

Acts 12:1-19

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Date: 09 October 2016

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[0 : 00] If you would, would you please open your Bibles and turn to Acts chapter 12.!

I got to preach on Acts chapter 10 a little bit over a month ago. And before we kind of go into where Nathan brought us last week and where we are right now, I definitely want to draw attention to something that David said in his prayer.

David was praying that we would be participating in the service through our worship, through the music, through our prayers, through the preaching, through the receiving of the word, through our giving.

So, painting the picture that all of this is worship, not just the music that was played. Even as you're listening right now, like you're honoring God in the way that you receive this, in the way that you ask God and you're praying for Him to show you what you need to see about this text.

So, all of this is worship. I need your prayers while I preach. I am so, I'm not infallible like God's word is. Thankfully, God chooses to use us.

[1 : 28] And so, I take that very seriously. But, please pray for me during this time. Be praying for other people here that are bringing completely different stories into the service who need to hear God's word.

And God's word pierces us like an arrow. So, and each person needs to hear this in a way that God is kind of preparing their hearts for. So, be praying for me. Be praying for each other.

Be remembering that all of this is worship. It's not just the music on the stage. So, with that, let's kind of talk about where we've been in Acts so far.

Last week, Nathan preached on finishing up Acts 11. And we kind of have seen a lot of really big pivotal things happen in Acts so far. We've seen the church grow from just a very, very small number, a couple hundred people, to thousands of people being added daily.

And it just, it's crazy. And so, then we're seeing persecution come. We see Stephen martyred. And then we have this other big event with the Gentiles being brought in. And we talked about that in Acts 10.

[2 : 34] So, there's a lot of really big events. The church is growing. Gentiles are being added into the church, which to us doesn't seem like a big deal. But if you're a first century Jew, that's a huge deal.

And now, what we've been doing, where we were last week, is we were kind of talking about Paul and Barnabas. And they're in Antioch. So, now what the author of Acts, Luke, is doing is he's bringing us back into Jerusalem.

And if you remember, where we left in Jerusalem was Stephen being martyred. So, we're coming back to persecution. And you're going to see that persecution is this really, really big theme of Acts. And we're going to kind of hit it over and over and over again.

And something that you're going to see, if you're noticing, is that where there's persecution, there's going to be gospel growth and gospel sharing. Where there's gospel sharing, there's going to be persecution.

It's not so much a cause and effect, but think of it as two sides of the same coin. If you see persecution, you're going to see gospel growth. When you see gospel growth, gospel proclamation, you will see persecution.

[3 : 37] And we know that persecution will come to the believer. The text that we're going to look at this morning is 2 Timothy 3.12, which says that all who desire to live a godly life will be persecuted, which is not an easy thing to hear.

We also know that Satan is the enemy of the gospel. We have an enemy, and it's not our neighbors or those who disagree with us politically.

It is a spiritual enemy whose desire is to stifle the gospel and keep the believer apart from God. We see that it's in Ephesians where Paul is saying, hey, our struggle is not against flesh and blood. So it's not against people, but it's against these principalities. It's against these authorities of the spiritual world. And so we know that Satan is the enemy of the gospel, and Satan's drive, his goal, is to silence the believer, to silence the proclamation of the gospel, to keep the believer away from God.

So the question that I'm asking, that I'm posing to you this morning is, it's not will you respond to persecution, but how.

[4 : 51] How will you respond to persecution when it comes? So with that, we're going to read Acts 12, verses 1 through 19, and then we're going to pray real quick, and then we're going to go right into it.

Starting in verse 1. About that time, Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.

He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of unleavened bread. And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.

So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. Now when Herod was about to bring him out on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with chains, and centuries before the door were guarding the prison.

And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, Get up quickly. And the chains fell off of his hands.

[6 : 01] And the angel said to him, Dress yourself and put on your sandals. And he did so. And he said to him, Wrap your cloak around you and follow me. And he went out and followed him. He did not know what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.

When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate, leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street. And immediately the angel left him.

When Peter came to himself, he said, Now I am sure the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hands of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting. When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. Recognizing Peter's voice in her joy, she did not open the gate, but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate.

They said to her, You are out of your mind. But she kept insisting that it was so. And they kept saying, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking. And when they opened, they saw him, and they were amazed.

[7 : 12] But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of prison. And he said to them, Tell these things to James and to the brothers. Then he departed and went to another place.

Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what became of Peter. And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries in order that they should be put to death.

Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there. Pray with me real quickly. Heavenly Father, thank you for your word.

Thank you for giving it to us that you speak to us through your word. No other text can do that, God. Only your word can. Only your word can speak to us in a unique way that convicts us, that encourages us.

And we pray that you would do those things this morning, that you would use me, God, a sinner, that you would use me to proclaim your truth, that there would be clarity this morning, that we would all walk away encouraged, convicted, and changed by your word.

[8 : 20] We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. Okay, so, if you're taking notes, one of the first things that we're saying right now is that persecution will come to the believer.

Persecution will come to the believer. That is seen in Acts chapter 12, verses 1 through 2. If you're looking at a text, you can see about that time, Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.

He killed James, the brother of John, with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. So, I want to take like a quick second and just do a little bit of character clarification, because if you're looking at the text, it might be a little confusing who's who. Okay, so James, not the author of James. Okay, you remember, if you recall, Jesus is walking alongside the Sea of Galilee, and he calls two men.

Do you remember their names? It's James and John. They're brothers. That's the James that we're talking about. So, this is, while Stephen was the first martyr of the gospel, this is the first apostle who's been martyred.

[9 : 30] This is not James, brother of Jesus. Okay, that's the James who wrote the book of James. Okay, second thing, his brother is John. Later on in the story, they talk about John Mark.

That's not James' brother. Okay, next thing I need to say, when Peter asks about, let's see, verse 17, he says, tell these things to James.

It's not the James that just died. So, he knows. He's talking about James, Justice, brother of Jesus, who's now going to start kind of leading the church in Jerusalem.

Second thing is Herod. There's a lot of Herods. Okay, there's Herod, the one that tried to kill baby Jesus. That's not the Herod we're talking about.

There's the Herod that questioned Jesus. That's Herod Antipas. Okay, that's not the one that we're talking about here. Herod Agrippa, that's the one we're talking about. He's the one who we're going to continue on with the story later on.

[10 : 32] Okay, so, the couple things that we see here in the text. Do you guys notice that James just kind of gets persecuted and killed with no trial? Like, there's nothing that happens.

There's no, there's no, like, he goes before a public forum. There's no, there's nothing. It's just James is, at least that's the way that Luke describes it in the text, is James is just killed. Out of nowhere.

And then, you'll see what Herod does, is he kind of waits to see what the Jews are going to react to it. So, he kills James. Herod is kind of looking for the applause of man in this. And he sees, okay, well, how are the Jews going to react to this?

And they react favorably. And he's like, okay, I'm going to kill Peter next. So, he throws Peter in prison. Again, no trial. Think about that. That's you. I mean, no trial here.

And you're just, there's no one to say, no, no, no, this guy, he's a good man. He should not die. There's no one to do that. If you were thrown in prison, you would have friends who'd be able to come to your call, and they would be able to voice their opinion for you, and vouch for you, and say, no, this is a good man.

[11 : 33] This is a good man. That does not happen to James or Peter. They don't get that opportunity. So, it's so, it's so incredibly unjust. And so, Peter's next in line, and the thing that, the reason why he hasn't been executed yet, is so that Passover can be honored.

There's this really tragic irony in upholding the law, and upholding these feasts, so that once those are done, then we can kill our guy. So, again, Peter's next in line to die, and the only thing that's waiting on that, is Herod's approval, and the Passover being completed.

And so, like James and Peter, we're going to be persecuted just the same. It's going to look differently, and there's reasons why I would say, we too will be persecuted. The first reason is that Jesus is our master.

This is huge to get. John 15, 20. So, Jesus is talking to his disciples, and he says, remember the word that I said to you, a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you.

If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. Okay, this is worth turning to, 2 Timothy 3.12. Okay, so, Paul is writing this verse, not from the comfort of freedom, and the comfort of a library somewhere, or a study.

[13 : 24] Paul is writing this in chains, knowing that his execution is near. So, Paul is writing this text, and he says in verse 12, indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ, will be persecuted, while evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

So, that's huge to get, because Peter, Paul is not saying that from theory. He's saying that from personal experience. And, so, again, the first reason is that Jesus is our master. We're identifying with Christ, we will be persecuted. The second reason is that we're foreign to the world. Peter kind of exhorts his writers over and over again, saying, hey, you guys are strangers and exiles.

