

## **The church in troubled times**

Acts 12: 1 – 5, 12 – 15

### **1) The church isn't immune to trouble**

- Jesus said that we'll have trouble in this world, but that we should take heart because he's overcome the world.
- Contrary to modern contemporary teaching Jesus never promised that all our problems and troubles would be over when we believe in him. The early church, and the church throughout the ages to the present day, faced more problems than problem free times.
  - Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Communists, Catholics, and numerous others who leave their respective religions go through ostracism and persecution when they become Christians.
  - When countries were invaded in war by other countries, the Christians and non-Christians alike suffered.
  - Christians have also suffered during plagues.
- Even more than this common suffering Christians throughout the ages have faced more persecution than any other religious group.
  - Jesus was the forerunner of all his followers to be persecuted.
  - A disciple is not above his teacher. If they persecuted Jesus then his followers could expect to be persecuted.
- Whatever we're experiencing in our lives, intense or mild troubles, know that that doesn't mean that you're out of God's will. On the contrary it is often because of being in God's will that we face troubles. So, let's take heart because Jesus is with us in them all, as he was with Peter.

### **2) Prayer, the natural response to troubled times**

- Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.
- As much as trouble has always been the norm for Christians throughout the ages, so the normal response to trouble by godly men has always been prayer.
  - Moses cried out to God whenever the Israelites opposed his leadership.
  - Most of David's Psalms are prayers that he wrote when going through difficult times.
  - The writings of the prophets are full of prayers when Israel was facing imminent danger from the Assyrians and the Babylonians.
  - Jesus himself fell prostrate before the Father in intense prayer when facing the greatest trial of his life.
- Those who run from God follow in the footsteps of Adam who hid from God when he had sinned, rather than falling at the feet of the Lord in open and honest repentance. His troubles worsened because of his own doing.
- Running from God is the natural response for the natural man, but running to God is the natural response for the spiritual man.

### 3) Different responses to answered prayer

- God answered their prayers and Peter was miraculously set free.
  - His chains fell off, the guards sleeping on both sides of him never woke up, as neither did the guards at the first and second gates. The iron gate that led out of the prison just opened by itself, and Peter walked out. The angel of the Lord then left him.
  - We seldom see such dramatic answers to our prayers, but God answers prayer in the way that he wants to answer prayer.
  - In Acts 16 God never worked a miracle for Paul and Silas in the same way, but gave Paul the wisdom to use his natural Roman citizenship to be set free from the Philippian jail.
- What were some of the responses to answered prayer?
  - Peter didn't even realise what had happened. Only when he stood outside in the street, he knew without a doubt that God had set him free.
  - He went to Mark's house where Rhoda, a servant girl, answered and was so excited that she forgot to open the door for him when she went to tell the others.
  - The church didn't believe her at all, and said it must be an angel. They were praying in unbelief.
- How do you pray in times of trouble?
  - You don't pray at all and hope for the best.
  - You pray in faith trusting that God will do the best in the situation, then get excited at answered prayer, even if it's in a way that you didn't expect.
  - You pray with preconceived ideas on what God should do, then don't believe that God has answered when he answers in a way that doesn't fit your ideas.
- The prayer of faith is the God honouring prayer. It trusts God no matter what the circumstances.