

The Christ of Every Crisis

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Date Preached: May 6, 2001

Main Scripture Text: Acts 12:1–10

“Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.”

ACTS 12:1

Outline

Introduction

- I. Respect the Mystery of God’s Providence
 - II. Request the Ministry of God’s People
 - A. The Frequency of the Prayer
 - B. The Fervency of the Prayer
 - C. The Fellowship of the Prayer
 - D. The Faith of the Prayer
 - E. The Focus of the Prayer
 - III. Rest in the Mastery of God’s Peace
 - IV. Rejoice in the Majesty of God’s Power
- Conclusion

Introduction

Turn to Acts chapter 12, please, and I want us to think today about “The Christ of Every Crisis.” Now, we all have troubles—we all have troubles. They come every day, but every so often we come to a crisis—I mean an industrial-strength crisis—and we really don’t know where to turn, unless we turn to the Lord.

And, a crisis may come unexpectedly. It may come ferociously, just out of the blue—I mean, a full-blown crisis. Somebody said, “If you can keep your head when all of those round about you are losing theirs, it just may be a sign that you don’t understand the situation.” Or, it may be—it may be—that you do understand some things that I’m going to be sharing with you today from the Word of God.

Chapter 12, verse 1: *“Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him”—that is, Peter—“in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter”—that literally means “after Passover”—“to bring him*

forth to the people. Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And [the] chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself...bind on thy sandals...so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not”—“and knew not”—“that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. [And] when they were past the first and...second ward, they came unto the iron gate [which] leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.” (Acts 12:1–10)

Now, stop there. We'll take up the reading here a little later, but let me give you the background again, reiterate what happened. Herod was a wild, a ruthless, a wicked, and a vile man. He wanted to torture, to vex, to disturb the Church. He had already taken James, the brother of John, and had put him to death. He saw that pleased the multitude. He said, “All right, I'll get the big guy; I'll get Peter.” And so, he put Peter in prison, said, “After Passover I'm going to bring him out, and I'll make him a foot shorter at the top. I'll take off his head.” Herod was absolutely ferocious, vile, wicked, and cruel. Now, that's the situation, and it was indeed a great, great crisis.

How do you handle a crisis? What do you do in times of crisis? Well, I want to give you four thoughts today—and put them down because you will need them. You may need them right now. Some of you who are listening to me right now are in the very midst of a genuine crisis. But if not, you will be.

I. Respect the Mystery of God's Providence

Number one: We should respect the mystery—understand the word now. We should *respect*, not *reflect*; we should *respect*—respect the mystery of God's providence. As you look in this chapter, there's one word that comes through; it is *providence*. That is, you're going to see the hidden hand of God. God is going to be working in a mysterious way, an inexplicable way. God is going to be in the shadows arranging things, moving things that people cannot see, and that may be very true in your life right now. God is working, but you cannot see God working. You may be in the middle of chaos right now—nothing seems to be making sense; everything that you thought you had nailed down is coming loose, and the devil is pulling nails.

Now, listen to me: just because it doesn't make sense to you doesn't mean that it does not make sense. Many of us have many questions. As we look at this chapter, we

would say, “Well, why did God let Herod be king anyway? Isn’t God God? How could God let a rascal like Herod be the king? If I were God, I’d turn him into a frog. And why should James be killed and Peter released? Why is that? Does God have favorites? Is God capricious, or has God lost control? And why do all of these things happen?” Now friend, I want to tell you something: we do not live by explanations. *Life is not a problem to be solved; it is a mystery to be lived.* And, you have to back off sometimes and just simply see what I’m going to call “the hidden hand of God,” and you need to respect that.