And then we see that theme with Paul where he says, hey, you're to be in the world, but not of the world. So, saying that this earth is not our home. The ways of the world are not our ways. We are called out of this world. We are called out of sin, and we're called strangers and exiles. So, the world will see that we are, we don't go with everything that the world goes with.

[14:42] So, that we're foreign to the world. It's not a question of, like I said earlier, it's not a question of will we respond to persecution, but how will we respond to persecution? Because of these reasons, Jesus is our master, we're strangers and exiles to the world.

We're going to appear different, because we've been called out of darkness, so we no longer look like that darkness. So, how are we going to respond? The first thing is that, we can kind of look at, the reaction of the church.

The church is persecuted, and it doesn't shrink back, but instead it goes forth of a message even more, and it proclaims it even more. It's that two sides of the same coin. There's persecution, there's going to be gospel proclamation, and the church doesn't shrink back from that gospel proclamation, and so, as people who will be persecuted, we respond by, not being surprised, when it comes.

The church isn't shocked by it. And if they are, Luke doesn't add that into the story. It makes it very clear, that the church, responds to James being killed unjustly, out of nowhere, with no trial, and Peter being next in line, they respond with prayer, they're not surprised, they're not going, and creating a mob, and demanding justice.

They're counting it all joy. And then they're praying. We're going to get into that in a minute, but that's the church's response. Do you see that? Like, it's so important to see. Okay, persecution comes, the church prays.

[16:15] That's the church's response. Not surprised. Yes, grieved. I don't want to, I don't want to understate that, that the church is some machine, that is so godly, and so holy, that when one of their own gets killed, or someone doesn't get healed, they're immediately like, well, God is good, we're just going to pray, and that's what we're going to do.

Like, no, I'm sure, like, by no means do I believe, that the church was not mourning James' death, and they weren't crying out. Like, I absolutely believe that. So, church is not mechanical in that. But, it isn't surprised, and they respond in prayer, grief, and in prayer. The thing that I want to ask is, okay, so what if we aren't seeing persecution in our lives?

This is a big question. We're, we're seeing the type of persecution here, where someone's being executed, and thrown in jail, wrongly. So, we're not seeing that.

We're sharing the gospel, but we're not seeing ourselves be thrown in jail. And thankfully, our, our government protects us in that way. But, nonetheless, the promise is true.

[17:16] Right? The promise is true, that all who desire to live a godly life, will be persecuted.

There is not, this, explanation that he gives, saying like, unless you're living, in a country that allows you to share the gospel.

No, no, he's just saying, hey, all who desire to live a godly life, will be persecuted. So, what if we don't see that though? What if you're looking around, you're saying, well, we're not seeing that. Again, I'm not saying it's going to look exactly like the way it's looking in Acts.

At least in this country, it won't. For now. But, I want to give a couple reasons, why I don't think we see persecution happen all the time. And, the first reason is that there are spiritual forces at work. So, like we said earlier, again, our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but it's against these spiritual forces. And so, Satan is happy to not persecute us, if it means that we enjoy our luxuries more than we do share the gospel.

So, it's a particular challenge that we face in the West. Because we have all of our comforts, and we do have these freedoms and these liberties that allow us to not have to worry about gathering this morning and reading the Bible.

[18:30] But, Satan doesn't see a need for us to be persecuted if we're already doing what he wants us to do, which is silence. Which, if we're not proclaiming the gospel boldly.

And, again, comforts are a blessing. Material things in and of themselves are not evil. But, they can be a distraction, right? Like, they can be a distraction from us knowing why we're here, getting caught up, getting caught up in everything that is happening in our season of life.

Whether it is, like, you're in college. Like, things that Satan wants you to focus on, which is your schoolwork. And, making sure that you get through that. Making sure that you get the grades that you need. And, there's so many different stages.

I mean, that we could kind of go on and on and on about. But, I'm just saying that our comforts can be a blessing, but they can be a distraction. And, I think that we can be Christians who are over-medicated by luxury.

Remember, all who strive to live a godly life will be persecuted. We will be persecuted. It'll look differently, but we will be persecuted. So, the first reason we're saying that there's spiritual forces at work.

[19 : 40] The second, and this is also the third reason, so you're going to have to listen to both. The second reason is that, second and third is that, we either aren't striving to live godly lives, or, we aren't people who have God in our lives.

So, we either aren't striving to live godly lives, or, we aren't people who have God in our lives. So, I hope that you're catching my heart, and what I'm saying with that. So, I think that, what's really happened is that we have, we hear that, we hear that phrase, that, that verse, all who desire to live a godly life, will be persecuted.

And, we've redefined the word godly, to suit our lifestyles, to mean something different than what Paul is talking about here. And remember, it's two sides of the same coin.

Persecution, and gospel proclamation. They go hand in hand. It's not a cause and effect, but what we're saying is, if there is one, there will be the other. I'm saying, yes, if you share the gospel at work, it's possible you might get passed over for a promotion.

It's possible that, if you share the gospel at work, you might lose your job. It's possible that, if you share the gospel with your friends, that you might face social isolation.

[20 : 54] You might get passed over for things. It's possible that, you might share the gospel with your classmates, and suffer for it grade-wise. It's going to take different forms, but I'm saying that there is a cost to sharing the gospel.

And when there is gospel proclamation, there is persecution. I am saying that it's possible that you could share the gospel, and not be persecuted, and not experience hardship. I'm saying it's possible.

I just don't think that it's likely. I would be hard, you would be hard-pressed to find someone who is boldly proclaiming the gospel, and is not experiencing any problems with that.

And here's the thing. We will bear fruit. If we're believers, and we've been changed, we will bear fruit. And to some, that'll taste like a peach. But to others, it'll taste like a lime. And the gospel will be a cold glass of water to someone who's in need of refreshing, and whose soul is weary, and they're thinking about spiritual things.

It will be a cold glass of water to them. But to those who have no desire for it, who reject it, it will be a glass of vinegar. It's a polarizing effect. So what I'm saying is, if we're seeing little to no polarizing effect with our words, we're looking less and less like our Lord, and that should make us pause.

[22 : 17] And that should make us wonder if we actually do know and are communing with God. That should make us pause. That should make us ask, all right, God, am I desiring to live a godly life the way that you have defined that in the Bible?

Okay, next thing that we're saying is that prayers should be made by the church. We've talked about persecution, and we're saying, okay, prayers will be made by the church.

You see that as the response from the church that this event happens to. Look at verse 5 and 12. Verse 5, So James has been killed.

Peter's thrown in prison, and he's scheduled to be executed by the end of the day, and the church is praying in response. Interestingly enough, there's one person who's not praying. Did you notice that? The guy who's about to die is not praying.

He's, like, sleeping. And it's like, I feel like we've been here before. Something big is about to happen, and someone should be praying, and it's always Peter, and he's sleeping.

[23 : 41] It's like, he either, like, is the most relaxed guy in the world who's just not worried. He's like, God's sovereign in this, or that dude just loves him some sleep. Which I can identify with.

The other interesting thing, just as a little side note, do you notice that, okay, the church is praying for Peter's release, but when Peter is actually released, they're surprised.

Like, it's either, again, they were either surprised, like, they didn't think that what was going to happen was going to happen, or it didn't happen the way they thought it was going to happen. It's like, it's really, really odd. I'm not trying to critique the church too much there, but it's like, what?

So, so Luke, the author, he takes significant time to talk about prayer in the story. Like, why, why did he go so much into this, why did he go into that story of, like, Peter shows up, the church is praying, and then the servant girl goes, and they're like, and she's like, hey, it's Peter.

And they're like, no, no, it's not, and they keep praying. Like, why does, why does Luke go into that story? I think he goes into that to show, to talk, to make a significant point to talk about prayer. So, because of that, I'm saying that we should be praying collectively.

[24 : 51] That's what the church is doing in this instance. So, individual prayer should be happening, yes. But that should already be going on. And group prayer should be a knee-jerk reaction like it is here.

And again, that's why Luke attaches that to this text. He's trying to make this point. They're persecuted. They're thrown in jail. Something like, unjustly, prayer's happening. Again, not mechanically, but it is a knee-jerk reaction.

And it's important to remember that God uses man's prayers as a vehicle, as a means to accomplish his will. Does he need us? No. He's totally sovereign, entirely in control, but he uses our prayers as a vehicle, as a means.

If you recall, Acts 10, you could flip over one page, and you could see that in verse 4, Cornelius, who's the centurion, he's praying to God.

Listen to the way that God describes his prayers. He says, Cornelius is praying, and then this angel appears, and in verse 4 it says, and he stared at him in terror, and he said, what is it, Lord?

[25 : 57] And he said to him, your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. That phrasing, another version says it's, your prayers have ascended as a fragrant offering to God.

So it's like God, it's like you smelling something really, really delicious, and it's like, oh man, that gets me going, I love that. And that's Cornelius' prayers in this instance, and that's what we're saying with this text, is that our prayers, they please God.

Our prayers please God. God uses them as a means, and they please him. But praying collectively is not a knee-jerk reaction for us, if we're honest.

I think that individual prayer sometimes can be, and that most of us, our reaction is to pray, and that's good, but I don't want to leave out this piece of collective, group-wide prayer.

Often it's not a knee-jerk reaction. The thing is that group-wide prayer, if you have noticed, if you are, is anyone here like a, like you love to people-watch sometimes, you love to notice trends and like the way that people do things and just the interesting things that go on during prayer.

[27 : 08] Have you noticed that it's awkward sometimes that we're easily distracted, and we feel pressure to impress in our prayers? It can feel forced, right?

Like our group prayer, when we say like, okay, let's get together and let's pray, if you've been in your community groups, like you've probably experienced some difficulty in group prayer. Like it doesn't just flow like water, it's just, sometimes it's difficult and it's not as easy as you would hope it would be.

And I think that reveals something about our view of God in prayer. Sometimes we view prayer as like a ceremony or a ritual that we have to go about. There's these certain rules that make up prayer.

So what I'm talking about with the people-watching thing, some things that I thought about, like the rules that kind of affect prayer, here are the rules of prayer that I've noticed. If you're going to pray, you must always announce, all right, let's pray now.

Again, none of these, I'm not critiquing them and saying they're really, really terrible. It's just showing something about like, I feel like we can all identify with different rules. So there's the, we have to announce that we have to pray, that we're going to pray.

[28 : 10] It's not like if someone was sharing something with me and I was like, man, that's really, really good. God, like what do you, like we want you to accomplish it. Like we couldn't just go into that necessarily. It would be like, okay, like let's all gather together and let's pray right now.

Sometimes you'll get in that time where it's like, if we're going to pray, we're going to pray to the left and you're going to pray for the person to your left and they're going to pray and we're going to complete the circle here. And then the other thing is, if you've ever gotten in a situation where you're in a group and everyone's prayed but two people, it's like this unspoken agreement between that person and you that like, I won't have to pray if you don't pray and then we'll wait.

We'll wait this thing out. We will like go through the storm here and then someone, someone else will say amen and so amen signals the end of our prayer time. It's like this unspoken agreement and it's just like, that's just human nature.

Like that's okay. I'm not critiquing it and saying like that's the worst thing in the world. I'm just saying that sometimes, and I feel like other people can share more rules but it seems like there are rules to prayer which again is, I think it's reflecting something about our view of prayer.

We view prayer as a ritual or a ceremony with certain rules rather than commuting with the Almighty. Hardly can we say prayer is a knee-jerk reaction.

[29 : 29] When was the last time, just as a gauge, when was the last time we prayed for more than 30 minutes? When was the last time that we cried out in prayer and showed emotion in our prayers?

When was the last time that we did that? And I don't want to come down too hard but I do want to say I think this is a muscle that you have to work out.

Just like anything. Like someone needed to show you how to read your Bible. Someone needed to show you how to share the gospel. And just like that, learning how to pray collectively is not an easy thing and we need, it's a muscle that we have to work out.

So how do we do that? I have a really complicated plan for how we do that. We just start doing it. It's not something that we need to overthink.

As you leave here, like are you praying right now? As you leave today, as you go over your meals, like are you thinking about how do we pray? How do we ask God that He would transform our hearts? It starts with, what about the one-on-one encounters?

[30 : 32] What about with the quarter group discipleships? Like are you making prayer a focus? I have noticed that in the times that I've disciplined guys, prayer has not been a focus. It's been something that we do at the very, very end of our meeting.

It is not the focus of it. And I feel like in some ways, I've failed certain guys by not showing them how important prayer is. By not letting that be a major focus.

I let the content that we're going through be the main focus. And at the very end, we have like a quick little prayer. But rarely have I like gotten with these guys and be like, hey, like, let's cry out together. Let's really labor for the people that we are praying for and we want to see changed and transformed.

So it starts there. It starts in your core groups. It starts in your community groups. And it's just something that we sometimes, and this isn't for every case, but sometimes we have to act our way into right thinking rather than think our way into right acting.

