

Acts: The Gospel Gone Viral
Lesson 25 “Freedom Through Christ”

I. Introduction - We are in a series on *Acts*. We are going through the entire book and looking at how the Church was born in revival and this caused the Gospel to go viral.

A. We've studied multiple revivals in the early church. These include Pentecost in *Acts 2* - 3,000 saved, healing of lame man - *Acts 3-4* - 5,000 saved, signs and wonders and the healings off Peter's shadow - *Acts 5* - all Jerusalem filled with the doctrine of Christ., and the revival in Samaria - *Acts 8* - All of the city filled with joy, and the outpouring of the Spirit on the Gentiles from *Acts 10*.

B. Last week we saw a major victory for the early church as they took the gospel to Gentile territory (Antioch) and transformed a pagan, immoral city into a place that was saturated with the gospel that became the major missionary city in the first century.

C. Today we are going to see how the “Empire Struck Back.” We are going to see our first apostolic martyr and then Peter was thrown in prison by King Herod.

1. *Mark 4:17 Affliction and persecution come for the word's sake.* Persecution isn't a sign the word isn't working, it is a sign the word is working.
2. We must be ready for this by getting rooted in truth or else when bad things happen we won't have the strength to endure.

II. Freedom Through Christ

A. **Acts 12:1-4 Herod's Violence Toward the Church**

1. About the time the church in Antioch sent provision through the hands of Paul and Barnabas to those in Judea, Herod had James (John's brother) put to death.
2. This time is probably about 12-15 years after Pentecost, around the mid 40's.
3. Imagine being the early church, you have seen Steven martyred which led to immense persecution and the Christians being scattered all over the world. Now years later, and immense famine hits that effects people all around the world and at the same time, one of the big 3, James is martyred
4. It is believed James was beheaded. Clement of Alexandria said the soldier guarding James before the judge was so affected by his witness that he declared himself a Christian and was willingly executed for Jesus alongside James.
Matthew 10:19.
5. It's significant that Peter was arrested at Passover. This was a great opportunity for Herod to demonstrate His political power to all of the Jews and Christians that were gathered in Jerusalem for the festival. *Mark 8:15 Jesus warned of the leaven of Herod, which is the political spirit.*

B. Acts 12:5-19 Peter Freed From Prison

1. Peter was put in prison and it says the church offered constant prayer for him. While it's not explicitly stated in the text, one can draw the conclusion that if the church would have prayed constantly for James that he may have been freed.
2. **Matthew 6:8-10** Jesus said our Father knows what we need of before we pray. He then tells us to pray. The measure of God's will we experience in our lives is connected to our prayer life.
3. How long do we pray? **Matthew 7:7-8 AMP** *“Ask and keep on asking and it will be given to you; seek and keep on seeking and you will find; knock and keep on knocking and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who keeps on asking receives, and he who keeps on seeking finds, and to him who keeps on knocking, it will be opened. We pray through to breakthrough!*
 - a. Example of the blind man Jesus prayed twice for - **Mark 8**.
4. **Verses 7-11** Angel frees Peter. Angels are ministering spirits sent to minister to the needs of the heirs of salvation.
5. **Verses 12-17** Peter shows up the house of Mary, mother of John Mark.
 - a. When Rhonda hears Peter's voice, she forgets to let him in and runs and tells everyone else (this is a bit humorous).
 - b. The people who are there praying for Peter's deliverance don't believe Peter is at the door. That's ironic. ex: Andrew Wommack story of praying for cross-eyed girl who God healed and then he said, “I don't believe it.” The person's eyes uncrossed. **Our words make a difference.**
 - c. Tell James and the other brethren. This is James the brother of Jesus. Wanted the testimony told to build faith (expectancy for more miracles)”
6. **Verses 18-19** Instead of hearing of the miracle of Peter's escape and receiving it as an invitation to believe, Herod had the guards who let Peter escape killed.
 - a. Unfortunately, it is possible to not believe in the presence of miracles.
 - b. This is because of a willful hardening of the heart that chooses not to believe.

III. Conclusion - We must make a choice to believe God's word today. We need to let the presence of miracles be an invitation to explore His word and discover the promises He made us. We then must pray those promises so His will comes to pass in our lives.

A. Call Up Prayer Team

B. Pray Closing Prayer