¶ Have you ever watched a painter paint a picture—put his colors on canvas? Sometimes I get great recreation watching this old man who paints while you watch. He can in one half hour do a beautiful painting. Some of you have seen him. He’s an old guy. He’s got some sort of an accent. I don’t know what kind it is, but he says, “Yeah, ha. I put this on, yes.” And, he’s just splashing the colors on that canvas, and he’s mixing this, says, “I think a little more yellow, yeah.” And, he’s just putting it there. And, you know, I look, and I say, “Man, that guy’s so good. How does he do that? Everything just turns out good.” And then, the guy reaches in, and he’ll get some colors; and he’ll go *swoosh!* I think, “Oh, you ruined it! You ruined it.” He put some big old splashy thing on it; maybe it’s going to be a tree in the foreground. I said, “Mister, you really messed up. Let’s see how you’re going to get out of this.” And then, all of a sudden, it just comes together. It’s a masterpiece.

Sometimes we look at what God does as God puts His colors on the canvas, and we say, “Lord, you’re really doing good.” And then, all of a sudden, God just goes *swoosh!* “Lord! You have messed things up.” Have you ever felt that way? “God, how did you let this happen?” Now, it doesn’t make sense to me when I watch that man do it, but it makes sense to him. And, just because things are not making sense to you, do not think that they don’t make sense. And, just because you can’t see God working doesn’t mean God is not working.¶

Here is Herod’s ungodly power. Here is James’s death. Here’s Peter’s release. You have all of these things working together. We call that “the sovereignty of God”; we call that “the providence of God.” And, you just put there in your margin “Romans 8:28”: “*And we know*”—we know. We K-N-O-W. We know—“*that all things work together for good to [those who] love God...who are the called according to his purpose.*” (Romans 8:28)

Now, most of us have the idea that we go through life, and life is all good, and then life gets bad; then it gets good again. Generally, it’s not that way. Life is not like forty miles of bad road or good road, and then ten miles of bad road, and then sixty miles of good road. No, generally life is generally more like a railroad track—one rail good and one rail bad, and the good and the bad seem to be running parallel. Do you ever notice

that? I mean, wonderful things are happening—blessings and bad things—at the same time? There seem to be certain troubles in life, and we can't always just make them work out together. Good and bad seem to run on parallel tracks.

Now, many of us don't understand that, so we're wanting to get to the time of life when there won't be any bad things happening. You know: "So I'll be glad when all of this is over; and so, then we can do what we want to do." If you're in school: "I'll be glad when school's over. Then I can start doing what I want to do." If the children are little: "I'll be glad when the children are grown so then I can do what I want to do." When I'm sick: "I'll be glad when I get well so then I can begin to serve God as I want." No, no. The good and the bad—they are there, and they are working together. Sometimes we would like to just maybe live life without the bad.

¶ Here's a girl who marries a boy, and the parents say, "Don't marry him. Sweetheart, the boy doesn't have the character. He doesn't have what we believe it takes to make a good husband." But, she says she loves him, she's going to marry him. And so, the parents try to make the best they can out of the situation. They want to love their prospective son-in-law. They get married, and a little baby comes along. Then, after a while, he turns out to be a philanderer—he turns out to be the person the parents were afraid that he might be—and he leaves her. Well, I want to ask you, mother, if you could, would you just turn the clock back and say, "I don't want her to marry that boy"? If I could just turn the clock back and say, "No, they won't get married," would you do it? Be careful how you answer because if you say "yes," you're going to have to give up that grandbaby, that little baby that you've come to love so much.¶

You see, isn't life mysterious? Isn't life mysterious? There are the bad things, the good things. God, in the crucible of His wisdom, He mixes these things together for His glory. "And we know that all things work together for good." (Romans 8:28) You don't live by explanations. Friend, you will never ever explain God. You live by promises. And so, you'll never get it all figured out. You know, if you're a kid, you wonder, "Why does God put the vitamins in spinach and not in ice cream?" You let God be God. You should respect—listen to this—the mystery of God's providence. Allow God to be God. And, just because it doesn't make sense to you doesn't mean it doesn't make sense. And, if you're in a crisis, don't demand to understand, okay?

