**Peter Finally Wakes Up!**

(Acts 12:11-17)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

 Two men were talking about exercise, and one said, “I’ll have you know I do ten situps every morning.” The other said, “That’s not very much.” He replied, “Yeah, I know. But there’s only so many times you can sit up *to turn off the snooze alarm.”*

Speaking of the snooze alarm, I heard that the man who invented it just died. They tell me that his funeral will be tomorrow at 9…9:09…9:18…9:27…

 Well, I don’t know about you, but I never hit the snooze button when my phone alarm wakes me up in the morning. I’m just the kind of person who has no trouble waking up. But I have a feeling that if the snooze button had existed in the Apostle Peter’s day that *he* would have been the kind of person who used it, because here in Acts 12, he seems to be taking an awfully long time to wake up. I mean, an angel of the Lord has kicked him in the ribs, and marched him past 16 armed guards, and through what was probably a loud, squeaky iron gate (Acts 12:1-10), and he’s only just now coming to, as it says in the opening verse of our text:

 **“And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews” (Acts 12:11).**

Now the “Jews” Peter was talking about there were *unsaved* Jews, of course. They were eagerly expecting King Herod to *execute* Peter. But as we saw in our last lesson, God had other plans for Peter.

 But that verse shows how far the people of Israel had fallen, spiritually speaking, because—well, look what they were *expecting* back in the *beginning* of the New Testament:

 **“…*the people were in expectation,* and all men mused in their hearts of John, *whether he were the Christ,* or not” (Luke 3:15).**

In the beginning of the New Testament, the people of Israel were eagerly expecting *the arrival of their Messiah.* But here in Acts 12, after *crucifying* their Messiah, they are eagerly expecting the *execution* of the leader of their Messiah’s apostles. Now *that’s* a spiritual fall!

 As we’ve seen, the Book of Acts is all about the fall of Israel, the *diminishing* of God’s kingdom program for them, and the *rise* of His *grace* program for us. We’ve seen evidence of this in past lessons, and we’ll see more of it in this one.

 But now that Peter has been liberated from prison in the middle of the night, all that’s left for him to do is figure out where he should *go* in the middle of the night. That’s something we find him considering in the next verse of our text:

 **“And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying” (Acts 12:12).**

 After thinking about who might be awake at that hour of the night, Peter decided to go to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, the man who wrote the Gospel of Mark, for reasons we’ll see in a moment.

 But as we’re also about to see, there’s a lot of significance attached to Mark’s house. I personally believe that that’s where the Lord ate the Last Supper with His apostles. Now there’s no one verse that *says* that, but look how Mark describes what happened that night:

**“…in the evening *He cometh with the twelve.* And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said…One of you which eateth with Me shall betray Me” (Mark 14:17,18).**

The only reason Mark would say the Lord “cometh” with the twelve is if they came to *his* house. Remember, houses were small in those days, and very few homes would have a room large enough for 13 men to sit at the same table. So they had to have the last supper in the home of someone who was fairly well-to-do, and could *afford* a house that big.

 And that fits what we know about Mark. There’s evidence in Scripture that he came from money, as they say these days, and we’ll see more evidence of that later in this study.

 And we see more proof that they ate the last supper at Mark’s house when Mark tellsus what happened when the supper was ended:

**“When they had sung an hymn, they went out…And …Judas…and with him a great multitude with swords…laid their hands on Him, and took Him…And they all forsook Him, and fled. *And there followed Him a certain young man,* having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: *And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked”* (Mark 14:26,43,46,51,52).**

Now I also think that *Mark himself* is the “certain young man” here. I think after the Lord ate the last supper at his house, He left with the 12, and mark undressed and went to bed. But the noise surrounding the Lord’s arrest caused him to spring out of bed, wrapped in a bedsheet, to go see what all the commotion was about.

