

Supplication

(Acts Session 20—August 9, 2026)

Acts 12:1-4

- 1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched out *his* hand to harass some from the church.
- 2 Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.
- 3 And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was *during* the Days of Unleavened Bread.
- 4 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.

All of the terrible things Herod did in this chapter were done for political purposes.

It says, “...because *he saw that it pleased the Jews*, he proceeded further...”

In a way, you can tell the character of a person by who it is they want to please. Sometimes, it comes down to a choice to please either God or man. Where are we getting our value system from—God or man?

This is a question that even followers of Jesus will have to pay close attention to.

Matthew 16:23

But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but *the things of men*.”

And therein lies the problem. Collectively, our society has lost any interest in the things of God.

And that is why they’ve reached a place where 2 + 2 no longer equals 4. Just read some of the nonsense being peddled in the headlines. Like for years now, not being able to define what a man or a woman is. It would be comical, if it wasn’t so devastatingly harmful.

Romans 1:21-22

- 21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.
- 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools.

Because human beings are so broken, it is child’s play for Satan to skew their thinking. And he’s having a field day in that department, that’s for sure.

Which is why we must lean heavily on the Word of God. It will enlighten our eyes and our hearts.

Get in your Bible, please. If you don’t, your thinking is going to be all messed up. You’ll be suckered into some of this insanity. No boundaries for sin. Depravity will be embraced and celebrated. That thinking ruins lives. It ruins nations.

Proverbs 14:34

Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a reproach to any people.

Now let’s get to the central emphasis for this morning. It is found in **verse 5** of our chapter for today.

Acts 12:5

Peter was therefore kept in prison, *but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church*.

I find it interesting that there is no mention of prayer being offered up when James was imprisoned. I have no doubt that people **were** praying for James. But for whatever reason, God did not answer those prayers affirmatively.

But Luke points out that the whole church was praying constantly for Peter. The fact that James was not delivered did not deter them from praying again. And there’s a lesson there for us.

We bow to God's sovereignty, but we keep on praying for other things.

Consistent prayer is a powerful thing. Powerful, but not omnipotent. God may well have other things in mind, so we must not be discouraged when He says **NO** to our request. We will keep on praying for other things.

And persistent prayer is a powerful weapon in the hands of God's people. Our prayers can and do make a difference. And **neglecting** to pray can make a difference in the opposite direction.

So let's be encouraged by the example of this church in Jerusalem. I see here the fulfillment of the promise made in the book of James:

James 5:16b

The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

Or to put it in common language, that kind of prayer gets the job done.

Christians need to understand the mechanics of righteousness as it relates to prayer. Because the devil will render our prayer lives ineffectual if we don't acquire that understanding.

What is involved in being a righteous person? That's a fair question. And in order to answer it Biblically, we need examine it from two different perspectives. There is **Positional Righteousness**, and there is **Practical Righteousness**.

Positional righteousness is described in **Romans chapter 3**.

Romans 3:21-24 NIV

21 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

22 This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

That is positional righteousness. In other words, an individual is pronounced righteous by God, because of Christ's death for them on the cross. And the one, single condition of being pronounced righteous in that way is placing your faith in Christ for your salvation.

Romans 3:22a

This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ **TO ALL WHO BELIEVE**.

But then there is the other side of the righteousness question: **Practical Righteousness**.

Practical righteousness encompasses our actual behavior, our thoughts, and the intentions of our heart.

This kind of righteousness was definitely on James' mind when he wrote this phrase. His whole book is about doing the right thing, living the right way, and having the right attitudes. Practical righteousness.

James 5:16b

The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

Yes, you have to be saved first. That's **Positional righteousness**. That's where you start. But then you go on to live out your faith in practical ways.

Following Jesus. Obeying His commands. Practical righteousness always follows after positional righteousness.

And practical righteousness has a profound effect on the power of our prayers.

And it is on this particular point that just about every Christian finds themselves severely deflated.

Their thinking goes like this:

A righteous person? Me? Well, I know I've been declared righteous in Christ. But actually a righteous person? I'm not that. I'm struggling. I have bad thoughts. I say things I shouldn't say. I commit sins.

I'm not all that righteous. Spiritually speaking, I'm not much of anything at all. To be honest, I'm kind of surprised that God has anything to do with someone like me.

That's how many will react to any suggestion of them being righteous. The thought is quickly rejected, and dismissed out of hand.

