

Monday - Week Thirty-five

Acts Twelve: Peter's Escape from Prison

Summary: Peter was facing certain death at the hands of Herod. God miraculously rescued Peter so that he could keep preaching the Gospel.

Background and Comments

- Herod saw that the Jewish people had reacted positively when he killed James so he decided to kill Peter too. To the church it must have seemed like Herod was unstoppable. A short time later Herod was dead.
- When Peter came to the door a woman named Rhoda was so excited that she left Peter standing at the door. What a humorous situation! There Peter was at the door knocking while everyone on the inside was debating whether it could really be him!
- What did those in the house mean when they said it was Peter's angel? Jewish tradition said that a person's "guardian angel" ended up looking like the person being guarded.

Lessons for Today

- Verse five says that Herod had Peter in prison and that the church was praying for his release. In reality there was a battle going on: powerful Herod vs. the "weak" praying church. Obviously the church won. Sometimes we forget just how powerful prayer is. The early church was quick to pray about everything!
- Was Peter worried about his upcoming trial and probable execution? It seems like Peter's trust was rock solid. When the angel came to rescue Peter he had to strike Peter on the side to wake him up! Peter was sleeping like a baby in his father's arms! In a sense he was sleeping in his Father's arms ... as you are. No matter what your situation you can be sure that God is at work to bless you. Rest well!
- Herod had defied God many times. This last time he actually accepted people's shouts that he was a god. The old saying rang true once again: "You can't mock God". Who are people in the world today that try to mock God?

Read: Psalm 150; Revelation 6

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for today's possibilities, dreams, and opportunities to serve You. Guide me to make the most of today. I want to do Your will today. I ask this in the name of Jesus; Amen.

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Acts Thirteen: Paul and Barnabas Embark

Summary: Paul and Barnabas embarked on their first mission journey. They were following the Lord's command to go into all the world.

Background and Comments

- The church in Antioch impresses us at every turn. In the first verses we read that the Holy Spirit somehow told them to send Paul and Barnabas on a missionary journey. This church didn't hesitate to send two talented pastors onto the mission field. This unselfish act became a huge blessing in many lives.
- In verse three we read about Paul and Barnabas' "installation service". We do much the same thing when we install a new pastor (pray and lay hands on him) with one notable exception. They fasted; we have a potluck meal!
- Verse 48 says *and all who were appointed for eternal life believed*. This verse refers to the doctrine of election. God chose the believers even before the world began. What comfort this gives us. God chose you from all eternity.

Lessons for Today

- Paul reacted strongly to Elymas the sorcerer by calling down God's judgment. Imagine what an impact this made on the king! What sorts of things can have an impact on unbelievers today?
- Verse 13 simply says that John left Paul and Barnabas. Various suggestions for John's departure have been made: Paul's sickness (Galatians 4:13), a change in leadership from Barnabas to Paul or simple homesickness. This departure must have been hard on Paul and Barnabas. Later Paul wanted Mark with him in his final imprisonment. We need to remember that godly people sometimes abandon us because of a weakness in their faith. We need to be patient with them.
- When the Jews rejected Paul he simply went to the Gentiles. When people reject us and our message of God's grace we need to be patient with them ... but at the same time there comes a point when we move on to other people and their need to hear the Word of God.

Read: Psalm 1; Revelation 7.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, make me a missionary to those around me. Give me courage, patience, and wisdom as I share Your love with other people. I pray in Jesus' name; Amen.

Wednesday - Week Thirty-five

Catechism Review

Read Questions 279-284

1. What does Paul mean in Romans 6:1-6 when he writes that we were baptized into Christ's death and that we "died to sin". A related question: how does thinking about our baptism cause us to find victory in temptation? Be as specific as possible.

2. How can you daily kill your sinful nature? [Again, be specific. What could you do when you wake up in the morning?]

3. Most self-help programs talk about first getting a positive self-image and then talk about self-discipline, hard work, and building relationships are keys to building that self-image. Are they right or wrong? Explain.

Read: Psalm 2; Revelation 8.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for bringing me into Your kingdom through baptism. Guide me to use my baptism every day by remembering that I am Your child. Give me the strength to live my faith at all times. I ask this in Jesus' name; Amen.

Thursday - Week Thirty-five

Acts Fourteen: The End of the First Mission Journey

Summary: God had said that Paul would suffer for Jesus' name; in this chapter we see that prophesy fulfilled.

Background and Comments

- When Paul found out about a plot to stone him he went to another city. God calls us to be willing to suffer for His name ... but that doesn't mean that we won't be careful to avoid suffering if we can.
- Can't you imagine Paul and Barnabas trying to convince the crowd that they weren't gods? This humorous situation quickly turned deadly when the crowd stoned him. [Note: this has to be the most fickle crowd in the history of the world. They quickly went from worshiping Paul and Barnabas to stoning them!] Paul got up from the stoning and went back!
- When Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra, Iconium and Derbe they reported: *We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.* Paul and Barnabas knew just how true that sentence was.

Lessons for Today

- In verse one we read that Paul spoke very effectively. Certainly the Holy Spirit is the one who puts faith in people's heart; yet it's also important for us to speak to people as well as we possibly can. Paul took great care in his preaching. Have you taken great care in your ability to share your faith accurately, clearly and powerfully?
- Carefully reread verses 2 and 3. The Jews fought against Paul so (v 3) Paul spent considerable time speaking there. Sometimes when we encounter opposition we want to quickly move on. The Bible teaches us that whenever we preach God's Word the devil will try to stop the Gospel's progress. Pray that God will help you to be persistent and bold as you share the Word with others.
- When Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch they reported everything that had happened. This was good for Paul and Barnabas because it allowed them to share the record of God's blessings with others. It was also good for the Antioch congregation to hear stories from the mission field. Do you take this sort of time with your fellow Christians?

Read: Psalm 3; Revelation 9.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, bless the work of our missionaries. Maintain my interest in their work. Help me to stay informed about what and how they are doing. Make me faithful in praying for them and their families. Amen.

Friday - Week Thirty-five

John - Lesson Six: Jesus Clears the Temple (2:12-25)

1. Verse 12 tells us about Jesus' brothers. This word for "brother" is always used for a blood brother in the New Testament. Why does the Catholic church teach that "brother here means cousin?
2. Since many Jews came from different countries they needed to buy animals for sacrificing. They also needed to exchange their foreign currency for Jewish currency. Why did Jesus get so upset about something that had to be done?
3. How could one man with a whip (made of pieces of rope tied together) drive out so many animals and get away with scattering the money?
4. The NIV translation of verse 16 is excellent: "How dare you turn my Father's house into a market?" What amazing claim was Jesus making?
5. When Jesus cleansed the temple the disciples applied this passage to Jesus' actions: "Zeal for your house will consume me." Luther wrote, "It is not hatred that moves Him to the anger He here shows, but friendly love toward God." In what ways does your love for God cause you to get angry?
6. Jesus remained in Jerusalem during the Feast. After he had done many miracles, people believed in His name. Their faith was shallow - and probably fizzled out after a time. Someone once called shallow faith "faith that exists only as long as its object fits our expectation." Put this in your own words.
7. Read verse 25. How are we much different than Jesus?

Read: Psalm 4; Revelation 10

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, give me zeal for the church that I go to ... not just the building but the people in it. In Jesus' name; Amen.