II. Request the Ministry of God's People

Number two: You should request the ministry of God's people. Now, what is the ministry of God's people? It is prayer. Look now in verse 5: "*Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.*" (Acts 12:5) That is a great verse on prayer. Look at it again: "[*But*] Peter therefore was kept in prison"—"*Peter therefore was kept in prison*"—"but prayer was made without ceasing of the

church unto God for him.” (Acts 12:5) Now, there seems to be no hope for Peter. Peter is in maximum security. The prison is guarded on the outside with two guards by the door. There are sixteen guards who are guarding Peter. He must have been fairly important for sixteen personal guards to guard him. And, besides all of that, he’s chained to a guard on this hand and he’s chained to a guard on that hand. I would say, brother! Talk about a man who is in a pickle! He’s in a pickle. And, on top of that, he is sentenced to death, and a wicked king says, “Soon, I’m going to execute you.”

Now that, friend, is a crisis. You may think you have a crisis, but Peter is really in a crisis. There seems to be no hope for Peter. Every door is shut—every door except one, and that’s the one that goes straight up. That was the door they could not shut—that you, we, can pray. In a crisis, there’s always prayer. And, when there’s no hope on the horizontal level, there’s always hope on the vertical level.

Now, I want us to look at this prayer, and I want us to just pull over and park here for a moment, because when there’s the mystery of God’s providence, there’s the ministry of God’s people.

A. The Frequency of the Prayer

Now, watch it. I want you to see, first of all, what I’m going to call “the frequency of the prayer.” Look at verse 5: *“prayer was made without ceasing.”* (Acts 12:5) Now, they prayed, and they did not stop praying. And, they may have asked, “Why doesn’t God answer our prayer?” Peter’s kept in prison, and God doesn’t seem to be in a hurry to get him out. But, God is trying to teach them a lesson about prayer, and one of the great lessons about prayer is persistence. The Bible says, “Ask, seek, and knock,” (Matthew 7:7; Luke 11:9) but it literally says, “Keep on asking. Keep on seeking. Keep on knocking.” And, in Luke chapter 18 and verse 1, the Bible says, *“And [Jesus] spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint”* (Luke 18:1)—that is, “not to stop praying.” And, you need to learn that God’s delays are not denials, okay? There’s the frequency of the prayer.

B. The Fervency of the Prayer

And then, also notice the fervency of the prayer. Got it? The fervency of the prayer. This word “without ceasing” may be translated “intensely.” They were praying intensely. I wonder, what do we know about intense prayer? I’ll tell you one thing: when you’re in a crisis, you learn how to pray with intensity, don’t you? Many of us prayed this morning, but I daresay that there are those in this building today, if I were to ask you, interrogate you, you could not tell me with specificity what you prayed for this morning. It’s just sort of a general prayer with no real intensity. I love Jeremiah 29, verse 13, where God says, *“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.”* (Jeremiah 29:13)

One of the things that I'm trying to cure myself of is casual prayer—prayer that is not intense, prayer that costs little. Do you know the Bible calls prayer “wrestling”? Romans chapter 15, verse 30: Paul said, *“Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake...for the love of the Spirit, that [you] strive together with me in your prayers to God for me”* (Romans 15:30)—“that you strive together.” Have you ever thought of prayer as striving, as wrestling? How much genuine agonizing do we do in prayer? If you really get into intercession, you’re going to find out that the devil will fight you and oppose you. Prayer is work. I’d rather preach for an hour than to pray for a half an hour, so far as the labor that it takes for genuine prayer.

There’s the frequency of the prayer. There’s the fervency of the prayer. Sometimes we don’t feel like praying, so we’ll say, “We’ll not pray.” Friend, if there’s ever a time that you need to pray, it’s when you don’t feel like it. Now, you pray ’til you do feel like it, but pray. Pray not only frequently, but fervently.

