

**BIG IDEA: God works in the midst of difficulty/opposition.****1) INTRO**

- How many people have ever had a bad day/week/month/year?
  - Stubbed toe, flat tire, people hurting you, etc
  - We need hope/light at the end of the tunnel...this too shall pass...tomorrow's a new day
- This text is meant to encourage us/reassure us
- Hard times for believers here – pers, death, prison, hiding
  - There are/will be hard times for believers today

**2) DIFFICULTY BRINGS US TO OUR KNEES IN PRAYER (vv1-5)**

- Today's setting is Jerusalem & the antagonist here is Herod
- Herod Agrippa I
  - Grandson of Herod the Great (who wanted JC killed as baby) & nephew of Herod Antipas (who beheaded John)
  - He wanted favor w/ Jews...and Jewish leadership is suspicious of the growing Christian movement
    - So, he killed James
- James is first martyr of apostles
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> recorded martyr after Stephen
  - James the brother of John...“sons of Thunder”...cousin of JC
  - Tradition says he was beheaded
- Boosted Herod popularity
  - So arrested Peter as well
  - During days of Unleavened Bread
    - Many Jews would have been in Jerusalem
    - Same time of year JC was executed
- Peter's put in prison
  - Plan is bring him out for his trial & execution after Passover
    - b/c execution at this time would offend the Jews...Herod doesn't want that
  - Peter's guarded heavily
    - “four squads” – would have been 16 soldiers

- v6 shows that two were chained to Peter and two on guard...one for each gate/entrance
  - They changed shifts every 3 hrs – stay fresh/alert
- In midst of these hard times/pers/James' death/Peter's imprisonment, what do believers do? ...Prayed...for Peter
  - Is this true of us?
  - What do we do in midst of difficulty/opposition? Reactions?
  - Angry...or trust in God's sovereignty...sulk
  - Fearful/lose sleep...or peace that God's got it all worked out
  - Distracted...or focused on God in prayer
- May we call out to God in midst of difficulty/opposition
  - Call out to God in desperation...when things aren't well
  - Let's be people who cry out to God for help
- Prayer is the catalyst/activity leading to Peter's rescue
  - vv14-15 seem to show that they weren't praying for his escape
  - Maybe it was for God's protection or strength in some way
    - But, they prayed
    - In prayer, we have direct access to God of universe
  - Prayer works – not like a genie in a bottle – but it works in helping us to call out to God and see him work as he pleases
    - God works in amazing ways...in midst of opposition

**3) GOD WORKS IN WAYS WE CAN'T EVEN IMAGINE (vv6-17)**

- vv6-10 – Peter's rescued the night before his judgment
  - He's sleeping – amazing given what's in store
  - He's chained to 2 soldiers, and 2 are on watch
  - God acts w/ the work of an angel
  - Angel comes in bright light (divine) and wakes up Peter, tells him to get dressed & follow him
  - Peter thought he was seeing a vision – understandable – and not a real experience
  - His chains fall off and it's as though all the gates open automatically
  - The Heavenly Man – Brother Yun in 1997 at a maximum security prison. Beaten so bad he couldn't stand. He believed God wanted him to escape. Unable to stand on his battered

legs, wasn't able to walk. He asked to go to the bathroom, but just kept walking. Guards simply looked straight through him. Doors and gates opened on their own. Once outside, a taxi pulled up and the driver asked, "where to?"

- v11 – Peter comes to and sees that the Lord has rescued him
  - From Herod...and from Jewish people
  - Many don't like Peter & what/who he represents
- People also won't like us b/c of who we represent either...when we're walking w/ JC
  - Simply b/c we're trusting in JC...they'll be hostile
  - But, may we have eyes/hearts to see how God's working around us
- v12-17 – Peter goes to Mary's house
  - She's the mother of John, called Mark...who goes on mission w/ Paul and Barnabas at end of chapter
  - There's a house church meeting there...likely in secret
  - Rhoda, the servant girl comes to answer Peter's knocking on the door
  - She hears his voice and is so excited she leaves him there to tell everyone that it's Peter
  - But, they don't believe her
  - The church who's praying for Peter doesn't believe it's him
    - They think Rhoda's crazy...we probably would too
  - All the while...Peter's still knocking at the door
  - Until they come to see that it is Peter and he motions for them to be quiet
  - He told them all that happened and that they should relay this to James and the brothers and sisters
    - This James is the brother of JC...knees like camel
  - Then Peter likely went to a place of safety
  - Do we believe this?
  - When we pray, do we trust God will work in great ways?
  - God's the same yesterday, today, and forever...Amen
  - God – who's powerful to save lost sinful people like us – works in ways we can't imagine
  - God – who's the only one powerful enough to defeat sin and death – works to glorify himself

#### **4) GOD HAS THE FINAL SAY (vv18-25)**

- vv18-19 – "Back at the ranch" (Darrel Bock)
  - Things are pretty unsettled the next day
  - It def didn't go well for the guards...executed
    - It was common that when guards let a prisoner get away, they'd receive the punishment the prisoner was supposed to get
- vv20-23 – God's dramatic judgement against Herod
  - Back "home" in Caesarea
- Herod's angry w/ Tyre & Sidon
  - We don't know why
  - But, we know that they were coastal cities north of Israel who depended on Israel's grain for food
  - So, when Herod gets up to speak, they stroke his ego
    - Say he's a god & not a man
  - And, when Herod doesn't rebuke or correct them, he's struck down dead by God
    - b/c he wants to take the glory for himself
    - So, God acts to show that he's the only one deserving of glory
  - The Glory of Heaven – we will rejoice at the defeat of the wicked, God's wrath poured out on them (Rev, end of Isaiah)
    - God's defeat of evil shows himself as glorious
- vv24-25 – The Gospel is unstoppable
  - Nothing can stop the spread of Gospel...not Herod...no one
    - Even in the midst of difficulty/opposition
  - The message of JC goes on...true today too!

#### **5) CLOSING**

- Nov 5, 2017, First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, TX...26 of 50-60 people. Young woman lost her husband and 17-month-old daughter. Another woman lost 9 people in her family alone in the shooting. This church lost nearly half of its members. Before the shooting, the church had 50-60 worshipers on a Sunday morning. Now they average about 200.