

## Mission Possible

### "Twists, Turns & Divine Comedy"

Acts 12:1-24 NKJV

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It started in Jerusalem with a group of Jews who the Holy Spirit descended on, bringing them into a place of power and authority, and changing their nature from the inside out. The Gospel just started exploding from there. What happened at Pentecost with the Jews happened again in Acts chapter ten with the Gentiles in Judaea, Samaria, and onward to the ends of the earth. In just twelve years, the Gospel had spread from Jerusalem over five hundred miles north to Tarsus like a holy virus from Heaven.

That's what we're supposed to be - *contagious* wherever we go. What caused the Church to spread was not peace and success, it was persecution. They started getting chased down and arrested, and getting kicked out of cities. Persecution causes *growth*, it doesn't cause us to stop. The more the church gets squeezed, the more unexpected, miraculous, and culture-altering things God does through the Holy Spirit showing up in power.

Acts 11:27,28 NKJV

*"And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar."*

God spoke to Agabus two years before the famine hit in 46 AD and the Church stepped up and made preparations for it. Then came a series of bad harvests throughout the Roman empire causing a massive famine that lasted for years, but, because they were prepared, the Church was able to take care of each other.

Amos 3:11 NLT

*"Indeed, the Sovereign Lord never does anything until he reveals his plans to his servants."*

John 16:13 NLT

*"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future."*

Even in the midst of trial, trouble, persecution and the Church being squeezed, God was telling them everything they needed to know before the rest of the world, because God knows how to bring us through everything we face. God was showing them the future through the Holy Spirit so they could be prepared, allowing God to take care of them and so they could show the world that God was *with* them, and that they weren't shaken when everybody else was.

We can have *peace* when we walk with the God who already knows what's coming. When we're close enough to him, he tells us about it all beforehand. *That's good news!* It's not just spiritual truth, it's *practical help* so we will not be taken off guard. That comes only if we have a relationship with him. If we draw near to God, he will *speak to us*. God is willing, and wants to talk to us and show us things we need to know, but that can only happen when we take the time to draw near to him - to walk with him so we can know him and recognize his voice.

Abraham and Lot were both righteous men - *believers* - but Abraham was called the *friend* of God and God would talk to him about things he was going to do before he did them. Lot, on the other hand, lived in the midst of Sodom and Gomorrah and was twenty-four hours from its destruction, but had *no idea* what was about to happen. Which type of relationship do we want to have with God? Do we want to be like Lot and have no clue what's going on and just be blown up by all the events in our life and in the world, or do we want to be like Abraham to whom God shows things so we're not shaken? This is a real invitation from the Lord!

## **Twists, Turns and Divine Comedy**

Acts 12:1,2 NKJV

*"Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword."*

*"James was the first apostle to suffer death after the martyrdom of Stephen. Although Herod was the authority that took his head, James's fate started when an individual brought charges against him before the tribunal. When the case was over and James had been condemned to death, the man who had instigated the trial was deeply moved by the behavior and continence of the apostle. James was so filled with the Spirit of God that on the way to the place of execution the one who had initiated the charges against him made a confession of faith in Christ. When he asked James to forgive him, the apostle said, 'Peace be to thee, brother.' James then kissed him and both men were beheaded for their faith." - Foxe's Book of Martyrs*

The Holy Spirit on the inside of James changed him from being a “son of thunder” to the son who could literally see the person who accused and condemned him to death be saved and then also to *follow* him to his *own* death. This is the revolution that happens when a person walks with God. It changes their very nature from the inside out - from sinner to saint - from hopeless and bound to set-free in Christ who gives us a new heart and makes us a new creation.

