

RHODA – THE GIRL WHO ANSWERED THE DOOR

Acts 12:13,14

The early church was under attack. Herod the Great was being consistent with his family's opposition to Christ and to Christians for the chapter sets out the scene, [Acts 12:1](#) Now about that time ... That was in 44 AD when a terrible famine came upon the land, cf. [Acts 11:27](#) And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. ²⁸ And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. ²⁹ Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: ³⁰ Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

[Acts 12:1](#) Now about that time Herod the king [*Herod Agrippa I*] stretched forth his hands to vex [*oppress, afflict, harm, maltreat*] certain of the church [*ἐκκλησία*]. ... Things had been fairly quiet for the Christians, with the exception of some of the leaders being told not to preach, and Stephen's martyrdom. Otherwise, it was quiet. ... King Herod was intent on changing that though. He was the grandson of Herod the Great who ordered the Bethlehem children to be murdered, and he was also the nephew of Herod Antipas who beheaded John the Baptist ... so he did not come from a good family!

Also, the church had grown significantly, - many of the thousands who were saved in and around the Day of Pentecost lived locally. So, Herod was feeling threatened, and he also wanted to court the Jews who were worried about the influx of this new religion. And, of course, he was also concerned the Christians might bring trouble ... maybe even a rebellion.

So, he started off by killing [Acts 12:2](#) James the brother of John with the sword. ... That is how the Jewish Talmud, - the law book written by the rabbis, - said anyone who led the people to worship other gods should be killed. He was trying to 'side up' to the Jewish leaders. ... ³ And because he saw it pleased the Jews [*i.e. killing the disciples/apostles of Jesus*], he proceeded further to take Peter also [*... with the intention of killing him too*]. (Then were the days of unleavened bread [*i.e. Passover time*].) ⁴ And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers [*a 'quaternion' was a 'shift' of four soldiers, therefore, sixteen soldiers watched over Paul, i.e. four 'shifts of four soldiers*] to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. ...

Herod did not kill Peter just then because it would not have had the same impact as if he was to kill him *after* all the busyness of Passover ... and that is why he put Peter in the prison for a few days. And to make sure the Christians wouldn't come in and free him, Herod assigned the four guards of four soldiers to watch over him and make sure it didn't happen.

Meanwhile, a special prayer meeting was held ... and the sole item on the agenda was the freedom of Peter from the prison. The new Christians in that city already knew they needed the Lord's help to continue, and they met in a private home to pray. Late into the night, they prayed for God to bring about the release of Peter.

Now, they were meeting in a home in Jerusalem belonging to John Mark's mother, Mary. They already knew James the apostle had been killed, and it was likely he was only the first, - there was bound to be more killings of Christians. ... It must have been a devastating blow for the early church to learn of the treachery and death of Judas Iscariot, - yes, he was a traitor, but he was also a disciple. His death must have sent shockwaves across those who loved Jesus. ... And also, how even more devastating for a good man like James to be murdered by official state policy! ... Previously, James, along with his brother John, and Peter were a close company who had known each other all their lives. They came from the same village and were fishermen. The three of them were Christ's closest disciples ... often being with Him when the other disciples were absent, e.g. Mount of Transfiguration, Jairus' daughter. ... So, James had been very much to the fore.

He had been put to death though ... so, who's next? It seems it will be Peter ... and who will be next after him?! And here, we find this group of Christians gathered in the home of Mary praying specifically for Peter.

So Peter was in the cell ... and sixteen soldiers were responsible for keeping him there. He was asleep between two guards, - imagine, he was sleeping (!) ... and probably facing the same death as his Master! How could he sleep? He could sleep because he knew there was a church praying for him. ... And he is bound with two chains ... unable to escape, even if he wanted to. The prison doors were locked firm.

Actually, he was in better shape in the prison than the people outside in the prayer meeting! If things didn't change, he was going to die ... but ... he was sleeping, while a short distance away his brothers and sisters were

on their knees, v.5 prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him [Peter].

Well, unbeknownst to the people in the prayer meeting, God had sent an angel into the prison cell where Peter was sleeping ... Alexander Maclaren called Peter “the sleeping apostle” ... and he did seem to be a dedicated sleeper ☺ ...

- In Gethsemane Jesus specifically went to him, **Mk. 14:37** And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? ...
- On the mountain of transfiguration, he was sleeping again, **Lk. 9:32** But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep ...
- Near the beginning of his ministry he had been fishing all night, but hadn't caught anything and the Lord told him to launch out into the deep cast his net. Now, it was morning ... and all Peter wanted to do was get to into his bed, **Lk. 5:5** And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night ...
- And in Acts 10, he's at it again ... just prior to the men from Cornelius coming to see him! ... So, Peter had no problem with his sleeping! ☺ ... But the people in the prayer meeting had.

And through Divine intervention, Peter is freed from the prison, and walked along the streets to the home of John Mark's mother. Inside, they were praying ... But let's look at this young servant girl (παῖδίσκη) who opened the door to Peter.

She has been in the prayer meeting and all the people there were crying out to God for Peter's life to be saved. They knew how wicked a man Herod was, - and he would put you to death for the slightest reason and if he thought he could gain 'extra mileage' for the death of another Christian he wouldn't hesitate!

But prayer (v.5) ... prayer brings us to the turning point of the story. Thomas Watson said, “The angel fetched Peter out of prison, but it was prayer that fetched the angel”. Often, we can be too quick to read over the simple words in Scripture ... and here is an example, but prayer.