 You say, “Why would you think that Mark is the naked streaker here?” Well, the thing about that story is, Mark is the only one who tells it. You won’t find that story in Matthew, Luke or John, the way so many of the events in the Lord’s life are repeated in those books. That would suggest that Mark is the only one who *knew* the story. And in my mind, the most logical explanation for that is that it must have happened to him.

 Especially because that story fits something *else* we know about Mark. You see, he was a bit of a scaredy-cat. Later on in Acts, Mark is out on a preaching tour with the apostle Paul, and he *bailed* on Paul when the going got tough. So it’s not surprising that when Judas and those storm troopers came to arrest the Lord that Mark would run home and hide under the bed.

 Now if you read the rest of Mark 14, you’ll see that they at the last supper in a large upstairs room. And I think *something else* happened in that same large upstairs room. Look what the Bible says about *Pentecost:*

**“…*they went up into an upper room,* where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James*. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplica-tion,* with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren.… And when the day of Pentecost was fully come…they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues…” (Acts 1:13,14; 2:1,4).**

As you can see, fifty days *after* the last supper (“Pentecost” *means* 50, similar to how the name “Pentagon” refers to a building with 5 sides), the disciples observed the feast of Pentecost in an upper room large enough to hold the 12 apostles and about a half dozen *other* people. That leads me to believe that Pentecost was *also* something that happened in Mark’s large home.

 And all of that is why Peter decided to go to Mark’s house after God sprung him from what prisoners sometimes refer to as “the gray bar motel.” He knew that the disciples would gather together to pray for him, and he figured they’d gather at the only house big enough to hold them all! And that’s why he’s standing at Mark’s door here in Acts 12:12.

 But there’s also a *symbolic* reason Peter went back to the upper room. This Book of Acts is *filled* with pictures of what God was *doing* at that time. And what God was doing was shutting down His kingdom program through the 12 apostles, and starting up His *grace* program through the Apostle Paul. We just saw the kingdom program going *forward* from the last supper at Mark’s house, through the observance of Pentecost at Mark’s house. Now the kingdom program is starting to go *backward,* as Peter *returned* to Mark’s house.

 And what’s happening here is *also* symbolic of what God expected Peter and the rest of the kingdom saints to *do* now that their program was beginning to shut down. Instead of *advancing* with the kingdom program, they *retreated* back to the place where they began at the last supper.

And we don’t have to guess why. Remember, the last supper was a symbol of *the cross.* The bread was a symbol of the Lord’s body, as He said that night, and the cup was a symbol of His blood. So in retreating back to the upper room, Peter was symbolically retreating *to the cross.*

And you know what? When *your life* seems to be shutting down, the way the kingdom program was shutting down, retreating back to the cross is a pretty good idea for you as well. When everything in your life seems to be falling apart, just keep going back to the thought that God loves you enough to send His Son to die for you.

Life can take away literally *everything you have,* but it can’t take away *that.* It can’t take away the salvation you got when you believed on the One who *died* on that cross. So just keep retreating there, and you’ll find the peace you’re looking for when your life is crumbling. It’s the only peace you can trust, for it’s the only peace that’s tied to the only thing that *not even the devil himself* can take away from you.

 Now since they didn’t have doorbell cameras in Peter’s day, he had to get the attention of the people in Mark’s house the old fashioned way, as we see as we read on in our text:

**“And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda” (Acts 12:13).**

Now here we see more proof that Mark’s family was fairly comfortable in life. His house had a *gate,* which means it had a *fence* around it, and that’s something that people can’t always afford even in our own day.

But if you know your Bible, the idea of someone knocking at the door of a gate should make you think of a question that someone asked the Lord, and His response in Luke 13:23-25:

**“Lord, *are there few that be saved?* And He said unto them, Strive to enter in *at the strait gate:* for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, *and shall not be able.* When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, *and to knock at the door,* saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and He shall answer and say unto you…*depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity”***

Now that’s talking about a guy knocking at the door of the kingdom of heaven on earth, and not getting in because he’s not saved. And you might think that a story like that can have nothing to do with Peter, because Peter *was* saved. If *he* was knocking at the door of the kingdom, the Lord wouldn’t tell *him* to take a hike.

