

Community Group Discussion Questions

“Plight and Prayer”

Acts 12:1-5

Sermon Series Title: “Church Beginnings”

Sermon Series Summary: From now until around Easter, we will be in the book of Acts, covering chapters 1-12. After the Ascension of Jesus Christ, we see the NT church being born by the power of the Holy Spirit. Through this series, we see the church being built, the kingdom going forth, and the gospel being proclaimed.

Setting: The book of Acts is a transitional book between the resurrection of Jesus and the established local churches of the epistles. With Jesus’ call to the church in Acts 1, we see how the gospel spreads to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the end of the earth..

Summary: In our passage today, we see a new wave of persecution. King Herod (Herod the Great’s grandson) wants to please the Jews, so he executes the apostle, James, and imprisons Peter. The church responds with prayer. This passage teaches us about suffering for Christ and praying with perseverance.

Main Point: *“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; Jesus has overcome the world.”*

Sermon Points:

1. The Plight
2. The Prayer
3. The Process

Opening Question

1. What are some ways people can cope with suffering?

(Answers may vary.)

After a respite from persecution for over three chapters, we see a new wave of persecution against the church. It’s in this new wave we see the execution of James, the first martyred apostle, and the imprisonment of Peter. Through our passage, we see how the church copes with this suffering.

Read Acts 12:1-5

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2. What does this passage teach about suffering, even if we have been faithful and righteous?

(Suffering is inevitable. It will come for anyone and everyone. It's not if but when. We live with sinful hearts in a sinful world with sinful people. We have broken bodies and we live in a physically broken world. Suffering is bound to happen for both the unbeliever and the believer.)

We also see through our passage that being an apostle doesn't make you immune to suffering and persecution. Actually, it can be greater. We see the first martyred apostle in our passage today, James, son of Zebedee. This is one of Jesus' closest disciples, and he is killed for his faith just because the king wants to please people.

Jesus Himself said in John 15:18-21 that the world will hate His people, because they hated Him first. All the apostles except one were martyred for the gospel. Being good and faithful does not mean that we won't suffer. It may mean that we may suffer more for the sake of the gospel.)

3. What is the difference between suffering in general and suffering for Jesus? Have we had any experience with the latter?

(Much of our suffering is a suffering that is a result of the Fall. Sin has corrupted every facet of life. We have brokenness in our hearts. We have broken relationships. We experience physical brokenness. The natural disasters in this world bring about much sorrow and loss. This all stems from sin coming into the world.)

Suffering for Jesus is directly related to the persecution we may receive for the faith we have and profess. We are in the middle of a spiritual war. The seed of the serpent has been attacking the seed of the woman throughout history, ultimately leading to the crucifixion of our Savior. Now, as His people, we are persecuted for our life and faith in Christ. If we are faithful and truthful to the Word, the gospel we proclaim is offensive.)

4. What does this passage teach us about prayer? Does this differ from other passages in Scripture?

(We see the Bible teaching us to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). It is a way we can spend time with our Heavenly Father in secret, and it's a way we can enjoy

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the reward of His presence (Matthew 6). We see in Philippians 4 that prayer is a great way for us to not be anxious but be thankful and at peace.

In our passage today, we see that prayer is a way we can cope with suffering and persecution. The church is praying earnestly and continuously. They pray desperately, knowing that God is their only hope, and they pray throughout the night (12:12) even after Peter is released. Prayer is the way we bring our requests, anxieties, worries, and laments to the Lord, and He hears us. He holds us fast. He is merciful as He graces us with His presence. He ministers to us, and sometimes like our passage, He uses our prayers and answers them for His glory.)

Final Thoughts: *In our passage, we encounter persecution and suffering again. The church is in disarray as it faces the reality that two of its prominent leaders may be executed. In this story, we see the reality of suffering and persecution for the church. We are reminded that Jesus' suffering allows us to see our suffering as formative and not punitive. And the cross we bear is because we are in union with the One who first bore our cross. But we don't bear it alone. We have the presence of Christ with us through prayer.*