And with that, we should be praying expectantly. Right? The church, again, the thing is that they are praying, but they, it's like there's some disconnect. Again, it's either they were praying and things didn't happen the way they thought they were going to happen or they didn't, or they just didn't think it was going to happen at all.

[31 : 44] There's something that's a little bit off in the church here in chapter, or verse 12 of chapter 12. So this verse that came to mind is James 1, 5. And if you want to turn there real quick, it'll be one of the last ones that you'll turn to.

So, starting in verse 5, James is talking about praying for wisdom here, but the principle is still the same. He says in verse 5, If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

But let him ask in faith with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.

He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. So, James is touching on this point of like, hey, not doubting when you pray, believing, praying expectantly. How often is it that we pray for something, whether it's healing or a job or an opportunity to share the gospel, and then it doesn't happen, and it's like we're the first ones, God's like the first one that we do blame.

We're like, oh, like why, or question, or just get frustrated with, like, God, why didn't you do that? But, when God does answer that prayer, it's almost like we write it off as like it was going to happen anyways.

[33 : 04] Like, I mean, I interviewed, well, like I prepared for that interview. And we're like, no, like, I mean, like the doctors knew what they were doing. They're like, they're great doctors. And like, we thank God, we like throw up a prayer to God and like, thank you.

But it's not like it consumes us like, oh my gosh, we prayed that this person would be healed and God used the doctors and he was healed. Like, so we were the first ones to blame God, but when he does answer our prayers, like we often like skirt that joy.

the other thing that I thought was something that we kind of might struggle with a little bit more in the reform camp and I have to say this very, very carefully and I ask you to hear my heart in this. So, we know about the sovereignty of God. We know that God is good, that he doesn't need us, that he's going to do what he's going to do and that he uses our prayers. We have a tendency to keep ourselves from truly praying expectantly in this way.

And again, hear my heart in this. I think that we know that God is not the God of the wealth and prosperity gospel and we know that just because he doesn't give us what we ask for in prayer, we know that he's still good.

[34 : 11] But, and we know that it's right for Jesus to pray in the garden, hey, let this cut past before me, but your will, not my. Right? So, we get that concept that Jesus is saying, hey, I really want this to happen, but it's not my will, I'm submitting to your will.

And I think that where we hurt ourselves when it comes to praying expectantly is that anytime that we pray for something, again, a job interview, healing, gospel sharing, we will ask for that and then we'll always follow that up with, but if it's your will, God, like, if that's what you want to happen, then make that happen.

And, again, while I'm saying that that's right, because we're so quick to follow it up, I think that if we're not careful, it can be a subtle way for us to insulate ourselves from pain, that when God doesn't answer the prayer the way that we want him to, it's almost like we already protected ourselves, we saw that happening two or three steps down the line and we were like, but if it's your will to not let that happen, then let me be okay with it.

And, again, I'm not saying that's wrong, I'm not saying that's bad, I'm just saying it is something that can subtly keep us from praying expectantly. It's good and biblical to say this, but while it can soften the blow of our disappointment, it can also stifle our praise for when God does answer our prayers.

Do you see that? Like, it's super, super subtle, and I'm not saying don't pray for God's will to be done, I'm just saying it's something that we need to be on guard for. Like, okay, when I pray this, when I say, let your will be done, am I insulating myself from pain in case you don't give that to me?

[35 : 48] Because I think that that hurts us again in the way that we praise God when he does come through with those things. I'm not suggesting that we adopt a name it and claim it mentality when it comes to prayer, that's not what I'm suggesting.

I'm saying that we pray expectantly knowing that God hears. We don't need to pray harder, you don't need to pray louder. We pray expectantly knowing that, we pray expectantly so that our praise or our hurt are not stifled.

We let God work through that. Even in the painful moments, we still let God work through that. We still wrestle through that. We don't numb ourselves so that it doesn't hurt as bad. So let's pray expecting God to work in power because power will be displayed by God for his church.

So this is my kind of last and final point is that power will be displayed by God for his church. How? We're saying it's for God's purposes.

There is this interesting detail where James is killed but not Peter. There's much rejoicing over the fact that Peter is released miraculously but that miracle didn't come to James and God saw that it was good for that to happen.

[37 : 08] There were different outcomes for different men. One got to come home and one didn't. But God is good in both situations. God is glorified in the martyrdom of James and in the release of Peter.

Could he have released James? Absolutely. 100%. Like none of us are doubting that. God uses it for his purposes. We see that Peter's released.

