

Earnest Prayer.

Acts 12:1-10.

Sunday morning, August 15, 2010.

I. Seasons in life.

- A. There are seasons in life that are relatively care-free. Those are seasons when we tend to coast along spiritually speaking with relatively little effort on our part. Very little, if anything, of lasting value is added to our lives in such times. They are times that our fleshly nature craves after, but the Spirit aims for higher things. For that reason, we, as the Lord's people, should not be surprised that the Lord should bring us different seasons as well, and sometimes seemingly only different seasons. 2 Corinthians 4:7-11.
- B. There are other seasons that are very demanding on our part. But with good effort and good counsel, putting our best foot forward, we are able to handle the increased demands of those times.
Those are times in which we grow as a person; we become more skillful in our natural abilities; we become more disciplined; more thoughtful, more careful, more deliberate, and more serious.
Those are good things, used of God to form us into useful vessels in His kingdom.
- C. Then there are seasons when the waters are over our heads humanly speaking. These are times when only the Lord can make a difference; times in which certain doom and demise threaten unless the Lord intervenes.
These are times sent to us by the Lord as well. They are times in which we grow not only as a person, in our natural abilities, but times in which we grow in our walk with the Lord. They are times in which we grow as spiritual and heavenly people. They are times in which we draw near to Him; times in which He keeps us on a short leash. Times in which we learn to give ourselves to earnest prayer.

Application:

Have you known such times? Are you going through them now? Take heart; the Lord has brought you into these circumstances; He will teach, form, and refine you in them. And He will safely guide you through them, having accomplished His purposes. So with purpose of heart give yourself to these times and to the Lord's intended purposes.

II. Peter's imprisonment.

- A. The church(es) in Jerusalem stood under the apostolic leadership of James, Peter, and John, which were the inner circle of the Lord's disciples during His earthly ministry. The other apostles appear to have moved to other parts of the Roman empire for their ministries.
- B. Apostolic authority and guidance were critical in these early days as the NT Scriptures had not been written as yet. Without apostolic authority and guidance the demise of the church was all but certain.
- C. James was taken from them having been executed by Herod; Peter was next; only hours remained till his execution, leaving only John, who almost certainly would have to flee Jerusalem for his own safety. This would leave the church in Jerusalem without apostolic oversight.

- D. No wonder the church is feeling the pressure, and the brothers and sisters are giving themselves to “earnest prayer.” They camp out as it were, at the doorstep of the Lord’s throne of grace until He intervenes and shows them the way.
- E. Peter is being kept in prison, which was in all likelihood the fortress Antonia which was adjoined to the temple grounds. At night Peter was guarded by four squads of four soldiers; each squad serving three hours. Two soldiers were chained to Peter in his cell, the other two stood guard by the door. Herod likely wanted to make sure that an embarrassing escape which had happened to the Sanhedrin would not happen to him.

Application:

How vain are the world’s purposes and measures to counteract the Lord’s designs. The guards at the tomb of the Lord proved this, as did the Roman seal on the Lord’s grave. The Sanhedrin proved this when had they had imprisoned the apostles, and the Lord set them free. Acts 5:17,18 and 22,23.

And now Herod wants to see if he can do better in frustrating the designs of God? In the end, to save face, he can only execute his own men.

III. Prayer changes things.

It is often said that prayer either changes things or it changes us. I would make this comment: that prayer that is true prayer, (and earnest prayer usually is) does usually do both, or at least aims to do both.

Application:

This means that we need to be careful in our praying not to be too narrow in our focus. All too often it is things we want to see changed. But the Lord has higher ends in mind; He wants to form and reform and refine us. He uses pressures to accomplish this.

- A. Deliverance did not come until the final quarter of the night watch, between 3-6am, for Peter’s escape was not discovered until morning (vs. 18). It came when there was no natural hope or strength left. Deut. 32:36. Yet to the church’s credit they were even at this late hour still camped out at the throne of grace.
- B. What goes on at such a “camping out at the throne of grace”? How many times can you say: “Lord be with Peter; deliver Peter; give Peter Your peace”? And the Lord tells us not to use vain repetition; once will do it. Matt. 6:7,8.
- C. This tells us that the majority of time goes into examining ourselves and posturing ourselves before the throne of grace.
 - Do you hold the Lord to a different standard in dealing with you than you are willing to employ in dealing with others?
 - 1. You expect to be forgiven, but reserve the right to hold a grudge?
 - 2. You desire to be dealt with according to mercy but deal with others according to justice?
 - 3. You do not want the Lord to pass you by, but you reserve the right to bypass others in the hour of their need although it is in your power to help them, but it is inconvenient. You have the right to bypass them, for giving is voluntarily, but so it is with the Lord; He also has the right to bypass you. Isaiah 58:6-12.