"GOD TO THE RESCUE"

ACTS 12:1-19
8-9-2026

*** In a time of crisis, always remember that:**
PRAYER BRINGS GOD TO THE RESCUE!

I. Because prayer brings God to the rescue, you must:
NEVER ELIMINATE THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER (v. 1-5)

A. DON'T ELIMINATE PRAYER BECAUSE IT IS NEEDED IN A CRISIS (v. 1-5a)

B. DON'T ELIMINATE PRAYER BECAUSE IT MOVES GOD TO ACTION (v. 5b)

What kind of praying moves God to action?

1. Fervent prayer ("without ceasing")

2. United prayer ("the church")

3. Intercessory prayer ("for him")

II. Because prayer brings God to the rescue, you must:
NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF PRAYER (v. 6-19)

A. GOD IS ABLE TO ANSWER AT JUST THE RIGHT TIME (v. 6-11)

B. GOD IS ABLE TO ANSWER IN A WAY YOU NEVER EXPECTED (v. 12-19)

1. The saints are shocked! (v. 13-17)

2. The soldiers are stirred! (v. 18-19)

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INTRODUCTION:

ILLUS: How in movies, some man is always the hero. EX - he rescues an attractive woman, marries her and lives happily ever after. It's always Superman to the rescue; Lone Ranger, Mighty Mouse, Incredible Hulk, Bionic Man & Woman . . . recently it's Batman.

All those movies are man-centered (humanistic). God is out of the picture. Even when God is in the picture, He is some "impersonal force or power."

The Bible is so great because it tells it like it really is! It is God to the rescue!

In verses 1 - 19, only two verses (v. 5, 12) describe prayer. The passage would have flowed without interruption, or without giving the idea of something missing, if the sentences about prayer were simply omitted.

But God was sure to include the reference to prayer, because prayer was the key that unlocked Peter's deliverance!

God is showing us that He responds to prayer! Prayer moves the hand of God into action. Prayer brings God to the rescue!

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A. DON'T ELIMINATE PRAYER BECAUSE IT IS NEEDED IN A CRISIS (v. 1-5a)

Note the crisis v. 1-5 and the necessity of prayer during these times.

V. 1

Herod Agrippa was a grandson of Herod the Great and a direct descendant of the Jewish Maccabees. Hence, he had popularity with the orthodox Jews, and now wanted a bit more favor with the people; he wanted to be elevated more (cp. his pride - v. 20-23).

v. 3

To gain more popularity with the Jews, he persecutes their enemy (Christians). He kills the Apostle James (v. 4); then decides to go for the "top dog" or "head honcho" - Peter.

He would have killed Peter on the spot, but because it was Passover Week (a 7-day time of putting no leaven in bread [a picture of Christ not seeing corruption]), no trial or execution could be carried out during that time.

God's timing is always perfect!

V. 4

Four quaternions of soldiers = four squads of four soldiers each (a total of 16 soldiers to guard one man).

Each group of four soldiers would guard the prisoner in shifts of three hours (so that each guard would be alert).

"Bring him forth" = lit. to lead up. This shows that Peter was in the inner prison or lower ward (the most secure part of the prison).

READ V. 5

In a time of crisis, you can eliminate many things. But prayer is not one of them.

If you are to eliminate anything, eliminate worry, fear, your own understanding (solutions) . . . But never eliminate prayer!

Prayer is an essential that we in our fleshly, old nature don't view as such.

Don't worry -- pray!
Don't plan without God -- pray!
Don't work in the flesh -- pray!

Why does God allow us to go into times of crisis? So He can be glorified by answering prayer.

I had an unsaved teacher in Jr. High school who said, "The only time you probably pray is when you really need something from God."

True, we should pray even when we are not in trouble, in good times and bad. But remember, troubles come so that you will pray. They come so that God can show Himself mighty!

EX: of people who prayed when trouble came:

1) Abraham for his relatives in Sodom (Gen. 18:23-32)

2) Lot when fleeing Sodom (Gen. 19:20)

3) Jacob when he thought his brother would kill him (Gen. 32:9-12)

4) Moses before the Red Sea opened (Ex. 14:15), and when in need of water (Ex. 15:25)

5) David when fleeing from Saul (Ps. 18, 25), and Absalom (Ps. 3)

6) Hezekiah when dying with a fatal illness (II Ki. 20:2ff)

7) Daniel when all the wise men were ordered to be killed (Dan. 2:17-18)

8) Jonah when in the fish's belly (Jonah 2:1)

9) Paul in prison with Silas (Acts 16:25)

Heb. 4:16 - "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help <u>in time of need</u>."