C. **The Fellowship of the Prayer**

And then, there’s the fellowship of the prayer. The Bible says that it *“was made...of the church.”* (Acts 12:5) Look in verse 5 again: *“prayer was made without ceasing of the church”* (Acts 12:5) That is, they came together to pray. Didn’t Jesus say, *“Where two or three [of you] are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”* (Matthew 18:20) and, *“If [any] two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it [will] be done for them of my Father which is in heaven”?* (Matthew 18:19) God is pleased when His children pray, but God is more pleased when His children pray in fellowship. There’s nothing that will bind us together as a church more than praying. If you’ve ever had a prayer partner, you know that your heart and his heart, or her heart, are linked together. There are times when God comes, when the Church prays, that is glorious and wonderful. It is what we call “the fellowship of prayer.” This prayer was made of the Church for Peter.

D. **The Faith of the Prayer**

And then, I want you to notice the faith of the prayer. The prayer was unto God—it was unto God. *“Prayer was made...unto God.”* (Acts 12:5) They were not praying to one another. They were not praying to impress one another. So many of our prayers are little memorized prayers.

¶ I heard about a young lawyer, just got his degree, opened up his brand-spanking new law offices. He didn’t have any clients, didn’t even really have a secretary, but he had his shingle out front. He heard footfalls in the hallway, thought his first client was coming, so he picked up the phone like he was busy and said, “Hello. Yes. No, I’m sorry; I can’t. No, no, perhaps next Thursday. I have a heavy corporation case coming up on Wednesday, and so forth, but perhaps we can arrange it.” And, he put the phone

down. By this time, the man was standing in front of his desk, and he said, “Yes, sir. What may I do for you?” He said, “Well, I’m from the telephone company. I came to hook up your telephone.” Many times our prayers are that way—trying to impress somebody else, but there’s no one on the line.†

These people, they weren’t trying to impress anybody else. They were desperate. Their prayer was unto God. (Acts 12:5)

You know, today I think the reason we don’t pray with frequency and fervency is because we think we can do it without prayer. You know, perhaps the worst thing about us is not our prayerlessness, but our pride. I mean, we have our machinery, we have our plans, we have our methods, we have our pastors, we have our choirs, we have our Bible fellowship, we have our buildings, we have this, we have that; and so, we come to church and think, “Well, we’ll do it. We know how to do it.”

And, you know what the devil does? The devil stands in the corner and smirks, says, “You can have your buildings. You can have your choirs. You can have your fellowships. You can have your preacher. You can have all—everything you want. You can even have your Bible studies, as long as you leave out the power of God that comes with fervent prayer that will not take ‘no’ for an answer.” The devil mocks at our schemes, laughs at our organizations, ridicules our talents, but he fears our prayers.

Now, these people are going to pray. Peter’s in prison. They’re going to pray. They can’t get a petition, bring it to the government. They don’t have money to bribe Herod to get him out of prison. They don’t have political influence. But, they’re gong to pray. And, the world may laugh, but friend, the devil didn’t laugh. Someone has wisely said, “The devil trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees.” There is the focus of the prayer. The prayer is unto God. (Acts 12:5) And, God is God, and God controls the universe. We need to learn that—that when we’re speaking, when we’re praying, we are praying to God. And so, there’s the faith of the prayer.

E. The Focus of the Prayer

And then, there’s the focus of the prayer. Look in verse 5 again. The Bible says, “*therefore...prayer*”—prayer—“*was made without ceasing of the church unto God*”—now, watch this—“*for him.*” (Acts 12:5) They were praying for Peter. It was a prayer, not only with intensity, but with specificity.

