

## Introduction

- If anyone ever tells you, or gives you the impression, that **God doesn't have a sense of humour**, tell them to read Acts 12!!!
  - I find this one of the most amusing incidents recorded in the Scriptures!
- First of all we have Peter in jail, locked up, guarded, like he was a high risk prisoner - **personal attention of 16 prison officers!!**
- The angel comes, wakes him up in the middle of the night - **anyone with small children knows how fuzzy headed you can be at three in the morning!** - and starts to lead him out of the prison!
- This is your normal everyday experience - **not!**
- And Peter, quite understandably, really doesn't think its real.
  - **"This can't be happening!"**
- Do you think that God didn't realise Peter's confusion?
  - but he lets him think its all a dream all the way out the prison gates, and right up the street, before **"Surprise!!"** ... angel disappears, and Peter realises its for real!
- **Can't you just see the smile on God's face!?!?**
- And then, when Peter heads off to find the rest of the church:
  - (incidentally, fascinating that he didn't head off to where the main leaders were, but to a small group who he knew would be meeting in a particular house - possibly something like a house-group - to people he knew, loved, and knew would be praying for him.)
- What happens when he gets there?
- **They don't let him in!!!**
- Left on the doorstep!
  - Peter: **"Ehh, excuse me... haven't you forgotten something?"**
  - **"Hello!! Er, hello.....!"**
- Its so ridiculous - and so much the kind of reaction real people are really likely to make in surprise!

## We laugh, but why study?

- We laugh - or at least smile inwardly at the utter incongruity of God's great leader of the early church, the pioneer, the one under whose preaching 3000 were brought to faith on the first Pentecost... left standing on a door-step!
  - but what does it have to say to us today?
- Two key things as we seek to follow Christ today:
  - **God's work will not be thwarted**
  - **God's people should be praying**

## God's work will not be thwarted

- First James, brother of John, is killed
  - then Peter, evangelist, pioneer, opening up the proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles is imprisoned
    - **whole work in danger of being stopped in its tracks.**
- God intervenes in spectacular fashion to make sure that that doesn't happen, and that the good news continues to spread.
- And the incident with **Herod** and his inopportune death is actually related:
  - here was one who was actively opposing God's work
  - indeed, he was coming to believe that he was like a God!
  - **and no one can stand in God's place...**
- Time and again we hear - **and experience** - how God's purposes will not be thwarted:
  - how, despite whatever the opposition of the day is, God works to bring glory to his name;

- whether the opposition is "official", as here
- whether the opposition is "disruption", such as accident or disease sent at a key time;
- (*disruptions to Holiday Club in Motherwell - week before something usually came up - a difficult funeral, someone claiming he was about to murder someone else, Peter breaking his arm, etc!*)
- or sometimes the opposition can be the insidious effect of **sin within God's people** (compare Acts 5, Ananias & Sapphira)
- Whatever the opposition, God's purposes will not be thwarted.

### **Story:**

- During the mid-1990s, a Christian writer named Jenny Kyricou was helping deliver aid to various towns in Romania.
- While staying with a family in one city, their host's 17 year old son told them this true story:  
The home in which they were staying was used as a depot for receiving Bibles that were smuggled into the country during the communist regime. One night, when a consignment of Bibles had arrived but had not yet been distributed, a hammering on the door announced the arrival of the secret police. Their home was very small. Boxes of Bibles were piled in the middle of the living room floor (a room approximately 15 foot square) when the police came in to search. They opened all the cupboards in the house, making, to all outward appearances, a thorough search of the premises. They failed to see the boxes of Bibles on the living room floor.
- **God's purposes will not be thwarted.**
- Now that confidence that God's purposes will not be thwarted **doesn't mean that everything will always go according to plan!**
  - far from it...
  - but where God has in mind to bring someone to faith, no opposition can prevent that happening;
  - where God has in mind to bring physical relief, no scheme of the devil can stand against Him.
- **That should leave us with a humble confidence!**

## **God's people should be praying**

- But the second part of what this passage teaches us that God looks for our confidence in him to be expressed:
  - we don't simply swan around saying "God will work it out!!"
  - rather, we actively express our dependence and trust **in prayer**
- **Peter was released in answer to the prayers of his fellow believers:**
  - v.5 - **the church was earnestly praying to God for him**
  - v.12 - **he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.**
- Those **"spectacular"** stories, of God fulfilling his purposes, of him answering prayer:  
(*like the one about the Bibles in Romania, or even the one in the passage about Peter*)
  - don't just happen to peculiarly holy people who we don't know....

### **Story:**

- Alistair was one of my friends from University days. He spent a couple of years after he graduated working with TEAR Fund in Africa. His degree was in agriculture and forestry and he was showing local farmers how best to use their land. His work involved him travelling around a fair bit, on often very bad roads. Just before he went out to Africa, he had been at a student prayer meeting in Glasgow. One of the people there was Fiona. They had met precisely once, and didn't know each other well. In the middle of one night Fiona woke up feeling that

she ought to pray for Alistair. She didn't know why or what, only that she couldn't shake the feeling that she should pray. Weeks later she found out that at precisely the time she had woken up and prayed, Alistair had been involved in a car crash, from which he was very fortunate to escape unhurt.

- *(God's humour - they are now married, working in Nepal!!!)*

## **Conclusion**

- God's work will not be thwarted
  - things may look bad, but they are as nothing compared with the power of God!
- God's people should be praying
  - for He chooses to act as we pray; he chooses to respond to the requests of weak and sinful humans!
- **So let's have confidence in God - and let's pray!!**
  - come to PM?
  - list of things to pray for?
  - support of other Christians...