And this young girl Rhoda is in that prayer meeting, - her head is bowed, God is listening to the simple prayers of His people ... and there's a knock at the door. Sitting on the outskirts of that small congregation, it was Rhoda's responsibility to get up and see who was there. Her heart and feet would have been heavy as she walked and lifted the latch. It

could have been anyone, - don't forget, she's a young girl, - ... it could have been the soldiers of Herod coming to arrest them all.

It was dark. ... Do you know what the name "Rhoda" means"? ... It means "rose" ... and if that prayer meeting could be described as a garden, Rhoda, - the rose, - and all the rest of them were wilting!

As she walked towards that door, I reckon she most probably had fear in her heart, a certain degree of trembling ... and as she approaches the door to lift the latch she cries out, "Who is it?". Then she heard Peter, - she knew his voice. ... No doubt she had heard Peter preach, she had heard him pray ... yes, she knew his voice. You can imagine her amazement, - this was the man whose freedom she and the others were praying for.

... Just a moment ago she was with the group of people asking God for Peter to be freed from the prison cell ... and now he was on the other side of that door! ... *God answered their prayer!*

Was this not the best place for Peter to come after being released from prison, to the very people who had been upholding him before God?! ... He wanted to tell them *God answers prayer!*

You know when you have been praying for something, and it has been on your mind for a long time, and you haven't given up praying about it ... and then 'out of the blue' God answers your prayer. ... Maybe you've built up a debt, perhaps over many years, and it's crippling you, - it's a debt that has arisen not out of unwise living and you've asked for God to help you ... and He has brought you in the resources to meet the payments ... *God answers prayer.*

You've been going to the doctor and you don't know what it is that has been ailing you and you're frightened ... but you pray, and the results come back from those tests and you're all clear ... *God answers prayer.*

And we are – like Rhoda – *amazed*. It's not that we don't believe God is able, because we do, but it's maybe we wonder why He would respond to the requests of people like you and me ... *God answers prayer.* [v.13 Peter knocked at the door ... 14 And ... she knew Peter's voice ...](#)

And when Rhoda heard Peter's voice she forgot what she had gone to the door for, - *she forgot to open it!* She had been praying for Peter to be

released from prison and now there he was standing on the other side of that door! And ... [she opened not the gate for gladness!](#) ... It wasn't because of fear, but it was because of gladness! ... She had been praying for this moment ... but she stood there and she couldn't open the door. She couldn't put her hand on the latch and bring Peter in ... such was the gladness (*χαρά*, joy) in her heart. It's so good when our prayers are answered ... situations we have struggled with and God steps in and takes it out of our hands ... God answers our prayers! ... The enjoyment of being able to attribute to God the work of answering prayer! ... But it's hard to take it in ... that God listens to people like us!

When we pray in His will He answers, and He brings glory to His Name and joy to His people. ... He is the God and King of the universe and still He has time to attend to our prayers! ... He hears and answers us while we pray and I assure you I most probably would not have been any different if I had walked to that door in Mary's house when Rhoda heard it being rapped. ... I doubt I would have believed it was Peter standing there either, because, often, when God answers prayer He takes us unawares. It's not that we don't believe He can do it, - for we believe He can, - but it is because sometimes we still find it hard to believe He would spare the time to listen to the likes of you and me. ... When He does answer it reminds us how precious we are to Him ... but we're still amazed He answers our prayers.

She was so 'flummexed' she forgot to open the door. She turned and went back into the prayer meeting and you could imagine her interrupting someone's prayer, "He's here! He's here!" "Who's here?!" ... "Peter is here!" ... She left him standing outside. She forgot to open the door! She wanted to tell the people inside *God answered their prayer!* ... She ran and told them ... but they didn't believe it could happen.

"It's an angel", they said. But sure that didn't make any sense because what would an angel be doing standing outside your front door; a front door is no obstacle to an angel! ... Surely he would walk right through! ... These people were praying without ceasing day and night, but they would have been well-minded to have prayed another prayer, [Mk. 9:24 Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.](#) Yes, Matthew Henry is so right, "Sometimes that which we most earnestly wish for, we are most backward to believe".

What we pray about ... do we believe it can happen? When we pray for God to save our families ... do we believe God will save them?! When we are going through a time of great anxiety, - maybe concerning our health, or a loved one, - ... do we believe God would hear and answer our prayer?

“Peter is at the door!” “Don’t be daft, girl!” The thing for which they had been praying ... and they did not believe Rhoda! ... **13** And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate ... and he is *still* knocking, **16** But Peter continued knocking ... It was not until Peter was standing in the middle of that prayer meeting, telling them how he was delivered, that they joyfully acknowledged the Lord’s answer to their prayer.

CONCLUSION

Rhoda is only mentioned once in the whole Bible and yet she shows us such a beautiful picture, - she was the first in that prayer meeting to witness the Lord answering their prayer.

In some ways, it’s quite ironical that God could get Peter out of a prison but Peter found it hard getting into a prayer meeting! Notice carefully, though, how Luke records this event, **v.16** But Peter continued knocking; and when *they* had opened the door, and saw him, *they* were astonished. ... What a message of encouragement Rhoda brought this prayer meeting and when her news finally got through to them, *they all* went to the door *to see how God answers prayer*. ... Eventually, they were all ‘in it together’!

I trust we *do* believe God answers the prayers of His people. The children’s chorus we used to learn said this ... “God answers prayer in the morning, God answers prayer through the day, God answers prayer in the evening; He hears every time you pray.” ... May the Lord encourage us to trust Him more ... and to believe Him concerning what we pray for! Amen.