What did you pray for this morning? Do you know, so many of our prayers are so vague, if God were to answer them, we wouldn’t know it, and if God didn’t answer them, we wouldn’t have to admit it. “Lord, save the lost this morning.” Well, if somebody gets saved, you can say, “Well, I prayed for somebody to be saved, and a lost person got saved.” How do you know that was your prayer? How do you know that wasn’t my prayer, somebody else’s prayer? You know, we have these vague, general prayers. At

least when they're praying for Peter and the answer came, they knew it was an answer to prayer. Isn't that right? It was made for him. (Acts 12:5)

¶ Have you ever had anybody, when you visit somebody, and they say to you, "Y'all come see us sometime. Y'all stop by. Y'all come see us sometime"? They don't mean that. I'll tell you what, if they say this: "Hey, man, I've got some of the finest steaks you've ever seen in the freezer. Could y'all come by next Saturday at five and we'll have a cookout?" they mean it. That's with specificity.¶

What are you praying for? What are you asking God for? When you say, "Lord, I want you to do this or do that," if God were to answer your prayer, would you even know it? You see, there's the focus of the prayer. It was for Peter, and God answered.

Now, when you're in a crisis, respect the mystery of God's providence. Friend, request the ministry of God's people. We have a prayer ministry in our church, and if you have a crisis, you call, and people will pray. We have prayer that goes around the clock, and we want to pray for those particular needs.

You know what voicemail is? Do you enjoy voicemail, as you call and you get a recording? Aren't you glad heaven hasn't installed voicemail? Can you imagine praying and hearing the following: "Thank you for calling heaven. Your prayers are important to us. Please select one of the following options: press '1' for a request; press '2' for thanksgiving; press '3' for complaints; press '4' for all other inquiries. I'm sorry that all the angels are helping other sinners right now. However, your prayer is important to us, and we will answer it in the order in which it was received. Please stay on the line. If you would like to hear King David sing a psalm while you're holding, press '4.' If you're checking on a loved one that has been assigned to heaven, press '5' and then enter his or her Social Security number followed by the pound sign. If you get a negative response, please hang up, and try area code '666.' For reservations in heaven, please enter 'J-O-H-N' followed by the numbers '3-1-6'"—you'll get that later—"For answers to nagging questions about dinosaurs, the age of the earth, life on other planets, and where Noah's ark is, please wait until you arrive. Our computer shows that you have already prayed once today. Please hang up and try again tomorrow. The office is now closed for the weekend to observe a religious holiday. Please pray again on Monday after 9:30 a.m. If you're calling after hours and need emergency assistance, please contact your local pastor. Thank you for calling heaven." Aren't you glad it's not that way? Aren't you glad that there's a God who says, "Call upon me, and I will answer thee." (Psalms 86:7)

III. Rest in the Mastery of God's Peace

Here's the third thing: When you're in a crisis, number three, we should rest in the mastery of God's peace. Now, there's the mystery of His providence; there's the

ministry of His people, and there is the mastery of His peace in the midst of the storm. Look in verse 6: *“And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night”—* watch this—*“Peter was sleeping”—*good night! Peter’s sleeping—*“between two soldiers, bound with two chains”—*I don’t know whether they were asleep, but here’s old Peter asleep—*“and the keepers before the door kept the prison”—*there he is. The next morning he’s to be executed, and there he is asleep. And, you know, he’s sleeping so sound that the angel has to punch him in the ribs to wake him up. Look. Look, if you will, in verse 7—*“And, behold, the angel of the Lord came [in] upon him, and [the] light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up.”* (Acts 12:6–7) Can you imagine? “Hey, Pete, wake up! Wake up!” “Huh?” Here’s Peter, sound asleep the night before his scheduled execution. This is peace. This is peace in the midst of the storm.

I thought about this as I read this. I said, “How could Peter sleep in such a crisis?” Well, number one: He’s no longer afraid of death. He’s seen the risen Christ. I’ve told you before, *a man is not ready to live until he’s no longer afraid to die*. He—Peter—has seen the risen Christ, and for this man, death holds no real terrors for him. Number two: He knows that God’s people are praying for him. That’s one of the great things that helps me in my ministry: I know you’re praying for me—not all of you, but most of you, many of you, some of you. One of you? You are praying. What strength there is! What joy! What victory! I have a sense so many times when I’m doing what I’m doing—there is this peace, this buoyancy, and you know that it’s because God’s people are praying. Peter knew those folks were bombarding heaven for him, and that’s the reason he was asleep. And also, he is aware of God’s presence, because he knew that the Bible says, *“He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.”* (Psalms 121:4)

