

**TODAY = PREPARATION FOR TOMORROW
OTHERS = LESSONS FOR ME**

Introduction

Acts 16 – Paul and Silas singing in prison = How? Not just because God enabled them, but because God had prepared them...

Persecution Continued (vv. 1-4)

- Herod Agrippa I (grandson of Herod the Great) is initiating this persecution of the church.
- His intentions were simply malicious; but when he discovered that persecuting the church earned him favor with the Jews (his subjects), he continued.
- He started by killing the apostle James, and then imprisoned Peter.
 - Peter was going to be brought before the people for conviction.
 - Peter was heavily guarded (4 groups of 4 men who rotated in their watch)—2 men chained to him; 2 standing watch.

Deliverance Sent (vv. 5-17)

- The church's first response was prayer. "Prayer moves the Arm that moves the world."
 - This emphasizes the church's responsibility to humbly and expectantly wait on God, rather than initially taking matters into our own hands.
- God sent His angel to Peter's cell the night before Peter was supposed to be tried and convicted.
 - This emphasizes the sovereignty of God's timing in His protection
- Even though Peter was sleeping and being watchfully and heavily guarded and even though a bright line shone in the cell, the escape was successful.

- This emphasizes the unthwartable plan of God for His people.
- The chains simply fell off, the guards simply didn't see them, the locked gates simply opened, they simply disappeared into the city, and the angel simply vanished.
 - This emphasizes the power of God to protect His people.
- Peter wasn't even aware of the reality of the situation until he "woke up" in the street.
 - This emphasizes the unquestioned ability of God to protect His people.
- Peter praises the Lord, acknowledging that the Jews had a disappointment in store for them the next day.
 - This emphasizes the omnipotence of God (cf. Psalm 2 – "the heathen rage...God mocks at them").
- Peter went to where the church was gathering all night in prayer (the first 24-hour prayer chain). After some convincing (and a bit of "blonde" behavior by Rhoda), the church finally realized that their prayers had been answered. Peter now simply fades off of the scene.

Lesson

- The primary point that I want to emphasize from the passage, however, actually has very little to do with Peter. In fact, the main point has to do with a character who isn't even mentioned in these 17 verses, but whom (I believe) was deeply impacted by them.
 - Paul was at this all-night prayer meeting (cf. 11:27-30—Paul sent with love offering to Jerusalem; cf. 12:25—Paul leaving Jerusalem with John Mark; cf. 12:23—Paul would have met John Mark at John's house, where the all-night prayer meeting was being held).
 - In Acts 16, we see a similar story in the history of the early church, this time with Paul (and Silas) in prison at midnight after being severely beaten. However, in that

story, they are praying and singing hymns of praise to God.

- Question: What do you think Paul was praying for? Answer: Deliverance.
- Question: Why do you think Paul was so energetic and hopeful in that imprisonment? Answer: Because of the lesson that he had learned a few days earlier through the experience of Peter.
- God had sovereignly prepared a famine to get Paul to go to Jerusalem, so that he would witness God's protection in a powerful way in Peter's life; in the near future, when faced by a similar (albeit, worse) situation, he could draw from the lessons of the past for strength and dependence in the present. This is God's grace.
- *Lessons:* (1) Situations today prepare me for situations tomorrow; (2) The experiences of other believers are meant to be illustrations of God's care, teaching me lessons.
 - Look for God in action today; you may need those lessons/truths tomorrow.
 - Look for God's care in the lives of others; you may need those memories to embolden faith-filled obedience tomorrow.