

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.

"We are in our "Church Beginnings" sermon series, and through this series, we're going to see that we need to know where we come from to know who we are now and to know who we will become in the future."

Call: 2 Samuel 22:5-7

Text: Acts 12:1-5

Title: "Plight and Prayer"

Next Week's Call: 2 Samuel 22:14-16

Next Week's Text: Acts 12:6-19

Next Week's Title: "Rest and Rescue"

Future Calls: 2 Samuel 22:14-16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21-22, 23-25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 47-49, 50-51

Future Titles: "Futility and Fruit" (Acts 12:20-25); "Obedience Unto Death" (Matthew 26:36-56); "Resurrection Accomplished, Resurrection Applied" (Matthew 28:1-20)

Fallen Condition Focus: In this world, there will be tribulation.

Christ redeeming FCF: We have overcome our suffering through Christ. He was the One who took on the wrath of God for our sins. He was the One who was first persecuted. And as we suffer, we know that our suffering is not punitive but formative. It's for our good, and we are one with our Savior.

Proposition: "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; Jesus has overcome the world."

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.

Reflective Questions:

1. What does this passage teach us about suffering, even if we have been faithful?
2. What is the difference between suffering in general and suffering for Jesus?
3. What does this passage teach us about prayer?

I. Introduction

- A. Hook
- B. Transition
- C. Proposition
- D. Points

II. The Plight (vv. 1-4)

- A. We have experienced a respite from persecution in this book since ch. 8. There may be times when God gives times of peace and grace. We must not think that those times are the norm, but we must see it as the exception.
 1. Living in a sinful world with sinful people as we are sinful ourselves means suffering.
 2. Suffering for the gospel has been present from Eve- the seed of the serpent v. the seed of the woman. Jesus the Son of God was persecuted, and He says that the world will hate us as it has first hated Him (John 15:18-21).
- B. There is a new wave of persecution. Herod the king lays violent hands on the church, killing James the brother of John.
 1. Herod the king- Herod the Great's grandson; father was killed by grandfather; sent to Rome for safety; became friends with Claudius and other future rulers; politically savvy- Roman to the Romans, Jews to the Jews
 2. James, the brother of John- James, son of Zebedee, different from James, son of Alphaeus and James, Jesus' brother. He was one of the three closest disciples to Jesus. He is the first apostle martyr.
 3. Just because you're a church leader doesn't mean that you are immune to suffering. John, James' brother, is the only one who did not die a martyr for Jesus. James is the first apostle to die. John is the last one.
 4. Herod kills James to win the Jews' favor.
- C. After Herod sees that this execution pleases the Jews, he arrests Peter as well.
- D. He is definitely going to execute Peter as well, but because of the Passover feast, he is not allowed to defile the festival with an execution.

- E. Herod guards Peter with four squads of soldiers (4 groups of 4 soldiers each, taking turns watching Peter). Herod wants to execute Peter when everyone is there for the big holiday.
 - 1. He wants to make sure Peter doesn't escape or the church doesn't revolt.

III. The Prayer (v. 5)

- A. Peter is kept in prison, but the church is praying earnestly for him.
 - 1. Prayer has a description- earnest (heartfelt, desperate, needy).
- B. What is the church's response to suffering/persecution?
 - 1. They are not angry with God. They don't grumble like the Israelites, rebel against God like Jonah, or denounce the faith. They pray.
- C. They pray out of the knowledge that they cannot do anything. They are helpless, and their only hope is prayer. "All you have is prayer- ministry and parenthood."
 - 1. Praying for deliverance, strength, and grace in this time of suffering.
 - 2. Maybe even repentance? (Chinese church)
- D. They are praying all night, even after Peter escapes in the middle of the night (12:12).

IV. The Process

- A. How can we approach persecution in this way? What is our hope in the midst of suffering?
- B. When we suffer, we know that it's not punitive but formative, because Jesus has taken on all the suffering for our sin on the cross.
- C. When we suffer for the gospel, we can be encouraged that we are united with Jesus in His suffering.
- D. We are able to pray earnestly, because Jesus was the first One to pray earnestly for us. And through the cross, He now has opened the doorway for us to pray.
- E. This is all part of the process as Jesus went through that same process for our redemption.