

Acts 12 – The Hidden Hand at Work

The *French Resistance* movement was an underground movement of civilians from ordinary walks of life who fought against the Nazi German occupation of France during World War II. They were publishers of underground newspapers, providers of first-hand intelligence information, and maintainers of escape networks that helped Allied soldiers and airmen trapped behind enemy lines. They executed acts of sabotage on the electrical power grid, transportation facilities, and telecommunications networks. They played a vital part in aiding the Allies to success in Western Europe - especially leading up to D-Day in June 1944.

Things aren't always as they seem. On the surface there was a war happening but underground people were working to bring about the downfall of one side.

The Gospel has begun to move out from Jerusalem. In chapter 12 the Gospel comes under siege. It seems as though the Gospel will be brought to a grinding halt but we'll see that...

Jesus is King so no force can stop the spread of His gospel

1. Is Herod ruling?

Read: 1-5

Herod is attacking the new young church. He is doing this by arresting the Apostles. Not only that, he is killing them. He sees this is good for leadership rating so he keeps going.

He's not that he necessarily hates Christians he is a politician. It's just that killing Christians is good for the opinion polls. He is increased his population.

So it is with so many. It is not that those who oppose Christianity necessarily hate Christians but in is the thing to do. It's the popular thing to do.

No doubt Herod knew Peter has escaped prison before. He wanted to make sure that it did not happen this time, so he assigned four squads of four soldiers each to guard him around the clock. Two soldiers were chained by the wrist to each of Peter's two arms. Two more stood guard at the door of Peter's cell. Then there were two more guards, plus an iron gate that led into the city

The Kingdom's of this world try to halt the work of God. The people of this world try to hinder the word of God. Individuals try to deny the work of God.

The early church experienced the favour of all the people. This didn't last long. So whenever there is the advance of the Gospel there is opposition.

2. Living in 2 Kingdoms

Read: 5

This is the reality of life. There are always 2 kingdoms operating.

The one you see and the one you don't. The one that is seen, temporary and local.

One that is unseen, permanent and universal.

Peter is under arrest because of one. The believers are praying recognising the one true eternal and universal King Jesus. Pray is their first resort and says Herod is not in control God is.

Read: 12-17

Here we see their prayer is answered. Do you see the comedy in this.

What is believers response? V.15, v.16 They are astonished.

Isn't this a mirror of us? Don't we say sure we are earnest in prayer but yet when God answers prayers we are taken by surprise.

Do we really expect that when we pray that God is listening?

Even in our most earnest prayers we are going through the motions without expecting God is listening and will act. Or we don't really expect to do what we ask for.

We hedge our bets. I bet to not pray for this or for that much otherwise I'll look stupid or I'll just embarrass myself if it doesn't happen.

Dare I pray that for the advance of the Gospel on the coast? Dare I pray for 50000 coming to Christ?

Dare I pray for 200 new churches starting?

John Piper says: - We have taken a *wartime walkie talkie* and turned it into a peacetime intercom to call for pleasures and luxuries. Prayer is a walkie talkie for wartime not an intercom for conveniences.

Following Jesus will lead you into opposition. God has given us pray to call for reinforcements.

Prayer is to be the activity of the church. This is what a church is about.

Not about activities for all ages. Or programmes on everyday at the church building.

Or entertaining preaching. Or entertaining worship.

But praying expectedly for the Gospel to be at work in people's lives.

But Put v.2 alongside v.11 Why is one rescued and one not?

It's not something like that stupid saying:- "Oh probably the church didn't pray hard enough for James as they did for Peter". If that was the case Luke would have to make that plain.

It's the mystery of the way God works. We see this over and over again. Two believers in Jesus one person is healed of cancer and another dies of cancer. Same thing you see through the history of God's people.

Why are some of the most godly people, who go deep in their love for Christ and longing to serve him, who are willing to use their gifts and expend themselves for other people, given sicknesses when they want passionately to serve? And on the other side, why do some who have every opportunity, every means of support, all manner of blessings, never get around to giving away what they have been given?

Some are spared and delivered. Some of us will be called to suffer for Christ. In fact Paul tells Timothy says all who live a godly life will suffer.

Remember Acts 5:41 The Apostles were "rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."

Why cancer? Why infertility? Why joblessness? What we get back is "**who**" as an answer to the "why" questions. The Lord Jesus is with us and he will make sense of it all someday. The *tapestry* seen from the back is chaotic, but when we see it from the front, it will be beautiful.

Experiencing suffering means Christ's strength can be made known.

I heard of a man who had been sharing Jesus with his neighbours with no impact. He had hard times and started sharing with his neighbours how Jesus was helping him through the hard times. All of a sudden his neighbours began to listen.

As we experience weakness, as we are brought low, Christ's power is more evident in us.

Unless something comes into your life to break you and self-righteousness and pride your weakness will not be seen and so Christ's strength.

God had to give me a sickness to get me where he wanted me. On my knees. I now get to the end of my human resources quickly and so pray sooner than I have done before. God will bring you down to use you.

Alexander the Great had a general whose daughter was getting married. He valued the general and so offered to pay for the wedding. When the general gave the treasurer the bill, it was enormous. The treasurer came to Alexander and told him the amount. To his surprise Alexander smiled and said, "Pay it! Don't you see – by asking me for such an enormous sum he does me great honor. He shows that he thinks I am both rich and generous.

Are we insulting God by our small ambitions and low expectations in our prayers for those who need to hear about Jesus today?

You are coming to a King,

Large petitions with you bring

For His grace and power are such,

None can ever ask too much

3. Or is Jesus ruling?

Read: 7

Luke wants us to make no mistakes. God intervenes here. Peter is asleep so he does not do anything.

He continues to be half asleep when he gets up. It is God who is doing the work. He is in control.

Look at the **COMMANDS**. Look at **WHAT HAPPENS**.

When Peter comes out of his stupor he sums up what happened in v. 11

We also see Jesus ruling in what happens to Herod in the end.

Read: 21-22

Unlike Peter who denied he is not god and so it not to worshipped as god. Herod accepts the worship as if he's god.

Peter was '*struck*' by God to be rescued Herod is *struck* by God for judgment.

As chapter begins with **contrast** of v.5 so it ends with the **contrast vv.23-24**

God always get done what he plans. Some may oppose him but they will not win. Even the apparent defeat makes his ultimate victory more glorious.

The DEATH of JESUS is the ultimate display of this. It's the irony of the Cross.

What men intended for harm God intended for good and his ultimate glory.

John Paton was born in Scotland in 1824. He labored as a missionary in the slums of Glasgow. But he wanted to take the gospel to the fierce cannibals of the New Vanuatu. John Williams and James Harris made the first attempt to take the gospel there in 1839. They were clubbed to death and eaten within a few minutes of their landing. Paton and his new wife landed there in November, 1858. On February 12, 1859, she gave birth to a son, but on March 3rd, she died from complications after childbirth. On March 20th, the baby died. Of course Paton struggled with his grief and loneliness.

Paton lived into his seventies, devoting himself to the gospel among these cannibals, experiencing many divine deliverances. At the end of his life he exclaimed, "Oh that I had my life to begin again! I would commit it to Jesus in seeking the conversion of the remaining Cannibals on the Vanuatu"

Whatever the cost, will you commit yourselves to the cause of the unstoppable gospel of Jesus Christ!