

Detained but not Defeated

Acts 12: 1-16

Our text deals with an intense time for the early church. God was clearly at work, and the church was growing. Thousands had been saved by the grace of God and the church's influence was spreading. Such growth created much concern for the religious establishment in Jerusalem, and their disdain for the church resulted in intense persecution. It is believed these events happened about eight years following the stoning of Stephen. Even though Saul had been converted, the persecution had not decreased, and appeared to be growing.

While the early church endured much opposition, she prospered through the provision of our Lord. We too face much opposition in our modern culture, but that doesn't mean we can't be effective in ministry while growing in our faith. The church has endured for two thousand years, and she will remain until the Lord calls for her. We will face adversity as we serve the Lord, but we do not have to succumb to defeat.

As we continue our *Conquerors* series, I want to examine the [aspects](#) of Peter's encounter as we consider the thought: [Detained but not Defeated](#).

I. The Adversity he Faced (1-4) – These verses reveal the great adversity Peter, and others within the church faced. Consider:

A. The Opposition (1) – [Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church](#). Bear in mind, this is several years following Pentecost and the horrific stoning of Stephen, and yet the persecution continues. Herod is purposely trying to intimidate those in places of leadership within the church. He has sanctioned their persecution. He sought to oppress the church and bring harm to those who adhered to Christian doctrine.

- We are thousands of years removed, and yet this intense opposition continues. Records prove that Christians are the most persecuted religious group in the world today. While we aren't facing it on levels experienced in other countries, opposition to believers is on the rise in America.

B. The Desperation (2) – [And he killed James the brother of John with the sword](#). Herod committed a heinous act in killing James. This too was an attempt to disrupt the church by removing one of her most effective leaders, while striking fear and dismay in the hearts of all who believed. No doubt this created an atmosphere of great concern and desperation within the church.

- We remain in desperate times regarding global persecution. Many are forced to choose between their faith and their lives. The numbers increase annually as Satan and those who hate the church do all they can to hinder the Gospel and defeat the church. We are living in desperate times that call for faith and commitment to the Lord.

C. The Incarceration (3-4) – *And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)* ^[4] *And when he had apprehended him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.* Knowing the Jewish leadership despised those who adhered to the Gospel, and in an effort to gain their favor, Herod continued his campaign of devastation against the church. He arrested Peter and placed him in the inner prison, under the watchful care of sixteen soldiers. This was a strategic move, calculated to bring the most praise from the Jews while striking intense fear in the hearts of those within the church. Peter was apprehended during Passover, the holiest of celebrations for the Jews. At this time, tens of thousands of Jews would have made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Likely, Herod intended to execute Peter following Passover, seeking to maximize the exposure among the Jewish population.

II. The Advantage he Enjoyed (5-11) – While Herod thought he had devised a fool-proof plan, Peter enjoyed a decided advantage that Herod knew nothing of. We find Peter enjoyed:

A. The Prayers of the Church (5) – *Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.* While Peter was kept in the inner prison, the church prayed for him without ceasing. They immediately began to intercede for Peter, calling out to God on his behalf. As we will discover, their prayers were not offered in vain.

- The world and those who oppose the church seek every advantage to hinder the spread of the Gospel, but they cannot prevent the church from praying. Like the early church, we must be a people of prayer, continually interceding for those within the church. The needs are varied, spread throughout the world, but we can bring those needs before the Lord in prayer!

B. The Presence of the Lord (6-7) – *And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.* ^[7] *And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon *him*, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from *his* hands.* Herod thought his devious scheme was going according to plan, but God had a different plan. On the night before Peter was to be brought before the people, God showed up at the prison. He sent

His angel to deliver Peter from the prison. While he slept, chained to a soldier on either side, the angel of the Lord appeared unto Him, freeing Him from the chains that bound him.

- Satan and those who oppose us may feel as if they have gained the upper hand, but we are never separated from the Lord. He is there with us wherever we go and in whatever situation we face. We need not fear facing this world and the opposition it brings alone.
- I couldn't help but think of the wonderful day the Holy Spirit came to me, as I was bound in the chains of sin, condemned and facing a death sentence. The grace of our Lord brought salvation to me and I was freed from the bonds of sin and death!

