

## "THE GREAT ESCAPE!!"

8 / 20 / 17

Acts 12:5-11 (NIV) (Was SERM\_297; 8/11/96; 759, 8/24/03; 1058, 8/5/07; 1457, 8/19/12)

**INTRODUCTION**— The prospective bride and groom were planning the details of their FORTHCOMING WEDDING CEREMONY. SHE SAID: "MY WHITE GOWN IS A SYMBOL OF JOY." The groom meditated for a minute, and asked: "THEN— WHY AM I SUPPOSED TO WEAR BLACK, like a FUNERAL??" (Snappy Stories, 21) WEDDINGS ARE TRULY JOYOUS TIMES.....

AND SO SHOULD BE OUR TIMES of WORSHIP —

AND, SO, our BIBLE LESSON today is the AMAZING story of HOW GOD RESCUED the APOSTLE PETER in a TIME of GREAT NEED— it is:

### I. "THE GREAT ESCAPE" of PETER!! (12:6-11)

#### A. THE ARREST OF PETER (12:1-5)

##### 1. This was a PERIOD of INTENSE PERSECUTION.

**HEROD — ENEMY of the EARLY CHURCH. GRANDSON of HEROD the GREAT (who had ordered all infant boys killed in Bethlehem at the time of JESUS' birth, to kill a MESSIAH and future KING) — **HEROD AGRIPPA I was as CRUEL AS HIS GRANDFATHER!** To PLEASE "ORTHODOX" JEWS (who had HATED JESUS and his FOLLOWERS) and to PLEASE the ROMANS, HEROD HAD CHRISTIANS JAILED or KILLED.**

The APOSTLE JAMES (brother of John, 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel) was beheaded then.

##### 2. HEROD found this to be a VERY POPULAR THING TO DO, esp.

during the JEWISH RELIGIOUS FESTIVAL of the FEAST of the UNLEAVENED BREAD (which began the PASSOVER celebration).

##### 3. HEROD had PETER, one of the LEADERS of the CHURCH, ARRESTED.

He assigned "FOUR SQUADS of FOUR SOLDIERS EACH" to watch PETER— that is, FOUR GUARDS on each of FOUR WATCHES of SIX

hours each— which meant, with that number of GUARDS, THERE WAS NO CHANCE FOR ESCAPE, OR FOR BREAKING PETER OUT!!

4. SO— “*The CHURCH was EARNESTLY PRAYING to GOD for PETER.*” v.5

B. THE ESCAPE OF PETER (12:6-11) (Passage I read a minute ago)

1. PETER DIDN'T BELIEVE it was REALLY HAPPENING !! DREAM ??

2. ONLY REALIZED what had HAPPENED— *WHEN HE WAS OUTSIDE* !!

3. PETER HAD NOT EXPECTED THIS!!!!

C. THE SURPRISE OF ANSWERED PRAYER!! (12:12-17)

1. PETER was surprised by what had happened!!!

2. The people at the HOME of MARY (the mother of John Mark, author of the 2<sup>nd</sup> GOSPEL) — the people GATHERED AT HER HOME for PRAYER were STUNNED !!!

3. In FACT, as we see in v. 13, a servant girl named RHODA... (read verse 13 to 17)

4. ISN'T IT IRONIC!!!! HERE THEY WERE, PRAYING FOR PETER—

for his SAFETY and RELEASE— and when GOD sent HIM to THEM, *THEY HAD A HARD TIME BELIEVING IT!!!* (Sounds LIKE US, EH?)

5. The PEOPLE of the NEW TESTAMENT *were NO DIFFERENT than US!!*

WE SOMETIMES THINK, “GEE, THOSE PEOPLE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT WERE NEARLY PERFECT— THEY KNEW JESUS PERSONALLY, and they had SUCH GREAT FAITH!

I AM a PEON in FAITH COMPARED to THEM...”

6. But— the PEOPLE in the NEW TESTAMENT were — JUST LIKE US !!

Like us, they prayed— *But they weren't CONFIDENT that their Prayers would be HEARD by God!!* They weren't SURE that God would ANSWER their requests and prayers!!!!

7. ISN'T THAT SO MUCH LIKE US!! WE PRAY, but HOW OFTEN DO WE

EXPECT and PLAN as though GOD WILL, SOMEHOW,

IN SOME WAY, ANSWER OUR PRAYERS!!!

8. EXPECTATION is a **CRUCIAL PART** of **DYNAMIC PRAYER**. He who EXPECTS LITTLE from God will **RECEIVE LITTLE**. Sometimes we are disappointed with what GOD gives us, **but did we ASK FOR and EXPECT too little, and fail to ask God for Bigger Things ??**

9. **MANY PEOPLE HAVE HAD CAR WRECKS VERY SIMILAR** to the one I was in 1984. I've told you'all before @ how hard I prayed, while I lay in a hospital bed with a **BROKEN BODY, HALF-PARALYZED, w/ SHATTERED BONES** — **I pleaded with GOD to restore my body and **ENABLE ME to RECOVER, so that I could WALK AGAIN, PREACH AGAIN, and enjoy a NORMAL, FRUITFUL LIFE. AND I BELIEVE THAT GOD ANSWERED MY PRAYERS!!****

(SOME of you, HEARING ME, may wonder @ the PREACHING PART.....)

