

Come On, Open the Door

Acts 12:12-25

Most of us have heard the saying, “*opportunity knocks.*”

How many of us this morning have stories from past opportunities of would’ve, could’ve, or should’ve?

There are times we were given opportunities we failed to take advantage of, either because it seemed too good to be true, or because we had plenty of time to act, but then ran out of time.

Germany Kent said, “*When the spirit gives you a command, act on it **because that one thing** could lead you to an important opportunity that you would otherwise have missed.*”

We must always be available and remain sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit so we can fulfill His will and purpose in life.

Please open your Bibles to the ***Book of Acts 12...***

Last week, we learned about the generosity of some believers who gave to other Christians because of a famine, and we also learned about some persecution from the government.

Most of the persecution the Church in Jerusalem was facing came from the Jewish religious leaders, but here we see the persecution came from the civil leaders of the **government**.

Herod Agrippa had James killed, and he imprisoned Peter, thinking to have him killed after the Passover. As Peter was in prison, “***Constant prayer was offered to God***” by the Church.

When we are going through the trials and heartaches of life, we should fix our eyes on Jesus and pray, knowing Jesus is our intercessor to the Father.

vs. 6 says ***Peter was sleeping.***

After he had the Holy Spirit, Peter was no longer scared to die, and he was so **secure** in the promise of Jesus Christ that he could sleep in the middle of a potential death sentence.

While Peter was sleeping, an angel showed up in his prison cell, struck him on the side, and told him it was time to go.

Peter and James were both arrested. The Lord allowed James to be put to death, but the Lord was not finished with Peter yet.

God has a plan, and He is working out His plan according to His will. So, we should trust Him!

Today, we will hear what happened after Peter realized **what** happened was not a vision, but reality, and we will hear about the importance of giving the LORD the glory for all He has done

I. Doubting answered prayers.

Read *Acts 12:12-16*

After the angel led Peter out of jail, he realized that what he was going through was not a vision, but reality.

Remember what has already taken place. James was dead, many of the believers in Jerusalem were being **harassed**, and Peter himself was facing a death penalty.

But here Peter stood in the center of town, wondering what his next move would be. He realized that as soon as daybreak, the guards were going to realize he was missing.

Peter must have known that the believers would be gathered together at Mary's, John Mark's mother's house, so he decided to go and join them.

This Mark is the writer of the ***Gospel of Mark***, the cousin of Barnabas, and the young man whom we read about in ***Mark 14***.

As Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, we read...

Mark 14:51 Now a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young men laid hold of him,

Mark 14:52, and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked. NKJV

Notice, ***vs. 12, where many were gathered together, praying.***

We are not sure, but this could have been one of the house churches in Jerusalem at the time.

So, Peter showed up at Mary's house in the middle of the night, and Rhoda came to the door and recognized Peter's voice.

vs. 14, "Because of her gladness, she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate."

Look at this picture that shows a potential layout of the house.

Some commentators say that it would have been customary for a young teenage slave to be assigned to answer the door, and that Rhoda was probably around 12-13 years old.

Rhoda must have been familiar with the Christians who met at Mary's house because we are told that she recognized Peter's voice when he was at the door.

I also believe Rhoda must have been a believer because notice how she was overjoyed to hear Peter's voice, as she was relieved that he wasn't killed.

Imagine being Peter. He was probably thinking, *"Come on, open the door. I just walked out of jail, and soon, the guards are going to realize I am gone and search for me."*

The house full of people had been praying for Peter's release, and Rhoda came in and announced that their prayers had been answered.

Notice *vs. 15*, ***"But they said to her, 'You are beside yourself!'"***

Another translation reads, ***"you are out of your mind."***

The people who were inside Mary's house, praying for Peter's release, told the servant girl that she had just plain lost it, but she kept insisting that Peter was at the door.

Paul told his protégé Timothy in *1 Timothy 2:8*, ***I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. NKJV***

The followers go even further with their unbelief and explain what Rhoda must have experienced, saying, “*It is his angel*”.

It was a common belief that every Jew had their own guardian angel, so maybe these believers thought that Peter’s angel sounded just like him, and it was Peter’s angel at the door.

I wonder if we are like this sometimes when the LORD answers our prayers. We will believe anything other than the fact that God may have heard and answered our request.

When I was in Kansas, our youth went to Texas for a camp, and one of our people, Trent, got sick and was taken to the hospital.

Trent had passed out due to some internal colon issues that had been a mystery for a very long time to many different doctors.

When I received the call, I went and got Trent’s mom and grandma, and we drove through the night, heading for Texas.

We got to the hospital at first light, and the surgeon was about to operate on Trent. Trent had a lifelong condition that he visited doctors about many times, but in Texas, they operated on him.

When the surgeon was done, he came and told us all about his findings and how he discovered the real issue Trent had, and Trent would never deal with that particular medical issue again.

When I thanked the doctor for **healing Trent**, he quickly corrected me and said, “*Only the LORD heals people; I am just a tool in His hand. Give the LORD the praise.*”

“It is like when someone has their hand on a hot burner, a doctor takes the hand off the burner, but the Lord heals.”

Oftentimes, we will thank a person for money, or the doctor for treatment, or anything else, but it is ultimately all from the Lord.

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. NKJV

The LORD, in His wisdom, and according to His own sovereign plan, answers every one of our prayers. The answers vary according to His will, sometimes yes, no, or wait.

Peter kept knocking, and finally they opened the door. *Why are people shocked when the LORD does God-sized miracles?*

I read an article that gave some reasons why **we are surprised when the LORD answers** prayers. Here are a few.

1. We haven't studied enough of what the Bible has to say about answered prayer.

There are many scriptures where the LORD answered the prayers of Abraham, Moses, Hannah, Paul, and many others.

2. We fail to understand how the LORD invites us to boldly come before His throne.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. NKJV

The LORD gave Himself to us that we might have a genuine relationship with Him!

3. We have prayed for something for a long time, but the LORD has not answered yet.

The longer we wait for an answer, the harder it seems to trust that He hears us. We know He is faithful, so don't give up hope.

4. Knowing we are not perfect, we start to believe the LORD will not answer.

Titus 3:5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, NKJV

5. Sometimes we don't hear about answered prayers from other people we have prayed for.

If we don't hear about answered prayers, it can sometimes surprise us that God answered our prayers for them.

When we forget these truths, God's answers to our prayers might catch us off guard.

II. Go and tell.

Read ***Acts 12:17-19***

Peter motioned to the people at Mary's house to be quiet. Maybe the people were so full of joy, and Peter was worried that Herod's people would hear the commotion.

Or it could be that Peter wanted to share, and so he was asking them to listen.

Peter said, “***Go, tell these things to James and the brethren***”.

The brethren Peter referred to here are the remaining Apostles and other believers in Jerusalem who knew about Peter’s arrest.

James in *Acts 12:17* does not refer to James the son of Zebedee, who was martyred, but rather it refers to the **brother** of Jesus, who was one of the leaders of the early church.

Ironically, Jesus’ half-siblings did not believe in Him until after His crucifixion and resurrection.

John 7:2 Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand.

John 7:3 His brothers therefore said to Him, "Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing.

John 7:4 For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world."

John 7:5 For even His brothers did not believe in Him. NKJV

The fact that James was a leader in the Church is another proof that we serve a God of “**nother**” chances; even someone who denied the Lord can later be used in the ministry.

Why did Peter depart for another place? Maybe to wait until things died down, or maybe to go and preach somewhere else.

Re-read *Acts 12:18-19*

When daylight arrived, there was quite a disturbance because the guards realized their prisoner was gone.

This would have been a disgrace for Herod, and he ordered a major investigation to take place.

Notice Herod “*examined the guards*”, which refers to a judicial investigation with cross-examination, because there was no way a prisoner could escape without the help of an inside man.

After the investigation, Herod was left with two choices: believe that the LORD intervened or believe the guards were lying.

Notice... Herod *commanded that they should be put to death.*

Even if Herod believed that the LORD had done this miracle, either because of **pride** or to save face with the religious leaders, he did not admit that the LORD showed up to help Peter.

After the execution of the soldiers, Herod left Jerusalem.

III. Give God the glory.

Read *Acts 12:20-25*

Herod was so angry with the cities of Tyre and Sidon that he was planning a war against them, which was a dangerous idea considering that Rome may not have liked his plans.

Tyre and Sidon did not like the idea of a conflict with Herod, so they sent some ambassadors to Herod to make **peace** with him.

Some commentators believe the ambassadors from Tyre and Sidon bribed Blastus, Herod's aide, to speak on their behalf.

Notice, *on a set day, Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them.*

The historian Josephus wrote that this was the second day of the special sports in Caesarea, a day that was set aside by Herod to honor Claudius Caesar.

Herod was dressed in his royal clothing and sat down on the judgment seat at the games. Some believe his address to the people was about the peace treaty with Tyre and Sidon.

At this point in history, Roman Law commanded the people to view the Caesars as gods.

Even though Herod was not a Caesar, notice “*the people kept shouting, 'The voice of a god and not of a man!'*”

When Herod failed to stop the people from praising him and calling him a god, the LORD caused him to drop dead instantly.

We are given a clear reason for Herod's death in *verse 23: he did not give glory to God.*

Herod may have been dressed in the best clothing and looked like a celebrity, but his inner man was corrupt and disgusting, so the LORD allowed worms to eat him from the inside out.