It has been my observation that many Christians seem to claim **Romans 7:15** as their life verse:

Romans 7:15

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.

Please listen to me. That kind of frustration is the conundrum that we face.

On the one hand, the Scripture commands us to come boldly before the throne of grace to obtain help in time of need.

But all we seem to do is focus intently on our own unworthiness. And any real boldness in prayer becomes virtually impossible. Maybe a little peep or two is about all we can muster.

Christians have developed tunnel vision when it comes to this subject. I listen to Christian radio quite a bit. And sometimes I just cringe at the lyrics to the songs.

You know, the songs with lyrics that go something like this:

"I'm a mess, I'll always be a mess, no matter how hard I try. I'm a wreck. I'm no good. Thank you for your mercy, Jesus."

And when I hear that I think,

"You guys are always down in the basement digging holes How about we celebrate some of the little victories of righteousness that we have in our lives? Instead of always bemoaning our lackings and our failures?"

I'm just being honest here. I remember the first song that really bugged me like that. It was by Amy Grant.

I have decided, being good is just a fable. I just can't cause I'm not able. I'm gonna live like I believe.

And I'm thinking, *"Really? Oh there's some inspiration. Thanks for setting the bar so high, Amy. Makes me want to go out there and do great things for Jesus. Not."*

I think we need to look at our spiritual lives just a bit differently than we do.

I'm assuming that all of us here are followers of Jesus. Disciples. If you haven't made that commitment yet, get it done. Today.

But along with seeing ourselves as disciples, I need to remind us that according to the Scriptures, we are currently in a war. Which makes us soldiers of Christ.

2 Timothy 2:3

You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

So it might be helpful if we start thinking like soldiers who are in the midst of a war. And for this reason:

Wars are generally won or lost over a significant stretch of time. Which means there will be both defeats and victories that precede the ultimate outcome.

Accept the fact that as a soldier, you are also a target. You will face regular attacks by the enemy of your soul, Satan. You will be ambushed. He will trip you up. Sometimes, his attacks will result in setbacks for you, and you will sin.

That's just part of being a soldier. But it's not the whole war. It's not even the whole battle. Don't behave as if you're defeated. You just got hit a bit.

This isn't dodge-ball. You know, one hit and you're out. This is a war. Don't over-react.

Here's the thing. I know for a fact that you are serious about following Jesus. You wouldn't be here listening to this if you weren't. I know you want to be a righteous person. Otherwise, you wouldn't be so hard on yourself whenever you do something wrong.

I know that in your heart you long to be righteous. To please the Lord in all things. I've talked to many of you directly about that very thing, and I have really good news for you today.

Matthew 5:6

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

You are hungry for righteousness. And that hunger can't be shaken, because the Lord put it there. And there is plenty of evidence of that hunger from your past.

Let's look for a moment on the positive side, There were lots of times when you made the hard decision to do the right thing when you were tempted to do the wrong thing. It was difficult, but you did the right thing.

So listen to me—all this stuff about you just being a mess, and no good, and all of that? Give it a rest, OK?

Start looking at the big picture, will you please? Start thinking about the long game. You are in a war. Along the way, there will be a mixture of victories and defeats. And please remember this: a recent defeat doesn't cancel out all of the victories that you have experienced before.

OK, so let's say you had a bad day yesterday. You got knocked off your feet by the enemy. No excuses. What do you do? Repent as needed, pray for forgiveness, and keep moving forward.

Listen, the fight goes on. One setback doesn't take you off of the field of battle. You took a hit, so why not try hitting back?

Do the next righteous thing you should. Resist temptation. Share your faith. Read your Bible. Pray. Apologize. Whatever. Just get back on your feet and do the next right thing.

And never, ever let the devil con you into not praying because you are not sufficiently righteous. There will always be things you regret; memories that will tend to bring you down. But there are good things to remember too.

David is a great example of this. In some of his Psalms, he's feeling bad about himself, and he lays it all before the Lord. But there are other times when remembers the victories as well.

Two quick examples:

Psalms 51:1-4a

*1 Have mercy upon me, O God,
According to Your lovingkindness;
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,
Blot out my transgressions.
2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin.*

3 For I acknowledge my transgressions,
And my sin *is* always before me.
4 Against You, You only, have I sinned,
And done *this* evil in Your sight—

We can all relate to that, right? But then listen to David as he sees things from another perspective.

Psalm 18:20-21

20 The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness;
According to the cleanness of my hands
He has recompensed me.
21 For I have kept the ways of the Lord,
And have not wickedly departed from my God.

Please don't misunderstand me here. I'm not advocating becoming a spiritual braggart. All I am saying is that David was able to celebrate the victories too. The defeats did not erase the victories.

Satan wants to convince you that your heart is wicked and dark and all of that. But that is unscriptural when it comes to you as a born-again believer. The Bible tells me that God has taken our stony hearts and remade them into hearts that are tender towards Him and His ways.

The Bible tells me that I have been made a new creation in Christ. Old things are passed away. All things have become new.

I'm not a mess. I'm not a no-good lowdown worm. Not from that perspective. I am one of God's own children. Alive in Christ, walking the straight and narrow, seeking first His kingdom. And if I get bumped off that path, I find my way back on again post-haste. And I keep moving forward.

Remember all the good things that have happened in your life. What the Lord has done in your soul. How you have followed Him, not just how you have let Him down.

Take it all into account, both good and bad. And then as necessary, sincerely repent of any sin. You did something wrong, OK. Well, you've set your course again, right? And you intend on following Jesus. Right?

Then that means the way is clear to pray—fervently, boldly, and unapologetically. You are back on the path of righteousness. And the prayer of a righteous individual avails much.

You have to fight back when the devil starts accusing you of being worthless. The Bible promises that Jesus will finish the good work He's begun in you. And He's done a lot already. Don't sell yourself short.

But remember—it's a work in progress. Bottom line: You don't have to be perfect to pray effectively. Just be on the path of righteousness. Don't give up. Keep your eyes on the prize, as they say.

Alright then, back to our text in **Acts 12**. We see an amazing deliverance coming in response to the church's prayer. But something rather humorous takes place in the process.

Acts 12:5-16

5 Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.
6 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.
7 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.
8 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."
9 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.

10 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.

11 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."

12 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.

13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer.

14 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.

15 But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!" Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, "It is his angel."

16 Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened *the door* and saw him, they were astonished.

Just a couple of observations and I'll let you go.

First of all, I'm struck by Peter's attitude of faith. He was sleeping so soundly here that the angel had to poke him in the ribs to wake him up. There's a man who knows his future is in God's hands.

Secondly, the angel seems to be in a hurry. That makes me think that there is a shelf life to a miracle, or to a work of God.

When the Lord shows up to help us out, we need to respond quickly, and do whatever our part is. Procrastination is not an option. Quick obedience is the only sensible choice.

And then thirdly, Peter thought this angel's appearance and his escape from prison might be a vision.

Now this is just speculation on my part but it seems to indicate that the difference between a dream and a vision is that a vision is just like real life. Where you can't tell the difference. Virtual reality on steroids, more or less.

And thirdly, when the answer to their prayer comes knocking, they don't believe it.

Even when they start to believe a little bit, they start explaining the miracle away. It must be that Peter died and it's his spirit that has come to visit them.

So here's my take-away from all of that: These folks were no more spiritual than we are. They still had their doubts. They speculated inaccurately. So their prayers may not have been perfect, but they were good enough to get the job done.

And the obvious question before us is this: If prayer can make such a big difference, why not pray more?

And don't just check the prayer box. In other words, don't just pray because it's the right thing to do.

Instead, engage your faith when you pray. Pray because your Father has promised to meet you in the secret place. And remember, He promises further to reward you openly. So make it a point this week to get alone with God and pray.

Matthew 6:6

But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

That's an amazing promise. When you go to prayer, confess whatever your sins might be, and ask for His forgiveness. That clears the way for you to pray as a righteous individual. And then it's just you and the Lord. You are praying. He is listening.

And before long, you will see results from your prayers. If some don't get answered the way you hoped, others will. Just keep on praying.

Even if—like with these folks praying for Peter—even if you don't feel like your prayers are being answered. Keep on praying, anyway. Your feelings do not hinder God from doing mighty things in response to your prayers.

Let's close with a verse from **Luke 18**.

Luke 18:1

Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray **and not lose heart**.

Trust me on this—***it is the devil's business to make you lose heart***. Continuing to pray is the best way you can thumb your nose at Satan.

We need to pray more. Pray for one another, pray for this church, and pray for a move of God in our community. Get alone with God.

And be prepared...

Be prepared to be rewarded openly. Keep on praying.