

When Times Get Tough, Tough People Depend on Prayer

Once again, it's late. The thickness of night has settled over the city as many rest. Given the hour, everyone in the room should also be sleeping in their own homes, preparing for the day ahead. But desperate moments often result in the loss of sleep.

Another day has passed, and tension has only increased. First it was James, and now it's Peter. King Herod's intentions are clear.

The stillness of the night stands in evident contrast to the flurry within the confines of a room of friends, asking for the impossible, needing the miraculous. The quiet of the sleepy town is breached by desperate requests that must be met by the power of God and can only be stewarded through heartfelt intercession.

Cries arise within the room. A man's life hangs in the balance. At times like these, only the Lord can step in and bring deliverance. Did fresh tears disturb and stain a dusty floor? Did knees and resolve harden against the whispers of impossibility?

We may not know all the details, but the most significant events have been recorded for us.

About that time King Herod extended his hands to harm certain ones from the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword. Seeing that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to arrest Peter also. This happened during the Days of Unleavened Bread. When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him before the people after the Passover (Acts 12:1-4).

We know that despite the way things appeared, the church displayed the resolve of the children of God to know that there's power in prayer.

So Peter was kept in prison. But the church prayed to God without ceasing for him.

The very night when Herod would have brought him out, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains. And the guards before the door were securing the prison. And suddenly an angel of the Lord approached him, and a light shone in the prison. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up, saying, "Rise up, quickly." And the chains fell off his hands.

Then the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put your sandals on." And he did so. Then he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." He went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had passed the first and the second guards, they came to the iron gate leading to the city, which opened to them by itself. And they went out and went forward one street. And immediately the angel left him.

When Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I certainly know that the Lord has sent His angel and delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

Realizing this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.

In the flurry of supplication and audible groans comes the response to a single desire of a unified cry.

As Peter knocked at the door of the porch, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter's

voice, from joy she did not open the door, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the door.

They said to her, "You are insane." But she insisted that it was really so. So they said, "It is his angel."

But Peter continued knocking. And when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. Motioning to them with his hand to be quiet, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brothers." Then he departed and went to another place (Acts 12:13-17).

Like many believers who came before and many who would follow afterward, this group exemplified the resolve of the church to pray for the miraculous. Thousands of years later much remains the same.

In the midst of persecution and death sentences, we pray. In the face of chaos and lack, we ask. In the fervor of turmoil, we still seek.

This is the church—not an elite few with the gift of prayer, but believers who turn their face to trust and follow their God. Generations have come and gone, but the cry of intercession continues because God is still needed.

With humble hearts, well-worn Scriptures and faith, we remember the stories of old and denounce the taunts of the enemy. Our God is the same yesterday, today and forever. He will come through.

But at times, the answers we desire don't seem to come as quickly as the word from Rhoda. The need is there. We even have ideas as to how God can answer our impossible situations, now that we've exhausted our attempts as to how we can answer our own prayers. We offer our tear-drenched words with the hope of seeing a response. In the silence, between prayers

asked and answers received, we are reminded of the truth: Our God is the God who answers prayers.

Even when our prayers seem to go unanswered, we still pray without ceasing, expecting the miraculous. Like Elijah, we respond to what we heard. We pray again, looking for the answer that has been promised. Like Daniel, we return to the Lord, knowing His word does not return to Him void. He fulfills all He has promised and is the only one who swears by Himself.

God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He spoken, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? (Num. 23:19).

But in times of waiting, unseen answers can provide that more opportune time for the enemy to attempt to discourage believers. These carefully selected moments provide the door that fear seems intent to pry open with any lie that might work, seeding doubt in the field of promise. Will God answer this time? What if His answer is too late? What if it doesn't happen?

In times such as these, it's important to remember that prayer may feel like simple words. But even when simple words are mingled with faith and spoken to the Ancient of Days, the reaction is not only powerful but is eternal. Our prayers connect with the plan of God, that His desires may be advanced in our day and time. And His plans and purposes always prevail. "There are many plans in a man's heart, nevertheless, counsel of the Lord will stand" (Prov. 19:21).

Despite how things may look, despite the events the enemy would bring to mind that didn't turn out the way we prayed or expected, we continue to pray and believe. In that place, we're reminded that He watches over His word to perform it. He cannot lie. He is God, and He is always working.

Even when we see nothing, we remember what He's done. He heard the prayers of the Israelites in bondage, and He freed them. He heard the prayers of Hannah in her barrenness, and He healed her. He heard the cries of the church for the release of Pastor Andrew Brunson, and He delivered him.

We hold tightly to the Word and follow the example not only set by the early church but also by our elder brother who has not stopped praying that His Father's plan would be accomplished: "But He, because He lives forever, has an everlasting priesthood. Therefore He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, because He at all times lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:24-25).

On earth, Jesus prayed continuously. He saw the need around Him and the contrast to its original design, and sought His Father's plan, healing bodies and minds, setting people free, raising the dead and preaching the gospel of the kingdom that many would be released from the grip of darkness.

But even the Son of God's prayers are still being answered.

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You. May they also be one in Us, that the world may believe that You have sent Me. I have given them the glory which You gave Me, that they may be one even as We are one: I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfect in unity, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. (John 17:20-23).

In heaven, He continues to pray for the ultimate fulfillment of the reality that drove Him to the cross. "Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession" (Ps. 2:8).

As nations rage, He continues to seek the Father's desire. He

doesn't grow weak, He doesn't grow weary. Instead, Jesus continues to be our example and great high priest, knowing there's coming a day when His prayers will also be answered.

Then the seventh angel sounded, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of the world have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever" (Rev/ 11:15).

As we lift our words to God and seek His power, we can be comforted by the truth that even when we see nothing, we can be absolutely confident that God is working to bring about His plan. He is still God, and He still responds to prayer. Our words connect with His promises, and He answers. Every prayer is heard and stewarded by the one who is eternal; and in His hands, they are powerful.

I waited patiently for the Lord, and He turned to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet on a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth, even praise to our God; many will see it, and fear, and will trust in the Lord (Ps. 40:1-3).

How can you be strengthened to continue praying in difficult times?

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