Now, we're empowered by the grace of God to stand boldly for his name in the face of death. Does that describe us? *“Lord, is this me? - I want this to be me! Lord, I know You can do it - You've proven it - so, Lord have Your way in me!”*

Revelation 12:10,11 AMP

*“Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom (dominion, reign) of our God, and the authority of His Christ have come; for the accuser of our [believing] brothers and sisters has been thrown down [at last], he who accuses them and keeps bringing charges [of sinful behavior] against them before our God day and night. And they overcame and conquered him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, for they did not love their life and renounce their faith even when faced with death.’ ”*

This shows a relationship with God that produces profound strength, purpose, clarity, vision, boldness, unshakable faith, a re-orientation of *everything* in our life, and an endurance like we've never had before. It literally pulls on something deep inside of us to where we can't help but be faithful to the One who gave it all for *us*. Then, there's no thought that could even enter our mind to betray the One who hung for our sins and was raised from the dead, and who also raised *us* up to live *with* him.

This isn't bravado, it's grace and heavenly power - and unshakeable *spirit* exploding on the inside of somebody who has really met Jesus. Then, when the pressure and squeezing comes, we “count it all joy” like Paul who said, *“This is my opportunity to express gratitude to the One who saved me before a world who needs to see it.”*

Hebrews 10:25 NLT

*“And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near...”*

The context of this verse isn't about trying to get sleepy people to come to church. This was written in 65 A.D. during the reign of Nero, the most evil caesar in Roman history. He decided to stamp out and eradicate every Christian by conducting "circuses" - throwing Christians into the arena to be eaten by lions and tigers for sport. When that didn't stop them from meeting together for prayer and worship, Nero crucified one hundred Christians on a hill in front of the whole city. Then, when that also failed to prevent them from gathering, Nero impaled many of the Christians on poles and set them on fire to be lights for a debaucherous party.

When this caused some Christians to get weary and draw back a little, the writer of Hebrews penned the words, *"let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near."* After he wrote that, the Church resumed meeting together and grew and exploded and couldn't be stopped. Their relationship with the Lord went far beyond mere inconvenience and busy schedules.

That's what God is after in us, and we can *get there* with just a heart-shift on our part. We don't just need relief from unfair treatment in America or more favorable policies, laws, or strategies to live a more successful, peaceful life. What we really need in the Church is real revival. We need our faith to become re-vitalized - the most vital, vibrant, life-giving part of our very existence that we live, breathe, and exist for.

When *that* happens, we'll find that we have everything we need, regardless of the circumstances - *favorable or unfavorable*. Jesus wants to stabilize our *soul*, not our circumstance. Safe and mundane Christianity is a myth and a counterfeit - there is no such thing. Walking with Jesus will disrupt every area of our life. Stability and consistency can't be found in the events and circumstances of our lives. They can only be found in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

This is why people who have everything life has to offer are miserable and riddled with anxiety while those who are imprisoned and martyred for their faith have genuine joy and peace. *"Don't pray for the persecution to stop! We shouldn't pray for a lighter load to carry, but a stronger back to endure! Then the world will see that God is with us, empowering us to live in a way that reflects his love and power. This is true freedom!"* - Brother Yun (who was tortured and imprisoned, witnessed miracles, and saw prisoners and officials alike saved.)

Acts 12:3,4 NKJV

*"And because [Herod] saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover."*

After being repeatedly jailed and beaten, Peter continued to preach the Gospel with increasing boldness and power. When we walk with God, the devil and world should be nervous even when they appear to have the upper hand. The hypocritical Jews wanted to kill God's servant, Peter, but only after their religious ritual had ended. If we don't know God personally, we can easily perversely combine religious activity with a life that is in direct opposition to what God is doing.

Isaiah 29:13,14 MSG

*"The Master said: 'These people make a big show of saying the right thing, but their hearts aren't in it. Because they act like they're worshiping me but don't mean it, I'm going to step in and shock them awake, astonish them, stand them on their ears. The wise ones who had it all figured out will be exposed as fools. The smart people who thought they knew everything will turn out to know nothing.'"*

Everyone can say "amen" that church is full of hypocrites. That doesn't take a rocket scientist to notice. The question is, have we realized that we are the hypocrite and surrendered to the will of God in broken-hearted repentance. Satan tries to get us to trade repentance for comparison. He will get us to look at everyone around us we see as more hypocritical, evil, and sinful than we are so that we see ourselves as better than they are, and therefore we don't repent or humble ourselves before God but remain unchanged, which is exactly what the devil wants.

