

Series Title: FOR ALL PEOPLE: A Journey through the Book of Acts, Part 6.

Sermon Title: Week 8: The Great Adventure Scripture: Acts 12:1-19

Date: 04-11-21

† Acts: Just interesting history, or principles of truth for life today?

- **Welcome back everyone, pray you had a wonderful Easter. BACK IN ACTS!**
- **Today's story is a GREAT OPPORTUNITY to address an important question regarding how we- as followers of Jesus- apply scripture in our lives- specifically scripture from Gospels and Acts... books containing accounts of Historical events.**
- **Stories where you have something that happens... some event, something people said or did... but most importantly, something GOD said or DID.**
- **We read about what happened THEN, but how do we appropriately interpret these events as APPLICABLE TRUTH in LIFE TODAY. In other words, are these events just interesting history, OR, on top of that historical foundation, are there principles of truth about how God relates to us, works through us, and is at work in the world TODAY?**
- **In today's story- one of the more dramatic stories in Acts- we will see something God DID, but not necessarily what God always DOES.**
- **BUT of the other hand, this isn't just history! THERE ARE PRINCIPLES OF TRUTH HERE from God to us, as we engage scripture honestly, and thoughtfully, with EARS TO HEAR.**
- **BEFORE CONTINUE, TO/PE, SUNDAY April 11th, 2021**
- **Let's go to the story.**

† It was about that time...

- **It's about 44 AD. Church has spread across all of Israel, and just started to move out into the broader Mediterranean world.**
- **It's about two years since Peter met Cornelius. Church in Antioch has been founded and is growing rapidly. It's been about 10 years since Stephen's death and the beginning of widespread persecution of believers in Jerusalem/Judea.**
- **NOW, we have a new villain enter the scene, Herod Agrippa, the local Roman ruler of Judea.**

It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. ² He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. ³ When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. ⁴ After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

† Herod, Herod, and the other Herod

- **Starting with the story of Christ's birth, we have come across THREE Herod's. Bit confusing.**
 - **Herod the Great. Roman client king of Judea at time of Christ's birth. Infamous for ordering the deaths of all the male children in the region, seeking to kill any potential messianic figure from being born.**
 - **Herod Antipas. Son of Herod/Great, ruler of Galilee during Jesus' adult life. Antipas is known for ordering the murder of John the Baptist. He also briefly met Jesus when Pilate send Jesus to him, and after mocking Jesus Antipas sent him back to Pilate.**
 - **Then there is the other Herod, Herod Agrippa, who is the GRANDSON of HG, and a nephew of Antipas, and he was the client king of Judea from AD 39-44. His rule came to**

an abrupt end, as we will see next week. Broader context, Agrippa's authority was first sanctioned by then then Emperor of Roman... Caligula.

- *ANYWAY... Herod is known to have been a very religious man, devout to the Roman Gods. But he was generous to the Jewish leaders, and well liked in Jerusalem, especially by the Sadducees... who especially didn't like Jesus.*
- *This may explain why Herod would be so hostile to the growing church in Jerusalem- he wanted to stay in a good relationship with the Jewish authorities, who increasingly were seeking to target and persecute the church.*
- *So, Herod arrests and executes the apostle James, the brother of John. If you remember from the gospels, James and John were called the sons of Zebedee, among the 12 disciples originally called by Jesus.*
- *James' death was well received, and so Herod goes after a bigger prize... Peter. He arrests him and puts him into prison. Luke tells us Herod intended to bring him to trial after the Passover, but the inference is clear. He intended to kill Peter, just as with James.*
- *WHAT HAPPENS NEXT is one of the big principles we see not just here, but in all of scripture.*

✠ **PRINCIPLE:** Throughout scripture, there is a consistent connection between God's ACTIVITY and the PRAYER of the Church.

