

Sermon Summary | Sunday 28th June 2026 | Acts 12.1–25

Acts 12 does not let us make the Christian life neat. In one chapter, James is killed, Peter is rescued, the church prays, and Herod falls under God's judgment. One apostle dies; another is delivered. The praying church is astonished when God answers. The chapter does not explain every mystery, but it does give us solid ground: do not trust God because life is predictable. Trust him because Christ is risen, Christ reigns, and his word cannot fail.

First, sometimes God's servants suffer. Herod lays violent hands on the church and kills James, the brother of John, with the sword. James had walked with Jesus, seen his glory, and been commissioned by the risen Lord. Yet Luke records his death in one brief, heavy sentence. Acts does not hide the cost of belonging to Christ. Peter is then arrested too, guarded carefully, and kept for public trial. Humanly speaking, the church is powerless. But verse 5 says, "Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church." Christian prayer is not pretending we are strong. It is coming to God because we know we are not. That matters as we remember persecuted believers today, including brothers and sisters in Iran, and as Mojtaba is baptised publicly into Christ. Baptism is joyful, but it is also serious: it says that someone now belongs to Jesus Christ, crucified, risen, and Lord.

Second, sometimes God's servants are rescued. Peter is sleeping between two soldiers, bound with chains, with guards at the door. Yet an angel of the Lord appears, the chains fall from Peter's hands, and the prison gate opens. What is impossible for Peter is effortless for God. But we must hear this carefully. James has just died. Peter is rescued. Acts 12 does not teach that if we pray enough, every prison door will open. Prayer is not a machine for getting the outcome we want. But it does show that no chain, ruler, prison, or locked gate can limit the Lord when he chooses to act. The church itself is wonderfully human: they are praying for Peter, yet when Rhoda says he is at the gate, they tell her she is out of her mind. God does not wait for perfect faith before he acts. So we pray: for the persecuted church, for our own church, for new believers, for gospel courage, and for the word of God to spread.

Third, always God's word prevails. After Peter's rescue, the chapter turns back to Herod. He appears in royal splendour, receives the praise of the crowd, and accepts glory that belongs only to God. Immediately he is struck down. The same Lord who sends an angel to rescue Peter sends an angel to judge Herod. Acts 12 reminds us that human power is not ultimate. Public approval is not ultimate. Political success is not ultimate. Herod looked strong, Peter looked trapped, James looked defeated, and the church looked powerless. But by the end, Herod is gone, Peter is free, and "the word of God increased and multiplied."

This points us to Jesus. He too suffered under unjust power. He was arrested at Passover, guarded by soldiers, mocked, struck, condemned, and killed. But unlike Peter, Jesus was not delivered from death. He went through it. He bore sin, entered the grave, and on the third day God raised him. The greatest rescue came not by avoiding death, but by defeating it.

So when Christians suffer, we do not say God has lost control. We look to the cross. When Christians are rescued, we give glory to the risen Lord. When proud powers rage, we remember that Christ is King. And when someone is baptised, we rejoice that the word of God is still increasing and multiplying.

Questions for personal reflection

1. Where am I tempted to trust God only when his ways feel predictable, rather than because Christ is risen, reigning, and faithful?
2. How can I pray more earnestly this week for persecuted believers, new believers, and the word of God to increase and multiply?