In the book of *Antiquities of the Jews*, it is written, “*a severe pain also arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner.*”

*“When he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he **departed** this life.” (Antiquities, XIX.8.2)*

In my opinion, to take personal credit for something God has done is not only the sin of pride; it is a form of blasphemy.

In ***Daniel 4***, Nebuchadnezzar, the king, was speaking of his personal greatness and of the kingdom he claimed to have built.

Just then, the Lord spoke to the king, and instantly, Nebuchadnezzar became insane and was driven out of the palace to live as a **beast** eating grass, for seven years.

God is patient with mankind, and He is always true to His Word.

We have the promise of Eternal life, escaping God’s wrath, the promise of provision, His presence, and forgiveness, and more.

Herod, like Nebuchadnezzar, believed he was self-made and glorified himself rather than giving glory to the Lord.

We should boast about the LORD’s great attributes, brag about what He has done for us, what He is still doing, and what He has promised to do. But don’t steal the LORD’s glory.

The LORD alone is worthy of praise!

After the LORD judged Herod, notice what happened with the Church: “***But the word of God grew and multiplied***”.

The persecutor of the Church was dead, and the Church grew through the trials, because God has a plan for His Church, and no man can thwart those plans.

History has many stories of people who try to get in the way of the LORD's plans, yet God overcomes every time.

Psalm 37:12 The wicked plots against the just, and gnashes at him with his teeth.

Psalm 37:13 The Lord laughs at him, for He sees that his day is coming. NKJV

After the death of Herod, ***Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry.***

Later, Paul said in ***2 Timothy 4:5, But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. NKJV***

Remember from last week, Paul and Barnabas went to deliver the special offering given by the Gentile Christians in Antioch to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

John Mark was with Paul and Barnabas on their journey. We will learn more about the dynamics of these men later.

To fulfill our ministry means to complete the call the LORD has placed in your life to the best of your ability.

Ministry is not always easy, but like Timothy, every believer will face obstacles, so we must persevere.

IV. Practical Application.

The main points of this morning's message are:

We need to be aware of the opportunities the LORD places in our lives. The Lord answers prayer in His time, and nobody can thwart the will of God. So, give Him the **Glory** due His name.

First, let's address opportunities. *How many of us have stories of would've, could've, and should've with past opportunities?*

Germany Kent said, "*When the spirit gives you a command, act on it **because that one thing** could lead you to an important opportunity that you would otherwise have missed.*"

We must always be available and remain sensitive to the **leading** of the Holy Spirit so we can fulfill His will and purpose in life.

Next, let's talk about how the LORD answers every prayer with a yes, no, or wait.

As a reminder, some reasons why we are surprised when the LORD answers our prayers.

1. We haven't studied enough of what the Bible has to say about answered prayer.

There are many scriptures where the LORD answered the prayers of many people.

2. We fail to understand that the LORD invites us to boldly come before His throne.

The LORD gave Himself to us that we might have a genuine relationship with Him!

3. We have prayed for something for a long time, but the LORD has not answered yet.

The longer we wait for an answer, the harder it seems to trust that He hears us. We know He is faithful, so don't give up hope.

4. Knowing we are not perfect, we start to believe the LORD will not answer.

5. Sometimes we don't hear about answered prayers from other people we have prayed for.

If we don't hear about answered prayers, they can sometimes surprise us that God answered. When we **forget** these truths, God's answers to our prayers might catch us off guard.

Next, we know no one can thwart God's plans. After Job went through so many trials, he said...

Job 42:2 "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. NKJV

Finally, let's remember to give God all the glory due His name. We give modern medicine, other people, or even a supposed coincidence **credit** when prayers are answered.

Psalms 115:1 Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, because of Your truth. NKJV

I believe it is a terrible form of **blasphemy** to give credit to anyone or anything before praising the LORD.

We defame Jesus with our behavior, our lifestyles, unthankfulness, complaining, or even failing to recognize how good the LORD has been to us.

Listen to the words of Paul to the hypocritical Judaizers.

Romans 2:24 For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written. NKJV

When we live empowered by Jesus, unbelievers will see Him in us and want what we have. The LORD is all-powerful, all-knowing, and no one can thwart His plans.

The LORD is also loving and kind, forgiving sinners.

Just as Peter was knocking on the door, wanting in, Jesus is knocking on your heart, wanting a **relationship** with you.

Will you come on and open the door to receive Jesus?

Henry Blackaby in ***Experiencing God*** said, “*Knowing God does not come through a program, a study, or a method.*

Knowing God comes through a relationship with a Person. This is an intimate love relationship with God.”

Through this relationship, God reveals Himself, His purposes, and His ways; and He invites you to join Him where He is already at work.”

Jesus wanted a relationship with you so much, He was willing to die on a criminal’s Cross to save your soul and have a friendship with you. *Will you receive Christ and be saved today?*