B. DON'T ELIMINATE PRAYER BECAUSE IT MOVES GOD TO ACTION (v. 5b)

"But" = shows a sharp contrast. The Greek text brings out this contrast by literally saying: "<u>On the one hand</u> ( ) therefore, Peter was being guarded (impf. passive) in the prison, <u>but on the other hand</u> ( ), prayer was (impf.) fervently being made by the church to God about him (Peter)."

The soldiers were guarding, but the saints were praying!

The scene looks bleak on the one hand, but bright on the other!

"Prayer to the Rescue!"

I imagine if Hollywood were to depict a tense scene like this, it would <u>not</u> show a heroic group of people gathered together in a house praying (which gives God the glory), but rather the heroes would be gathered together scheming how they might conspire and think up a strategy as to how they might heroically free Peter.

Why does God command us to pray? Cannot He work without our needing to ask? YES!

However, the reason we are to pray is so that God will be glorified. So that God will receive the credit for what He does. So that no one will think it was by chance or coincidence.

God has every right to receive glory and honor. Answered prayer shows God to be mighty, sovereign, and faithful.

"...If thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God" (Jn. 11:40-42)

"...Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein (by answered prayer) is my Father glorified" (Jn. 15:7, 8).

What kind of praying moves God to action?

1. Fervent prayer ("without ceasing")

   V. 5

   "Without ceasing" = lit. to stretch out

   1) Describes the length of prayer = continual, drawn out; tireless requesting.

   "Praying always with all prayer" (Eph. 6:18)
   ~Continue in prayer" (Col. 4:2)
   "Pray without ceasing" (I Th. 5:17)

   2) Describes the intensity of prayer - fervent and earnest prayer.

   Luke 22:44 - "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."

Epaphras loved the Colossian believers so much that it is said of him that he was "always laboring fervently for you in prayers..." (Col. 4:12)

To pray fervently (or wrestle in prayer) does not necessarily mean to weep loudly or raise your voice. Remember prayer is a spiritual rather than physical exercise (DeHaan, How to Pray God's Way, p. 21).

Rather, it means to persist in prayer (EX: Luke 11:5-9, 18:108), and to have a sincere intensity, not mere lip service.

Why does fervent prayer move God?

It's sincere!

--Insincere requests don't last long (are soon stopped, quickly fade; have a short life span)

--Insincere requests come from the head, not heart.

2. United prayer ("the church")

Why does united prayer move God to action? Cannot private prayer accomplish the same thing? Yes, it can.

However, corporate decisions and requests (in the name of Jesus; i.e. according to His will) have a special promise. SEE Matthew 18:18-20.

Sometimes the things we ask God to do privately are not in accordance with His will - the Bible.

However, if you have a group of 2 or 3 brothers and you share a prayer request that is unBiblical or not the will of God, it can be checked. On the other hand, if everyone agrees it is God's will (assuming all are spiritual), it will be done.

3. Intercessory prayer ("for him")

Why does intercessory prayer move God? Answer - It is not selfish. It is for the benefit of someone else.

Selfish prayer does not get answered - james 4:3 - "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."

Does this mean we should never ask anything for ourselves?

No. (EX "Lord's Prayer" - Mt. 6:9-13). It means that whatever you ask for ought to be for God's glory (v. 13b) and according to His will (I Jn. 5:14-15).

"Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them." (Heb. 13:3). Pray for those persecuted for righteousness sake!

The Puritan preacher Thomas Watson said: "The angel fetched Peter out of prison, but it was prayer that fetched the angel."

II. Because prayer brings God to the rescue, you must: NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF PRAYER (v. 6-19)

A. GOD IS ABLE TO ANSWER AT JUST THE RIGHT TIME (v. 6-11)

v. 6

"Would have brought him forth" - the language used of the law court = "to bring before."

The very next morning, Peter was to be brought to trial, be found guilty of disrupting society by his gospel, then executed.

But ironically, he could sleep! Why? He no doubt remembered Christ's promise that he would live to an old age (Jn. 21:18)

I believe it as because of the prayers of the saints.

No doubt, they prayed, "Lord, comfort Peter; help him to trust you..."

"The same night" - the very night before the trial, God comes to the rescue. What suspense!

God may not answer at your time; but He always answers on time (I.e. the time in which He will receive the greatest glory).

The people were praying day and night, perhaps for the whole week, but God comes through just in the nick of time!

V. 7

Peter woke up to a miracle, and had an angel for an alarm clock (Wiersbe, p. 145).

"The angel of the Lord" = an angel of the Lord. This is not a reference to Christ, who made pre-incarnate appearances in the O.T. as "The Angel (messenger) of the Lord." This is a reference to a guardian angel who came to fulfill a commission from God.

Our God is "the Lord of hosts". The LORD of the armies of Heaven. When He says "go," they go; "help" - they help; "rescue" - they rescue.

Just as God could do everything Himself (personally), He chooses to use His created beings to fulfill much of His will.

EX: how we are called upon to spread the Gospel, make disciples, etc.

God uses His angels (Heavenly messengers). God uses supernatural means, to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. II Ki. 6:15-17 - Elisha; Dan. 6:22 (lion's mouth), 10:20-21; Mt. 18:10 - "In heaven their angels...) (cp. Acts 12:15b).

Heb. 1:14 - "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

Peter later wrote (possibly remembering this deliverance) - "The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous and His ears are open unto their prayers" (I Pet. 3:12)

B. GOD IS ABLE TO ANSWER <u>IN A WAY YOU NEVER EXPECTED</u>
(v. 12-19)

V. 12

"Many" = <u>not</u> a small group assembled for prayer meeting, but a considerable number.

"Gathered together praying" = they had been brought together by someone (perfect, passive) and were)present tense) in the process of praying. They had been having an "all might" prayer meeting for Peter.

No wonder God worked so miraculously!

No prayer, no power
Little prayer, little power
Much prayer, much power

Was the problem of the disciples lack of faith? Did they ask God to free Peter from the prison and then not believe that He did?

I tend to believe that they asked God for one thing for Peter, and God did something even better! (Jer. 33:3 - "...Call . . . great and mighty things which thou <u>knowest not</u>").

They no doubt (knowing that the trial was the next day) asked God to give Peter wisdom, courage, and strength to stand up to Herod and the Jews.

Yet God went above and beyond their request and delivered him before the trial.

Never forget that : God is able to "do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:20).

1. The saints are shocked! (v. 13-17)

V. 13

Many times wile we are praying for something, God has already answered it!

V. 14-15

The scene is almost comical. The answer to their prayer is standing at the door, and they don't realize it or believe it. We are often like this!

V. 15

How said it is that we ask God to do great and mighty things; yet we don't believe He can and will do it.

How do people explain away direct answers to prayer?

1) Personal Attack - they discredit the validity of one's testimony, by discrediting the person himself. By saying, "Thou art mad," they are calling Rhoda crazy, or more literally "Out of her mind."

2) Substitute explanation - they rationalize and come up with a substitute for what really happened.

Unsaved men will give credit to natural causes.

Saved men may go so far as to give credit to supernatural causes ("It is his angel"), yet don't go all the way and believe that God answered more than expected.

The phrase "it is his angel" supports the truth that each person has a guarding angel, and may reflect a Jewish opinion that the Angel could also "assume the person's own bodily shape and voice" (Kent, p. 102; cp. Marshall, p.210).

2. The soldiers are stirred! (v. 18-19)

V. 19

"When Peter escaped the soldiers were led away to execution because it was the law that, if a criminal escaped, his guard should suffer the penalty the prisoner would have suffered" (Barclay, p. 95).

A typical response of a heathen, unregenerate ruler to God's working. Rather than examining the possibility of God working supernaturally, his only explanation is that the soldiers either conspired and let Peter go, or they were negligent in their duties and Peter snuck out.

Then Herod goes away, avoids what happened and gives no further thought to it.

CONCLUSION:

--Because prayer brings God to the rescue, you must:
NEVER ELIMINATE THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER

--Because prayer brings God to the rescue, you must:
NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF PRAYER

Prayer <u>accomplishes much!</u> (Ja. 5:16)

Promises When We Are in Trouble

Psalm 34:4
“I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.”

Psalm 34:6
“This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.”

Psalm 50:14-15
“Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High:
And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.”

Psalm 86:7
“In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me.”

Psalm 107:6 & 13
“Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses.”