 But don’t forget, the nation of Israel was a “commonwealth” (Eph.2:12). That meant the Jews shared the wealth of God’s blessing *in common* with everyone else in Israel when the nation as a whole obeyed God. But they also shared God’s *cursing* when the nation as a whole *didn’t* obey God. Let me give you an example:

Back when the people of Israel rebelled against God in Danie’s time, God allowed the king of Babylon to conquer and enslave *them all—*even Daniel and his 3 friends, who *hadn’t* rebelled. But look what Daniel said about that in Daniel 9:4,5,11:

 **“I prayed unto the LORD…and made *my* confession, and said, *We* have sinned…and have rebelled…therefore the curse is poured upon *us”***

*Daniel* hadn’t done any rebelling against God, but he confessed that *he* rebelled because he understood they were a commonwealth, and God saw them as *one people.* And he understood that when God *punished* the nation, that he had to be punished along with them.

 And in the New Testament, when the nation rebelled when they stoned Stephen, God punished the nation by not letting them into the kingdom. They were knocking at the door of the kingdom—it was “at hand,” as both John the Baptist and the Lord testified (Mt.3:2; 4:17)—but they couldn’t go in.

 But neither could Peter, because they were a commonwealth, and God saw them as one people! So Peter knocking at the door of the gate of this house here in Acts 12 *was* a type of the nation knocking at the door of the kingdom, and being turned away, as the Lord’s story depicted.

 *Berean Bible Society* founder Pastor C. R. Stam used to call the Book of Acts the picture book of the New Testament, and rightly so. We’re going to see *more* pictures of Israel’s fall, and *also* picture of the *rise* of the Body of Christ, and what God is doing today in the dispensation of grace. We’ll actually come to one of those in the very next chapter in Acts.

 But getting back to Rhoda here, we know that she *knew* Peter, because our text goes on to say,

 **“And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate” (Acts 12:14).**

Rhoda left poor Peter out there in the cold—kind of like how the nation of Israel was left out in the cold.

 But the *reason* she left the apostle out there is that she not only *knew* him, she must have *loved* him, for it says she was *glad* to know that Peter was alive, and just couldn’t wait to share that glad news with the disciples.

 And you’d think that *they’d* be glad as well, but instead it says,

 **“And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel” (Acts 12:15).**

Instead of being *glad* Peter was free, they thought Rhoda was kookoo for Coco Puffs, as we used to say when I was a boy.

 But now, wait a minute! Isn’t that what they were praying for? If so, why are they so shocked that God *answered* their prayers. Oh, right, like you never prayed for something, and then were surprised when you got it! God still answers prayer, but He does it *through His people,* often in ways we don’t expect, and so don’t see coming.

 But I personally think that the disciples *hadn’t* been praying that Peter would be set free. You say, “What else would they be praying for?” Well, look what the Lord told Peter in Luke 22:31,32:

**“…the Lord said, Simon…Satan hath desired to have you, *that he may sift you as wheat:* But I have prayed for thee, *that thy faith fail not”***

Now I think if I were Peter, I’d say, “That’s nice, Lord, but how about praying that Satan wouldn’t be *able* to sift me as wheat?” Instead, He prayed that God would see him through it.

 And that’s also how the Lord is praying for you. We know He’s praying for you, for our apostle Paul wrote,

**“Christ…is even at the right hand of God, *who also maketh intercession for us”* (Romans 8:34).**

And we know He’s praying that your faith won’t fail because we don’t live in a dispensation where God will deliver us from our troubles if we obey Him like He did for Israel. Our apostle *also* said,

 **“…we must *through much tribulation* enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).**

Now he meant the kingdom of God *in heaven,* of course, not the kingdom of God on earth. And the “tribulation” he mentions there isn’t the *great* tribulation that will follow the rapture. Paul was talking about the kind of tribulations we all have to go through in life. And you know that because of something Paul told the Thessalonians when he wrote,

**“…we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; *even as it came to pass…”* (I Thessalonians 3:4).**

The *great* tribulation didn’t come to pass way back then, but a lot of their *personal* tribulations did.