⁵ *So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.*

- *We don't know what these believers were praying! The whole story here suggests they were NOT praying for his release, or a specific outcome. It is possible they were rather praying for Peter's protection, or even broader, that God would work here according to his Will- that God's purposes would prevail.*
- *What we DO KNOW is they were praying EARNESTLY. Sincerely, with great depth of heart. Word rarely used- a form of this word describes Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, on the nights of his arrest. The tense of this verb indicates they were praying CONTINUOUSLY*
- *Another detail that can't be overlooked- the church was praying TOGETHER. The context indicates this wasn't all the believers, but one group, likely part of what we might call a house church network. But they were gathered as a body, in community. This is another example- in a long line of examples- of the essential presence of community among the believers- their understanding and experience of faith was not primarily as an individual, but as being part of the community of believers.*
- *AS STORY CONTINUES.. believers are praying... Luke turns to what happened to Peter. HERE WE SEE another great principle of life IN CHRIST.*

✠ **PRINCIPLE:** When we live *by the Spirit* in the now, and trust God with *what happens next*, our hearts will be at PEACE.

⁶ *The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance.* ⁷ *Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in*

the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

- **Think of Peter's situation! He is in a storm! In a cell, literally chained to two roman guards- couldn't have been comfortable- and he knew what was coming. From any possible angle, he was done. Herod was going to kill him. AND YET, WHAT IS PETER DOING? ASLEEP!**
- **Think of the growth we've seen in Peter! A few years earlier, he was freaking out along with the other disciples as a storm tossed their boat on the sea of Galilee... with Jesus asleep in the stern. NOW, Peter is in a different but very real storm, and just like Jesus... HE IS AT PEACE. Angel had to shake him to wake him up. I just wonder, as he nodded off, if he thought of Psalm 4:8, which he undoubtedly would have memorized as a child...**

Psalm 4:8 In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety.

- **Story continues with Peter's escape. And the next great principle of what it looks like when GOD IS WORKING THROUGH US..**

✠ PRINCIPLE: When God works through us...

⁸ Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. ⁹ Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰ They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him. ¹¹ Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen."

- His work will **PREVAIL**

- **For all of his power, Herod had no power to hinder God's plans and purposes. When something is the work of God, and we are joining God in what He is doing, we can trust that God's work will happen! We don't know what that will look like. For Peter, God is showing his Glory through a miraculous deliverance. For Stephen, God was glorified through the way he died.**
- **WE CAN MISS OUT on being part of what God is doing, but his will WILL be done. As people who look to Christ as our very life, THAT is encouraging.**

- His work will be beyond our **EXPECTATIONS**

- **Peter didn't expect to be rescued! Thought he was having a great dream.**
- **God's work through us won't always be supernatural in a physical sense- but God's plans will never be limited by our expectations and our plans. He has something bigger in store. We may see this, we may not, but his plans are bigger than ours!**
- **Michael Card.. "The disciples problem is that their wildest dreams weren't just wild enough.".... Point to Paul's statement in Ephesians 3...**

Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

- His work is not limited by our **ABILITIES**

- **Similar truth... Church, God may not do something through us supernaturally in the physical sense, but His work through us is always supernatural SPIRITUALLY. How God wants to work in your life, my life, and our church, is not limited to our abilities.**
- **There are times when God may be calling us to serve, to love, to minister in some way... and we say “I can’t”... what we really may mean is “I won’t.”**
- **HEAR! God shapes and calls us to different things, and we all won’t be used in the same way! But the work of God in and through us is still THE WORK OF GOD! Peter realized this...**

“Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.”

- **I’m experiencing this... This is happening to me... but it is the LORD who is doing it.**
- **So, Peter collects himself, decides to seek out the other believers, and this leads to...**

✠ An amusing scene

¹² *When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. ¹³ Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. ¹⁴ When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, “Peter is at the door!”*

¹⁵ *“You’re out of your mind,” they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, “It must be his angel.”*

¹⁶ *But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. ¹⁷ Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. “Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this,” he said, and then he left for another place.*

