Good Morning!

Yesterday we talked about Peter and his knowledge of his own death. Christ said that Peter would die at some other’s hand and it would be violent (John 21:18-19). Peter would live with knowledge that his death could be at any time. He had been seized by the same Sanhedrin that had illegally put Jesus to death, but released (Acts 4). He had been seized again with the other apostles, but God released them (Acts 5:17f.). However, this time they were flogged. Then Herod Agrippa killed the apostle James and seized Peter with the intent of killing him also. However, God showed that Peter was not to die at this time and sent the angel to release him (Acts 12). We look at Paul’s run-ins with the authorities (2 Cor. 11:23-27), and we can believe that Peter had just as rough a time as did Paul.

So why did the Lord bring Peter so close to death in Acts 12 only to miraculously save him? Why did He wait until the last moment to send the angel? Jesus had said that he would be carried to where he did not want to go and this capture and imprisonment of Peter certainly filled all that prophecy. Peter thought the whole angel leading him through gates and the chains falling off was just a dream or vision. He had no expectation of anything but this was the end Jesus had predicted.

The explanation of this comes after the miracle. If you read 12:11-17, we have the humorous story of Rhoda and the amazing story of the praying saints. First, we need to give tremendous credit to the believers who had gathered to pray for Peter. They probably had just finished burying James. His seven day mourning period was just over, and it corresponded to the seven day feast of Unleavened Bread which prevented Herod from killing Peter right away. So Peter waited for his execution seven days. The people prayed seven days. We find them praying still the night before he was to be executed. Oh, and Peter was not praying – he was sleeping. His friends were praying.

All this means that Peter had not ‘given up,’ but simply saw this as the fulfillment meant of Jesus words and he would meet his fate with godly faith. It had been a good 13 years since the prophecy, so Peter was ready to die.

But – his friends were praying. I wonder just what they were praying for. Certainly a miracle. Just what miracle? It would take a miracle to change Herod’s mind - that is for sure. Herod had returned to a Judah that he never knew. An heir to the throne, yes, but one who had been brought up in Rome. He needed to curry favor with the locals so he killed James and was about to kill Peter just to please them. Christians had no political weight so Herod would not seek their favor in anything. Prayer was the only thing that would change his heart – so they prayed to God for that miracle.

Then Peter shows up. “Who, Rhoda? You must be crazy. It can’t be him!” So they were not praying for a miraculous release from the jail even though they had a previous experience of just this thing (Acts 5:19). God rewards them with an answer that they weren’t even praying for. Notice that Peter doesn’t even stay there (Acts 12:17). He didn’t go there to be there; he went there just to give them the message that their prayer was answered and then he leaves.

From Peter’s perspective, it must have been, “Well, here we go again! I need to wait out this death stuff for even longer.” Peter has another 22 years until he meets his fate upside down on a cross in Rome. He will travel to Babylon, Turkey, Greece and finally Italy. In that time, he will preach and teach, probably do miracles as he did before. He will meet opposition, he will have to flee cities, and he will be beaten in many of those cities.

Peter will never know when his death will finally come. God will have no more miracles for him and he will die. But the night before his execution you will find Peter sleeping. He will be content in whatever the Lord will bring for him that day because he has learned to trust this God with his life and with his future. And so can we.

In Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever.

Pastor EA