 And when *your* personal tribulations come along, isn’t it good to know that the Lord is praying that your faith won’t fail? Because your faith is the only thing that’s going to get you through some of the sifting that Satan has planned for *you.*

 And how’s faith come?

 **“…faith cometh by hearing, *and hearing by the word of God”* (Romans 10:17).**

So your best bet to get through life is to be in church to hear the Word of God taught, so you can tell the devil what he can do with that sifter of his. Don’t take what he dishes out lying down! Be the man of God, the woman of God, that He’s called you to be!

 By the way, I don’t say that just to fill the seats in my church and other grace churches. If my goal in life was just to fill seats, I’d preach something *way* more popular than the grace message! I say it because church is the place to be if you want to learn how to live a victorious Christian life filled with joy and gladness.

 But now, why did the disciples think that Peter’s angel was knocking at their door? The answer is that it has to do with something the Lord told the 12 in Matthew 18:10. After He called a little child and set him in the midst of them (v.2), He told the crowd,

**“…despise not one of these little ones; for…in heaven *their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven”* (Matthew 18:10).**

Now that verse is often used to teach that children have a guardian angel who is supposed to protect them from harm. I can remember sitting in catechism one day and the teacher told us kids all to scooch over in our seats so our guardian angel could sit down for a minute.

 But don’t talk about guardian angels to parents who have lost children in tragic accidents, or to disease, or a the hands of evil men. If those poor kids had guardian angels, those angels were all a bunch of *slackers.*

The truth is, God’s people *don’t* have our own personal angels in the dispensation of grace. But the Jews did!—and not just Jewish *children.* The Lord may have put a child in their midst as an object lesson, but “little children” is one of the names He called His apostles (Jo.13:31). And the Lord said that the angels of *all* those little children in Israel beheld the face of His Father in heaven. That means that Jewish kingdom saints *did* have their own personal angels who acted as their representatives in heaven.

 But we know they didn’t act as *guardian* angels, for if they did, *James wouldn’t be dead!* God just used angels as go-betweens between Himself and the people of Israel. Look what an angel told Daniel in Daniel 10:12:

 **“Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand…*thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.”***

When God heard Daniel’s prayer, He sent an angel to answer him.

 And that’s who these saints at Mark’s house thought was knocking at their door—Peter’s angel, coming to tell them that Peter was dead. That’s what angels did when Jews died. They’d go to heaven and tell God about it. Now God already *knew* about it, of course. But that’s just how He set things up with Israel. He used angels as His eyes and ears. That’s what the Bible is talking about when it says that the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth. It’s *angels* who ran to and fro throughout the earth, acting as His eyes and ears.

You say, “But wait a minute! Why would Peter’s angel tell *the disciples* that Peter was dead, and not God?” Well, it’s because those disciples represented God on earth at that time.

 If you’re not sure how that worked, do you remember what happened when God called Moses to be His spokesman on earth, and Moses replied,

**“O my LORD, *I am not eloquent*…I am slow of speech….And the LORD said…Is not Aaron…thy brother? I know that he can speak well…*put words in his mouth*…And he shall be thy spokesman …and he shall be…to thee instead of a mouth, *and thou shalt be to him instead of God”* (Exodus 4:10,11,14-16).**

Moses represented *God* to Aaron, and together that tag team of Moses and Aaron represented God to the rest of the world in the Old Testament. And in the New Testament, *the disciples* represented God to the world. God’s headquarters could be found wherever the Lord’s little flock was found at that time. So the disciples weren’t crazy to think that Peter’s angel had come to tell *them* that Peter slept with the fishes.