I heard about a man who was in a crisis, and he thought about this verse of Word: *“He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.”* (Psalms 121:4) He said, “Well, Lord, there’s no need for both of us to stay up all night. Good night. I’m going to sleep while you stay awake.” The Bible says, *“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.”* (Isaiah 26:3)

Friend, listen to me. Turn your problem over to Him. Roll it on the Lord—I don’t care how big it is. There’s the mastery of God’s peace. *“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee.”* (Isaiah 26:3) Again, Paul says in Philippians 4: *“Be careful for nothing”—*that means “don’t worry about anything”—*“but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God”—*listen to it—*“the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall [guard]”—*“shall keep”—*“your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 4:6–7) They thought they were guarding Peter in prison. No, God’s peace was guarding him. God’s peace had garrisoned about.

IV. Rejoice in the Majesty of God's Power

All right, respect the mystery of God's providence. Request the ministry of God's people—prayer. Rest in the mastery of God's peace in the midst of your storm—I don't care what it is. *"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."* (Isaiah 26:3) Take your eyes off the storm and put them on the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, last of all, rejoice—rejoice—in the majesty of God's power.

Now, do you think that God was out of control when James was killed? Do you think that God was out of control when Peter was put in prison? No, no. God is on His throne. Let's begin in verse 7 now: *"And behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him"—that is, upon Peter—"and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And [the] chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals...so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. [And] when they were past the first and the second ward"—they keep on walking right on past these guards—"they came [to] the iron gate [which] leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of [its] own accord."* (Acts 12:7–10)

Do you remember the first time—well, no, not you youngsters, but some of you are my age—do you remember the first time you saw an automatic door? I can remember it. I saw somebody shake their head. Betty, you shook your head. Well, you know, my brother and I went downtown. We walked up to that door, and it would open. We'd go back outside, come back again, walk to that door, and it would open—most amazing thing I'd ever seen. Well, that's not new. Here it is right here in Acts chapter 12. This door, this iron gate, just opens of its own accord, and Peter walks on out. It is an incredible story of God's power.

But now, I want you to notice this: *"they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith"—I'm in verse 10—"the angel departed from him."* (Acts 12:10) The angel took him only so far and then said, "All right, Pete, so long." I want you to see how God's power is working here. Some people might have thought that God was weak and couldn't do anything, or that God was unconcerned and did not care. And, you may feel that in your problem. You may say, "Where is God? Where is God? Is God able?" or, "Doesn't God care?"

And, it's a very interesting thing that Peter's deliverance came at the last moment. I mean, God is very leisurely in this thing. As a matter of fact, all of this story is marked by leisure. When the angel comes in: "Hey, Pete, wake up. Tsk tsk. Get up"—hits him in the rib—"Come on, son, get up." "What time is it?" "Never mind what time it is. We're going to make a jailbreak. Now Pete, put on your clothes. Pete, put on your sandals. Now Pete, put on your coat." I mean, if you're making a jailbreak, do you get dressed up

as you're going out—I mean, putting on your shoes and everything? What he's saying: "Hey, Pete, we're going out in class. We're not sneaking out of this place. We're going out in real class." There's such leisure about the whole thing. God moves in majesty and leisure. And, they walk out—and through the first gate, the second gate; here's the iron gate, first ward, second ward. Here's the iron gate—just swings open. And then, the angel leaves him.

Now, there is something very interesting. After that iron gate opens, Peter is going to go where the prayer meeting is, and the people are there at the house. The door is shut; the front gate is locked, and they're having a prayer meeting now. Well, Peter now has made this prison break, and he realizes it's not a vision; it's for real. So, he goes there where they're having the prayer meeting. He knocks on the door. A little maid comes, and she looks through the peephole. "Whew! It's Peter." She doesn't even say, "Peter, come in!" She goes back and says, "Hey, folks! God has heard our prayer: Peter's at the door." They say, "Rhoda, you must be having a vision. Would you go leave us alone? We're praying for Peter to get out of prison." Here's Peter over here: "Let me in!" Do you know, it was easier for him to get out of prison than it was to get in that prayer meeting. That's an amazing thing! If the Lord could open a prison gate, don't you think He could cause that garden gate to open, or whatever it was? I want you to learn a lesson: prayer is never an excuse for laziness.