The Church is supposed to be a hospital for hypocrites, not a social club for the righteous. We don't despise people around us who are at a different point of the journey, we bring them with us as we pursue the Lord. Even Paul said that he was the *least* apostle and the chief of sinners.

Acts 12:5-11 NKJV

*"Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, 'Arise quickly!' And his chains fell off his hands. Then the angel said to him, 'Gird yourself and tie on your sandals', and so he did. And he said to him, 'Put on your garment and follow me.' So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. And when Peter had come to himself, he said, 'Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people.'"*

## Are We living in a jailbreak-worthy way?

Philippians 3:10-14 MSG

*"I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally, experience his resurrection power, be a partner in his suffering, and go all the way with him to death itself. If there was any way to get in on the resurrection from the dead, I wanted to do it. I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward - to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back."*

We only have two options - *misery* or *mission*. We can be miserable, anxious, and fearful, even though we have *everything*, or we can be on mission with God and see him breakout in miraculous and amazing ways everywhere we go, as he helps us to fulfill what he called and wrote for us to do. *Which will it be for us?*

Acts 12:12-16 NKJV

*"So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. But they said to her, 'You are beside yourself!' Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, 'It is his angel.' Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished."*

Acts 12:17-24 NKJV

*"But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, 'Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren.' And he departed and went to another place. Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed there."*

We can either *throw ourselves* on God's mercy or we will be *thrown under his judgement* - it's one of the two. Jesus spoke of himself as being *the Rock - the Gospel - the Truth*. Scripture says we can either fall on Jesus and be broken into pieces in the innermost parts of us, or, he will fall on *us*, and we will be *crushed*. We need him to break us so he can make us and change us rather than to be crushed by the truth that we tried to ignore and deny our whole life.

No one gets away with anything. It's either *justice* or *mercy*. That's *everyone's* choice. Herod didn't get away with this either. He went on to give a pompous speech in front of the people he was trying to rule who declared him to be a god. But while he was talking, an angel came and struck him and he died and was eaten by worms. (Acts 12:20-24) Just like an angel can come and break out of jail the one who is walking with God, the same angel can come in judgement for those who are in opposition to him.

God is not a curiosity, addendum, or benign weekend activity - he is the center of it all. If he is not at the center for *us*, that means *we* are off-center and everything in our life will be off-kilter and out of alignment - hard in all the wrong ways. We don't need *more* of God in our life, our life needs to die and we need to *step into* the life God has for us - the story he has already written for us. Some of us are living the wrong story and we *know* it! Scripture says that it's either our *old life* or the new life. It's not some "frankenstein" of the two. We either die to our old self and put on the new self, saying, "*God, re-make me and re-form me and re-orient me to what You wrote for me.*" - or we can remain bound in our old life ...*It's one of the two.*

## **Prayer**

*Father, in Jesus' name, we don't want the weak, the mundane, and the safe. God, we want You, and we want to be wherever You take us. We want You to have our whole heart. We don't want to just honor You with our lips only to have our hearts be far from You. God, break our hearts for what breaks Yours. May we have a deep encounter with Your presence and Your love. God, change us from the inside-out by Your grace like You changed James and Peter and the other fishermen, tax-collectors, and hooligans who You revolutionized. God, revolutionize us. Jesus, have Your way. We love and honor You. In Jesus' name. Amen*

## **Resource - [www.persecution.com](http://www.persecution.com)**

Voice of the Martyrs website and monthly magazine - Hebrews 13:3 says that we are to "*remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them, and them which suffer adversity as being yourselves also in the body.*" VOM ministers to the persecuted Church around the world and provides a connection with them so we can effectively support them in prayer. In their free monthly magazine, they share inspirational stories of our brothers and sisters in the faith who courageously and gladly give up their freedom, families, and lives for the sake of the Gospel.