- **Imagine this! The believers are gathered, praying for Peter, when all of a sudden he shows up at the door. The servant girl (Little Rose) is so shocked and overjoyed she leaves him outside, and their ensues a big discussion while Peter is outside banging on the door.**
- **That they said “it must be his angel” suggests they may have thought he had already been killed. When they finally let Peter in, they were ASTONISHED. This was beyond anything they could have asked or imagined.**
- **WE HAVE SAME PATTERN HERE! What God had done was beyond anything they had expected. CHURCH! When we pray for God to move, for God to lead, for God to do what only God can do... may we not limit him – or limit our faith- by what we think is possible! May we pray, and expect, for God to do what only God can do- and then be willing, by faith, to join him.**
- **Interesting note. Peter tells the group to ‘tell James and the other believers’ about what had happened. This is JAMES THE HALF BROTHER OF JESUS. James will be a rising leader in the Jerusalem church, and will play an important role when we get to Acts 15.**
- **Likewise, we won’t see Peter again until Acts 15- he disappears here, and we don’t know where he went or what he was doing until he reappears in Jerusalem several years later. Lots of theories, but a good guess is he continued to travel around Judea and Israel, teaching and strengthening the Jewish believers.**
- **And here we wrap the story up. Once again, God has shown the believers what he alone can do- growing their spiritual SIGHT, and then we see the tragic result of spiritual blindness.**

✠ The result of spiritual blindness

¹⁸ In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. ¹⁹ After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.

- For the guards tasked with Peter, what happened here is PANIC, and rightly so. The guards knew the punishment for losing a prisoner, and Nero's actions here was standard Roman operating procedure. The motivation for a good guard was fear of failure, and Nero drove this fear home.
- If you consider it, the spiritual blindness of Herod and the Jewish authorities here is striking. The evidence of God's work... that it was GOD at work in everything happening through the community of Christ followers... this evidence was overwhelming! And yet, their response was anger and frustration, not surrender and belief.
- BUT FOR THESE BELIEVERS, things were totally different. I mean...

✠ Imagine you were at Mary's house that night...

- What was it like for these believers? They were Astonished, blown away, at what God was doing! Peter arriving, telling his story of escape, telling them to spread the word, and then disappearing into the night... THIS IS HIGH DRAMA! If any of them hadn't realized it yet, they are caught up in a GREAT ADVENTURE. An adventure where GOD is taking the initiative, where God is doing what only He could do, and He is doing it through THEM.
- CHURCH! Think of this story, and others like it in scripture and Christian history—this does NOT teach us that our life as believers should always be like an action movie. There are people out there that teach this... and it is a disservice to the quite, daily, profound kingdom impact of everyday believers who reflect and share Christ as they go about their lives.
- This ALSO DOES NOT TEACH US that if we just pray enough, with enough people praying, that God will deliver us from hardship and difficult circumstances. What God did here was not centered on Peter's needs... it was centered on God and his plan.
- THAT SAID... a Principle we DO SEE HERE.. and that we see throughout Scripture and all of Christian history...

✠ PRINCIPLE: In Christ, as we live by the Spirit in a posture of love, obedience, and expectation, in the everyday reality of life, God will lead us into His Great Adventure!

- There will be times when God's work through us will be dramatic, with great emotion.
- But every day, we are part of the great adventure of God's kingdom when we
 - LIVE OUT THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT in relationship with people.
 - When we PRAY TOGETHER, focusing on God's kingdom, how he is leading us to respond, WAY MORE than we focus on our own needs.
 - WHEN WE are servants, people of compassion, people who look to positively impact the lives of those around us, work to make the world a better place, by HOW WE LIVE AND WHAT WE DO in the relationships God has given us.
 - THEN, through these relationships, as God opens the doors, TELLING about the hope we have. Sharing the message, the good news of Jesus Christ.
- Investing our time and energy in youth and children, modeling and teaching them about the reality of Christ.

- *This is a perspective, a posture of life, that sees each day- as we go about our important work of being parents, employees, business owners, teachers, builders, friends... that at the center of this day is GOD, and as I go through this day, he will open doors to express himself through me.*