Now, there was no way that Peter could open that prison gate, but there was a way that other gate could've been opened. We can't change water into wine, but we can fill earthen pots, can't we? We can't raise Lazarus from the dead, but we can take the grave clothes off, can't we? You see, there are certain things that we can do, and prayer is never an excuse for laziness. And, we need to understand that we're to pray to God for daily bread, but the Bible also says, "*If [a man won't] work, neither should he eat.*" (2 Thessalonians 3:10) Don't you love the balance of the Word of God? But, here is God moving in majestic power. God is still on His throne.

Conclusion

Now, in the last part of this chapter—and we don't have time to get to it—old King Herod is stricken dead because of his arrogance and his pride and is "*eaten of worms.*" (Acts 12:23) It's a gruesome type of thing, but you see the hidden hand of God in all of it.

And, listen to me: if you are in a situation and God doesn't deliver you, remember He didn't deliver James. It's not because He can't. And, if God is not working according to what you can see, it doesn't mean that God is not working. And, if evil seems to succeed, just remember that the success of evil is only temporary. Woodrow Wilson once said, "I had rather temporarily fail with a cause that must ultimately succeed than to temporarily succeed with a cause which must ultimately fail."

Now, if you're in a crisis—and some of you are in a real crisis—let me give you four things to remember: Number one, don't demand to understand; you'll never figure it out. Number two: Remember the resource of prayer. Number three: Put your eyes upon God and rest in His love. And, number four: Expect God's power to move in His own time and in His own way. And friend, He will do it. He's the Christ of every crisis.

Would you bow your heads in prayer? While heads are bowed and eyes are closed, how many in this building could say, "Pastor Rogers, you've been talking to believers today, to Christians..." How many of you could say, "I truly am a believer, a born-again Christian"? How many today could say, "Pastor Rogers, I know—not I think or I feel, but I know—that I'm saved. I've been born again. I've been saved by the power of God. I have a Bible reason for saying it, a changed life that shows it, and God's Spirit witnesses with my spirit that I'm a child of God. And, I know by God's grace, if I should die today, I would go straight to heaven, not because I feel it sentimentally, but because I have a Bible reason for knowing it"? If you can give me that testimony that you know that you're saved beyond any shadow of any doubt, would you lift your hand? All right now, take it down. I didn't do that so I could see; I just wanted you to think about it.

Now, if you couldn't lift your hand, I want to pray for you. I know you're interested in spiritual things or you wouldn't be here today. And, I want to tell you today that God brought you here because He loves you. I don't believe your attendance here today is an accident. God wants you to be saved, and the Bible says, "If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, trust Him, He'll save you." (Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9) He paid for your sin with His blood on the cross. Your sin debt has already been paid. He rose from the dead. He has ascended the high hills of glory. He presents Himself now to you through the Spirit. If you trust Him and receive Him, He'll forgive every sin; He will enter your life to give you power, and peace, and joy, and victory. And, when you die, or when He comes again, He'll bring you home to heaven.

If you want to be saved, you can pray a prayer like this: "Dear God, I'm a sinner, and I'm lost. I need to be saved, and I want to be saved. Jesus, you died to save me. You promised to save me if I would trust you. I do trust you right now with all of my heart. Come into my heart. Forgive my sin. Save me, Lord Jesus"—pray it from your heart and mean it—"Save me, Jesus." And then, thank Him for doing it, and tell Him that you'll not be ashamed of Him, that you'll make it public, that you will follow Him.

Lord, I pray that many will do that today. In your name I pray. Amen.†