when undergoing hardship: running away for God, or running towards Him.

It could have been all despair and hopelessness, fear, and a repeat of the cowardice from before the resurrection. But it wasn’t. In prayer they were running towards him.

The fact—as pointed out by Phil last week—that Peter is able to sleep shows a hitherto unknown kind of confidence in God’s hand in his life.

2) Our stories make sense if we understand that GOD does amazing things with ordinary people

There's actually something very authentic about the people here:

- Half asleep,
- surprised,
- unbelieving,
- amazed

Their authenticity makes them so normal!¹ What makes them extraordinary is that they carry on in confidence and obedience, because God is doing the work in them.

3) Our stories are encouraging if we understand that the evil one always loses

This is very important.

- James is in heaven
- Peter escapes
- The guards are working for the wrong boss
- And Herod doesn't fare so well, either.

And the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!"

Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last. (Acts 12:22–23)

IV) Conclusion

We need to ask ourselves, "what got these people into these problems in the first place?" They are pursued by royalty, persecuted by religious leaders, and have now been driven from their homes and homeland. It would seem as if the whole world is against them.

Reading the biography of Luther: all they have to do is recant unequivocally and stop this whole gospel preaching nonsense! But they won't.

Why?

They had met this God-man / man-God. They had heard his preaching. They

¹ Never forget you are unique, just like everyone else!

watched his life. And here's the biggest thing: they had watched death die (in the resurrection)!

Did they mourn Stephen's death, James' death, the loss of homes and homeland? Surely they did.

Nevertheless, they had seen behind and beyond the curtain of time into eternity. They saw that there was a fool-proof way to be reconciled as fallen creatures with the perfect God.

Weaknesses? Mistakes? Sins? Sure—all covered in Christ.

And so they were left with only one direction to go: forward, following Christ.