10. **OTHERS HAVE HAD A SIMILAR ACCIDENT, with a MASSIVE HEAD INJURY** as I had, with **SIMILAR RESULTS, and SIMILAR TREATMENT— but SOME HAVE NEVER recovered NEARLY AS WELL as I have.**

11. **WHY DID KEITH RECOVER SO WELL, and OTHERS HAVE NOT?? DOES GOD LIKE ME BETTER?!? NO— GOD HAS NO “FAVORITES.”**

Now, I **KNOW** that the **HUMAN BODY IS VERY COMPLEX, and NO TWO HEAD INJURIES** like the one I and others have had are **EVER EXACTLY ALIKE— BUT— the DIFFERENCES in our RECOVERY MAY HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED to SOME PART by the LEVELS of EXPECTATIONS and PRAYERS WE EACH HAD—the **EXPECTATIONS of WHAT GOD CAN and WILL DO!****

12. The **FORMULA** for **CREATIVE INTERCESSORY PRAYER** (prayers for others) **IS— —>>>> LISTEN CAREFULLY to GOD'S leading; — PRAY and ASK BOLDLY ; — TRUST GOD COMPLETELY ; — And **KNOW** that the **ANSWER** is **God's IMMENSE DECISION UTILIZING far more WISDOM than we can fathom.****

## ***II. ESCAPING the POWERS of THIS WORLD!!!***

***AND KNOW YOUR ENEMY FROM WHOM GOD WILL RESCUE YOU:***

**A. YOUR ENEMY: The DEVIL !!**

**1. RECOGNIZE that he is the AUTHOR of ALL YOUR TEMPTATIONS  
and TRIALS...**

**2. And HE IS AN ENEMY THAT NEVER GIVES UP!! HE:  
NEVER SLEEPS ....**

**NEVER GOES ON VACATION ....**

**NEVER TAKES A DAY OFF ....**

**NEVER LOOKS THE OTHER WAY ....**

**NEVER RESTS ....**

**NEVER QUITS !!**

**3. NOW, remember— God will sometimes ALLOW US to FACE TRIALS  
so that He might teach us PATIENCE, and teach us to TRUST  
HIM MORE COMPLETELY THROUGH THAT TRIAL....**

**B. KNOW THIS— YOUR HELP: THE LORD ALMIGHTY**

**1. PSALM 121— “Where does my help come from? My help comes  
from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.”**

**2. NOTICE in this story— we have NO INDICATION that PETER was  
WORRIED or FRETFUL. It would be UNDERSTANDABLE if he were—  
HIS FRIEND and FELLOW APOSTLE whom he had known for YEARS,  
HAD FISHED with in the SEA OF GALILEE MANY TIMES—**

**JAMES, the son of Zebedee, the brother of John— *HAD BEEN BRUTALLY KILLED!*  
ALL CHRISTIANS were *PERSECUTED!***

**3. BUT PETER DIDN'T SEEM WORRIED, to the POINT of THINKING  
the ANGEL'S RESCUE of HIM was ONLY a VISION!!!!**

**4. PERHAPS PETER— REMEMBERED that verse from PSALM 121!!**

**C. BE CONFIDENT: CHRIST RESCUES US TODAY— as He did then ....**

1. FOR GOD IS AS AT WORK TODAY IN THE LIVES OF HIS PEOPLE AS HE WAS THEN....

3. **DR. IRA PIERCE** was a RETIRED PHYSICIAN and FAITHFUL MEMBER of WASHINGTON PIKE United Methodist Church in KNOXVILLE, TN— A FEW YEARS AGO, at supper, he had a strange attack, similar to a stroke. He realized what others were saying, but he couldn't COMMUNICATE. His wife pointed out that he was trying to eat his silverware and napkin at once, and he thought that that was odd and stopped — and his family TOOK HIM to THE EMERGENCY ROOM. He couldn't COMMUNICATE with the doctors and nurses, EVEN THE ONES HE KNEW— but he understood what they said, TO HIM and BEHIND HIS BACK!!

FINALLY, he said, HE DECIDED TO TALK TO JESUS. DR. PIERCE WAS A DEVOUT CHRISTIAN, and said that FOR TWO HOURS, HE and JESUS “HAD A GOOD TALK- A GOOD TIME.” AFTER TWO HOURS, DR. PIERCE SAID THAT HE FELT A BRIGHT, WARM LIGHT START LOW IN HIS VISION AND “SHOOT UP,” and HE FELT BETTER INSTANTLY!! He turned to his wife, seated in a chair next to his HOSPITAL BED, and said: “HONEY, THE LORD HAS HEALED ME. LET'S GO HOME!” (SHE MADE HIM STAY FOR THREE DAYS) — a BATTERY of TESTS WERE RUN, but THEY NEVER FOUND ANYTHING WRONG!! He tells that story to his DOCTOR FRIENDS and COLLEAGUES TODAY, and they just SHAKE THEIR HEADS.

— **JESUS RESCUES US TODAY!!!!**

**CONCLUSION** — FRIENDS: --->>> **JESUS RESCUES US TODAY!!!**

SO— let us be:

- **EARNEST** IN OUR PRAYERS;
- **CONFIDENT** that GOD will HEAR US and ANSWER our PRAYERS;
- **EXPECTANT** that GOD will PERFORM HIS PERFECT WILL  
IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES....