

Unbelieving Prayer?

Acts 12:11-19

Sunday, August 22, 2010.

I. Peter comes to the house of John Mark.

- A. It is not until the angel leaves Peter, one street away from the prison, that Peter realizes that he is not dreaming, but that the Lord has delivered him.
- B. Peter saw his deliverance as a twofold deliverance:
 - 1. From the hand of Herod, who simply wanted to please his Jewish subjects to make them more manageable to rule over. Herod gladly sacrificed one Jew to keep the rest of them quiet. Acts 12:3.
 - 2. Peter saw his deliverance also as a deliverance from the expectation of the Jews. The seven day feast of Passover now being ended, the Jews expected Herod to bring Peter out of prison, before the people to face his accusers, and after that to be put to death.
- C. Walking the streets of Jerusalem during these early morning hours, between three and six am, the question must have occurred to Peter: "Now what do I do; now where do I go?"

Peter no doubt knew that two things needed to be done:

 - 1. Peter had to get himself off the streets before dawn, and before someone recognized him and he would be re-arrested.
 - 2. Peter had to let the church in Jerusalem know what had happened.

Peter must have been aware that the church was praying for him "without ceasing." He also must have been aware that at least one of these meetings took place at the house of John Mark, which was a place where believers commonly met for the house had a large upper room for the second story. Here also the Lord had met with His disciples to celebrate the last supper.
- D. Peter goes to the house of John Mark.

He gets as far as the gate in the wall that surrounded the house. The gate is locked. This shows us the danger under which believers met in Jerusalem. Great care is being taken for their security.

 - 1. the outer gate is locked; someone knocking on this outer gate would not be heard from inside the house.
 - 2. Someone was watching outside by the outer gate so as to be able to warn those inside the house of any suspicious activity, as well as to let any members of the church in and out, as people came and went in all likelihood to join the prayer meeting.
- E. The servant girl inside the courtyard who let people in and out hears Peter knocking and recognizes his voice. She must have belonged to the church herself, and no doubt had heard Peter speak many times.

Two things must have gone through her mind; both had to be done immediately.

 - 1. Peter had to be let in the gate.
 - 2. The church had to be told that he was out of prison.

She opts to do the latter first; but why?

 - 1. Was there any lingering doubt in her mind as to whether this really was Peter or not? Was this just too good to be true?

2. Did she want a second opinion in spite of being sure that it was Peter?
 - Remember that it was in the blackness of darkness, and darkness has a way of distorting our perceptions. You do not trust yourself in the dark.
 - The threat of danger that loomed all around; Rhoda couldn't be too careful.
 3. Perhaps under these circumstances her action are understandable to us.
- F. Perhaps harder to understand is the attitude of the gathered believers. They have two explanations for Rhoda's announcement; neither involve the possibility that Peter is indeed out of prison.
1. "You are beside yourself." She cracked under the pressures of the darkness and the looming dangers from outside the gate.
 2. "It is his angel." The meaning is Peter's guardian angel; the thinking being that Peter had been beheaded in prison and his guardian angel, now being out of a job, came to the gathered church to give them the grim news.
- G. Peter, being finally admitted into the gate, met briefly with the gathered church and related to them the things the Lord had done for him.
1. He tells them expressly to tell James, the Lord's brother and author of the book of James, and a later key leader of the church in Jerusalem. See Acts 15:13-21. James may well have led another prayer meeting elsewhere in the city.
 2. Peter has to get himself out of the city before his escape is discovered.

II. Why couldn't the believers believe that Peter had been set free?

Considering this question usually involves comparing these believers to ourselves.

- A. All too often we offer up our prayers "hoping that something will stick," but not really expecting anything. Given the earnestness and the hours the church was praying this may not be a realistic assessment. These guys were serious!
- B. We expect them to have been praying earnestly for Peter's release; that's what we would do, but it may not have been what their praying was all about.
 1. Based on the Lord's words regarding Peter in John 21:18,19 the church was expecting Peter's "untimely" death at the hands of his enemies. Based on what follows in vs. 21-23 they also expected John to live until the Lord's return.
 2. The church of that day had internalized, to a much greater degree than we have today, the truth expressed by the apostle Paul in Phil. 1:23 "...having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." This may account for Peter being sound asleep a few hours prior to his execution. The church may not have been willing to hold Peter back from that which was far better.
- C. The church's praying may have been "a standing with Peter until they knew that the Lord had safely brought him home; an accompanying Peter to the river's edge." No doubt it involved a praying for the church in a post-Peter era as well.

Applications:

1. Don't be too quick to judge as carnal and weak the actions of other believers. You haven't walked in their shoes.
2. Do you know what it is to pray expectantly; to draw near to the Lord?
3. Have you come to grips with the truth that to depart and be with Christ is far better?
4. Have you come to grips with remaining here; that it is not for your own sake, but for the sake of the Lord's needy people?