

5-2-21 Persecution and Provision

Acts 12:1-17.

How many are dealing with some troubles or trials? As I have stated before each one of us are headed into a storm, in the middle of it or just coming out of it.

In Persecution, in trouble's, tribulation and trials God can be found, so can his provisions.

In **Acts 12**, we see the church in the middle of persecution. Over the past few weeks, we have looked at how the church was making news, news that traveled far. We must remember what God was doing with the Church wasn't wanted by most of the Jews.

King Agrippa I was not well received by the Jews. He was a horrible man; but he saw an opportunity to gain some favor.

There were several different men named Herod in Scripture, each of whom were wicked and cruel.

- Herod the Great ruled during the time of Jesus' birth and ordered all male children under two killed.
- Herod Antipas is the guy who beheaded John the Baptist.
- Herod Agrippa I. This is the Herod we meet in **Acts 12**. He is the grandson of Herod the Great.
- Herod Agrippa II. Paul appears before this Herod in Acts 25-26.

In our passage today, we see things that cause worry and tension, and, in their midst, there are humorous events.

It's important for us to understand that in the middle of everyday life, God is working.

- He's moving things toward completion.
- He's doing things that give us help and sustenance.
- Whether life is drama, comedy, or a combination of both, we can trust that He'll be faithful to His promises.

Let's dive into God's Word and see somethings.

I. Persecutions

- **Read verses 1-5.**
- Herod came from a wicked family and because he was an Edomite he was never accepted by Jews. They resented having an Edomite ruling over them.
- Herod harassed the church and had James killed, and because it pleased the Jews, he captured Peter.
- James, John's brother, son of Zebedee, one of the first disciples and companions of Jesus. (Sons of thunder)
- Something interesting in **Mt. 20:20-28**. The mother of James and John asks Jesus if He could please honor her sons by making them His most important assistants, right and left hands.

- Of course, James and John did not know what they were saying, there is a high cost to a throne of glory. James arrested and executed (church tradition says by beheading) John arrested and exiled to the Isle of Patmos.
- Agrippa's timing not particularly good with Peter because his arrest was at the start of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is part of the Passover celebration, considered a Sabbath no matter what day it fell on.
- Peter was caught and imprisoned. Four squads of four soldiers each squad to cover a six-hour period. Each squad have two soldiers chained to Peter and two watching the doors.
- What could have been more dramatic for the early church than to have James executed and Peter arrested and under heavy guard?
- Do you think the church was terrified and worried about what was going to happen next?
- I said a couple of months ago that I was going to repeat a point often. Believers will face persecution. You will face trials, troubles, temptations, you can try to mind your own bee's wax and you will STILL accidentally step into it.
- The Word of God says so!

John 15:20, Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.

John 15:18, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you."

2 Timothy 3:12, Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

1 John 3:13, Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.

Romans 8:35, Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

John 16:33, I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

- Have you ever been hated, mistreated because of your faith?
- Have you ever been placed in Jail because you were part of a certain faith or church?
- How will we respond if one day we are persecuted for our faith in Jesus Christ?
- Where there is persecution, distress, trouble, tribulation, there is always God's provision.

II. Provision

- **Read verses 6-18.**
- An amazing description of God's hand of providence in the life of the church.
- I can get caught up in the "Why did God allow James to be killed and deliver Peter from death?"
- I remind myself; God's ways are not our ways; His thoughts are above our thoughts.

- But it's also a clear indication that just because we are faithful Christians and active in doing the Lord's work that we are not exempt from persecution and even death.
- I can speak for myself; I am too busy wanting to know "why" when the important thing is that we're honoring God in the here and now. If I am not careful the "why" can cause me to hesitate or not move at all.
- Look at where Peter is in **verse 6. "Peter was sleeping..."**
- If you were chained between two prison guards and had two more on the outside watching the doors and if you knew you were going to be executed the next day, could you sleep?
- Peter was so sound asleep we find in the next verse that the angel had to strike Peter in the side to wake him up!
- How could Peter sleep so soundly?
- God's people were praying for him, **verse 6 says, "constant"** (without ceasing) and **verse 12** verifies it. (An all-night prayer vigil)
- Also, he trusted in the promise that Jesus gave him back in **John 21:18-19**. That he would live to be an old.
- Notice Peter's obedience in **verses 7-11**.
- If Peter was going to be rescued, he was going to have to be obedient. No matter how silly he thought the situation seemed. Remember, Peter thought he was dreaming or having a vision.
- In the middle of the extraordinary, Peter had to do the ordinary to be delivered.
- Peter goes to give a praise report to the prayer service, **verses 12-16**.
- When Peter realizes that this is not just some silly dream, he knows he the best place for him to go is the house where the prayers meeting was being held.
- The house belongs to a woman named Mary who is the mother of John Mark – author of the gospel of Mark.
- Peter knows that since these people have been praying, they deserve a report on the success of their prayers.
- Between **verses 13-17** we see it switch from a drama to God's comedy sitcom.
- First, he continues knocking at the door and then tell them all to be quiet so he can talk.
- The prayer service praying for the release of Peter don't believe it when God answers their prayers.
- Peter leaves them with one last thing, **"Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren."**
- Just like that Peter was gone, he didn't want to give Herod another chance to make good on killing him.

Conclusion

You can be minding your own business, living life and still find yourself in the midst of troubles, because of your faith.

Natural man and his sin are in opposition of the Bible and what it stands for. You can pick and choose what you believe is worth standing up for, but I can tell you someone will be offended, no matter what it is.

What will you do with it?

You may never find yourself in prison like Peter, but you will find yourself held captive for your faith. Remember God's provisions are in the midst of it all.

He is always with you, walking with you and knows exactly what it feels like to not be liked based on your beliefs.

The gospel, which followers of Jesus have been charged to share is offensive to the lives of people. Will you share it anyways?

Have you surrendered to the gospel? What if rather than getting offended by it or rejecting it, what if you investigated it? What if you investigated it for yourself?