

In Chains , in Prison and at Rest

Craig Mobey and Mariet Prins

Scripture Reading: Acts 12:1-11 (NIV)

¹ It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them.

² He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.

³ When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

⁴ After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

⁵ So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

⁶ The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance.

⁷ Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

⁸ Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him.

⁹ Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision.

¹⁰ They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

¹¹ Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen."

Preface

This is a sermon heavily based on a sermon sent to me by Mariet Prins on 2nd February 2020. As it is here, I have translated and worked with it a bit more. For those who did not know Mariet, she was a sister in Christ, friend and faithful servant of the Most High. He called her home on Sunday afternoon 14th February 2021.

Introduction

As I close my eyes, I can see everyone gathered in a dark room. They are afraid.

“Have you heard ... James was put to death yesterday and Peter is in jail. Many of us have been taken prisoner and tortured. It’s terrible! Let’s get together for a prayer meeting tonight at Maria’s house.”

Isn’t this what we usually do? When things are not going well; when there is danger; when it feels as if darkness is closing in over us, then we arrange a prayer meeting.

And sometimes, our prayers are answered just as we prayed, and other times, not.

Body

I often wonder:

- Why did this child get cancer and not that one?
- Why does one family get hit by crime a few times, and another never?
- Why does one’s budget balance and another’s not?
- Why does one live until 90 and another dies way too soon?

To wonder about these things, especially when all is not well on your end, might just cause you to wonder...

- If I am a bigger sinner than others.
- If God loves that person more than me.
- If God is unfair.

You even begin to ask God if He has abandoned you.

As things stand James has been beheaded, Peter is in jail and tomorrow, Peter will be murdered.

But...if you read further on, Peter is saved. But it is the same people in the same prayer meeting that prayed for James, Peter and other congregants. There are some similarities between James and Peter:

- Both are from Galilee.
- Both were fishermen before Jesus called them.
- Both were in the inner circle of the apostles – Peter, James and John.
- Both were church leadership figures.
- Both were targeted by Herod.

Both were a faithful follower of Jesus, yet the Lord chose to walk a different route with each.

- James was murdered by Herod while Peter was delivered from Herod's grasp.
- James was arrested and without a trial of a sort, beheaded.
- Peter was also captured, with the intention of putting him to death after Passover.
- The Lord allows the death of one and the other to be saved.

Enter verse 6 following on from this morning's Scripture reading, "The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance."

The word "between." And suddenly, the penny drops!

It is in those "between" moments where you fear, feel insecure, feel anxious and start to wonder, where is God?

- Maybe you are in a "between moment," wondering if your employer will survive COVID's blow to small businesses.
- Maybe you are in a "between moment," wondering if your marriage is going to make it or not.
- Maybe you are in a "between moment," waiting for test results on a medical condition.

And it is in these “between moments” when it feels like you are in chains between two soldiers.

Here is Peter, fast asleep between two soldiers. Would you or I be able to do this?

This was Peter’s 3rd arrest!

- In Acts 4, he was brought before the Sanhedrin and warned to preach about Jesus anymore. Of course, he did not listen.
- In Acts 5, he is arrested for the second time.
- And here is now, in jail, chained up.

Herod wanted to make sure that Peter would not get again get away with matters. There are 16 carefully selected soldiers (in total) and if the prisoner escaped, the guards would be put to death.

Let’s recap the order of events:

1. Peter is asleep in chains between 2 soldiers.
2. Another 2 soldiers are outside the prison cell.
3. An angel appears to Peter and touches his side.
4. On the angel’s instruction, Peter gets up.
5. His restraints fall off.
6. He puts on his clothes and shoes.
7. The angel told him to put his cloak on and follow him.
8. Past the first and second guards.
9. The iron gate to the city opens.

So often, we are held captive in the “between moments.” Yet here, we clearly read that the angel tells Peter to get up, and the chains fell off.

16 soldiers and 1 angel:

10. The Peter understood, without doubt, what was happening.

Conclusion

- God is our outcome. He's got this.
- Never stop praising God, in all circumstances. This is His will.
- The work of God will not be stopped, even if it feels to you as if you are in chains and are afraid.
- The work of God will not be stopped, even the situation appears to us – in our humanity – impossible.
- Prayer matters and prayer helps.
- You can sleep peacefully, even if it feels to you as if you are in chains and are afraid.
Allow the Lord to minister to you in any “between moments.”

Jesus came to bring light into darkness and through the Holy Spirit, convince you that you do not have to be afraid during the “between moments.” Get up in His strength, and the chains will fall off.

Amen.

If you can, listen to this song, Chain Breaker by Zach Williams:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGYjKR69M6U>