 But all the time that the disciples were trying do decide if Rhoda was crazy, or if she was hearing Peter’s angel, poor Peter is still outside knocking at the door of the gate, as it says in Acts 12:16:

 **“But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.”**

 As you can see, it took Peter awhile to get to go inside Mark’s house—just as it is going to take hi awhile to get into the kingdom. That’s what we’re seeing pictured here.

 Personally, I think their astonishment here proves they *weren’t* praying that God would free Peter, or they wouldn’t have been so astonished. All I know for sure is their astonishment must have been making a lot of noise, because it says in the final verse of our text:

 **“But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place” (Acts 12:17).**

Now when it says that Peter beckoned with his hand, he either used his hand to put a finger to his lips in a “shsh” gesture, or else he used his hand in a motion as if he was pushing something down, in an effort to get them to keep their voices down. He knew that too much noise would wake the neighbors, and cause them to come over and *investigate* the noise. That would probably lead to the neighbors turning Peter in to the authorities.

 But the “James” that it mentions there in verse 17 is obviously not the apostle James, for he died in verse 2 of Acts 12. This is “James *the Lord’s brother”* (Gal.1:19).

 And what do we know about the Lord’s brethren? In John 7:5, we read:

**“…neither did His brethren believe in Him”**

That means the Lord’s brother James wasn’t a believer! So why did Peter tell the disciples to tell him he was alive?

 The answer is that after the Lord rose from the dead, James *did* believe that his brother was Israel’s Christ, and then James took Peter’s place as the leader of the kingdom church. And frankly, I always wondered why. But it has to do with the reason James called Peter “Simeon” over in Acts 15. The name *Simeon* is the Hebrew form of Peter’s first name “Simon,” and one of the definitions of the name Simon is *wavering.* Peter was a wavering man. He *stopped* wavering after He was filled with the Spirit, but he went *back* to wavering after the Spirit was withdrawn. You may remember Paul had to withstand him to his face in Galatians 2 because of his wavering.

 And the disciples needed an *unwavering* leader here, so James took Peter’s place. There doesn’t seem to be anything waverly about him in Scripture!

 Now when verse 17 says that Peter went into another place, the Bible doesn’t tell us where he went. Catholicism says that he went to Rome to start the Catholic church, but there’s no more evidence of that in the Catholic Bible than there is in any other Bible. Peter *eventually* wound up in Babylon (I Peter 5:13), but that was 44 years later. Here we’re not told where he went because it didn’t *matter* where he went, now that the kingdom program was shutting down, and he was no longer the leader of the kingdom church.

 In closing, do you know what the name Rhoda means? *Rose—*as in the flower. And do you know what is going to happen in the kingdom? Isaiah predicts:

**“The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad…and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom *as the rose.* It shall blossom abundantly …*your God will come…and save you.*  Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped” (Isaiah 35:1,2,4,5).**

And that’s why a girl named Rhoda was keeping the door of the gate of a place that represented the kingdom of heaven on earth. In the kingdom, the desert will *blossom* as a rose.

 And you know what? Our kingdom of heaven *in heaven* is going to be just as wonderful. I was thinking about that recently when I read how Isaiah *went on* to describe Israel’s kingdom:

**“Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing….*And an highway shall be there*…called *The way of holiness;* the unclean shall not pass over it” (Isaiah 35:6,8).**

 And that will be true of *our* kingdom of heaven as well. And I don’t know about you, but I think the most wonderful part of either kingdom of heaven won’t be that the blind will see and the lame will walk—although I have to admit that sounds pretty nice! But I think the most wonderful part is that there will be *no uncleanness there,* no uncleanness of *sin.* If you’re looking forward to living in a place where neither you nor anyone else can grieve God’s Spirit with uncleanness, why not bow your head and give God thanks.