C. The Power of the Lord (8-10) – The angel of the Lord instructed Peter to get dressed and follow him. Although Peter believed it all was a dream, he obediently followed the angel. He was led past the first and second ward of the prison, and brought to the iron gate leading into the city. The door opened unto them and Peter was freed from his prison.

- There are no bonds that our Lord doesn't have the power to break and provide liberty. He broke the bonds of sin, delivering us from condemnation. He has the power to meet any need we could possibly face. He can break the bonds of defeat and despair. He has the ability to restore our joy and provide the courage we need to continue our walk with Him!

D. The Perspective of Faith (11) – *And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.* Can you imagine the joy Peter felt at this moment? If there had been any doubt or fear, it is now replaced with abundant faith. Peter realized the Lord had delivered him from the hand of Herod and the impending death he faced.

- Every believer has a decided advantage over the world and all the trouble it brings. We have the benefit of faith. Those who are in Christ are secure within His mighty hand. The world can bring nothing against us that our Lord does not allow. He is more than able to keep us through whatever adversity or trial we face. He loved us enough to die for our sin on Calvary. He isn't about to abandon us in the journey of life!

III. The Apprehension he Encountered (12-16) – As we consider these closing verses, bear in mind that the church is gathered, offering continual prayer for Peter's safety and release. This should serve as a challenge regarding our prayer life. Consider:

A. Their Purpose (12) – *And when he had considered **the thing**, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.* Following his miraculous release, Peter makes his way to the home of Mary, John Mark's mother. Many from the church are gathered there praying for his release. These are faithfully interceding for Peter in the middle of the night. They were committed to prayer, day and night.

- This serves as a challenge for the church to be persistent in prayer. We are often too casual and brief in our prayers. There are times and needs that require continual, fervent prayer! We must be committed to praying for those who have yet to receive salvation. We must continue to pray for the church and those who serve the Lord. There are those who are weak, burdened, sick, and hurting who need our prayers. We must be a people of prayer!

B. Their Pessimism (13-15) – As the people were gathered, praying all night, Peter arrived at the home of Mary. A young girl named Rhoda came to the door as Peter stood there knocking. She recognized his voice and was so overcome with joy that she forgot to open the door. She immediately told the others that Peter was at the door. Bear in mind, they were there praying for the release of Peter, but they doubted what Rhoda had shared. Some accused her of being crazy, and at her persistence, they assumed it had to be Peter's angel. Unfortunately, this shows the faith they had in prayer. Although they were dedicated to prayer, they lacked faith to believe.

- We may be critical, but we all have been guilty of the same. I know I have prayed many times, and yet wondered whether God would genuinely answer my prayer. I have bowed in prayer before, and picked up the burden as I rose from prayer, never leaving it at the feet of Jesus. We must not only be a people of prayer, but a people of faith who believe God will hear and answer!

C. Their Persuasion (16) – *But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened **the door**, and saw him, they were astonished.* As Peter continued to knock at the door, someone eventually opened the door, and all were surprised to see Peter. At this moment their doubt was turned into belief as they encountered Peter in their presence. They were all astonished to see him.

- Peter's persistence brought great faith to the people. We must be willing to continue for the Lord, even if others lack faith or are unwilling. The Lord is able to provide for every need we face, and we must remain persistent in faith. I hope we will become so accustomed to prayer and seeing God move in our midst that we develop great faith. That isn't to say we lose our awe and wonder when God moves, but that we pray with an attitude of faith that expects God to hear and answer our prayers!

Conclusion: I think you will agree that Peter faced a dire situation. Many were praying for his release, but really weren't expecting God to answer their prayers. We must pray in faith, believing that God is able, while expecting Him to do the impossible. There is nothing we encounter in life that He cannot bring us through.

Are you burdened with cares and struggles today? Have you prayed for the Lord to provide deliverance for your situation? As you prayed, did you believe He would answer your prayer? We can overcome in Christ, but we must have faith. If your heart is filled with doubt and fear, come before the Lord and confess your lack of faith while seeking Him to provide the faith you need. If you are unsaved, Jesus is calling you to respond to His offer for salvation. Come to Him by faith, with a heart of repentance for sin, and receive salvation!