He encourages the church. He reminds them of God's sovereignty and God's continued plan to use Peter to advance the gospel. And the other thing that's great about God's power being displayed by God for his church is that God does this because of us but also in spite of us.

So, their prayers, God uses those prayers. Those are the means, the vehicle that God accomplishes his purposes. But, Peter's sleeping and the church isn't praying completely expectantly.

You know what I mean? Like those are the two things that are a little off about the situation but God still answers their prayers. So, God works because of our prayers but also in spite of our prayers. Like he does, he is sovereign, he is good.

[38 : 24] He doesn't need our prayers but he invites us in to have them be the means, that vehicle that drives his will. And then this is the why.

Why does God use his power to be displayed for the church? This is the biggest point, guys. God is entirely devoted to the advancing of the gospel.

He is relentless in it. Nothing will keep the gospel from being advanced. Okay, the miracle is awesome but there's a bigger purpose to it and I don't want to say don't pay attention to the miracle because just stop and think for a second like the insanity of this miracle.

The fact that Peter is guarding, so what would have happened is he has a chain around one leg and a chain around the other and those are both connected to guards and there are two guards guarding the doors and there's four of these four man groups and they take different shifts.

So it's like you would think that they were guarding the most valuable man in the world or the most violent man in the world but they're guarding Peter who's done no violence. It's an odd thing but nevertheless it's almost it's almost like God uses that uses man's attempts to prevent Peter from escaping just to show how big and powerful God is.

[39 : 37] Nothing stands in God's way. He suspends his own laws of physics. The laws that he created he suspends them. He says you will not hold this man any longer and the chains fall off of him.

He shines this light in the cell and it wakes up Peter after touching him but not the guards. He walks through the gate the gate opens for him he walks out of the city.

Like this is a big deal like God suspends all of these things all these things that would be impossible for the sake of God building up his church and advancing the gospel.

That is the point of this miracle here. It's not just to say oh that was super cool and I think that God's neat and isn't he powerful no it's to say God's relentless in his pursuit of the gospel and he will accomplish it and he's using Peter.

The physical properties bend their knees to God's purposes. God is entirely about the proclamation of the gospel entirely.

[40 : 43] So in closing thoughts I believe that Luke wrote this text to encourage the church to remain steadfast steadfast under persecution steadfast in prayer because of our belief in God's power.

Steadfast in prayer that we'll believe that God will hear our prayers and he will accomplish his will. And it's easy to look inward I believe it's easy to look inward and be a little bit discouraged or maybe be discouraged or maybe see this as an indictment on our lack of prayer or our lack of belief sometimes or our lack to proclaim the gospel when we really need to because we're afraid of uncomfortable situations because a million different reasons it's easy to look in that and especially for myself I know that I fail so much of this like I am not the greatest of this I'm in that group I'm in that camp where I'm saying guys I've redefined godliness to mean something different to mean something more palatable for me something that's a little bit more comfortable for me so that I can still say that I am my own instead of saying I'm gods and I'm bought with a price and it's no longer me but it's Christ like I want to avoid that and I fail at this so please please hear me but in that even though it's easy to be discouraged the message is not try harder the message is not pray louder pray more or that you need to believe more or that your faith is little that's not the message that we're saying it would be a travesty to believe that to get that out of this message that okay we need to go home we need to pray more and we need to be more godly and we need to share the gospel more and like hoo-ha-hoo let's go like that's not the message and it would be like a travesty for us to go in that direction instead what we're saying is that god's power his message centers on himself nothing will stand in god's will nothing will stand in god's way of the gospel and that's not dependent upon us at all it's not dependent upon how good we are but god invites us to be a part of that so

here's what i'm saying that the messages of this to you that we go home with this is that remind yourself of that daily remind yourself of that right now remind yourself of that as we're about to take the lord's supper remind yourself of what christ has done for us and how god has redeemed us from darkness and taken us into light and jesus is our master and we are formed the world that's what we remind!

ourselves of! not try harder you need to pray more you need to believe more it's believing that god will accomplish his purposes and reminding ourselves of that and then reminding each other of that in your core groups reminding each other of that in your community groups that god is relentless about his pursuit of the gospel and he uses us and we get to be a part of that that is what i want us to hear out of this i want us to hear that god invites our prayers in persecution will come and it should come if there's gospel proclamation there's going to be persecution but it's all relying on it's all hinging on god's power believing that god will accomplish what he desires to accomplish let's pray