

July 30, 2023

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What is the one important thing you will take away from this weekend's message or our community group discussion? Is there any challenge, difficulty or praise that you would like to share with the group for prayer?

MY STORY

Describe a time when your reasonable expectations were so off-target that what actually happened caused you to do a double-take.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT US TO HEAR?

King Herod started an intense persecution of the church, beginning with the execution of James, the brother of John. When he saw this pleased the religious leaders, he fixed his sites on Peter ...

When he had seized [Peter], he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people (Acts 12:4)

Why did Herod amp up his persecution of the church after executing James?

Why is the approval of others, even for stupid acts, such a powerful motivating force?

Peter was miraculously rescued from prison by an angel, but the apostle thought it was all a dream.

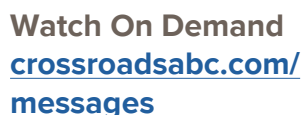
When Peter came to himself, he said, “Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.” (Acts 12:6-11)

Why did it take a minute for Peter to figure out what was happening to him?

Describe a time when the Lord disregarded your expectations, and took you in a completely different direction than you had planned.

Peter found his way to the place where his fellow believers were praying for him—but at first, they didn't believe it was him!

Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. They said to her, "You are out of your mind." (Acts 12:14-15)



Why did it take a minute for the people praying for Peter to realize that their prayers for Peter had been answered in a spectacular way?

When it comes to our expectations as to how the Lord is going to act, why should we hold on to those expectations loosely?

Herod found himself giving a speech, and the people who heard him claimed he spoke with the voice of a God. Because he accepted their worship, he got a bad case of tapeworm.

The people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!" Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last. (Acts 12:22-23)

What happened to Herod when he accepted the worship of people?

Why are some people tempted to soak in the veneration of others? Why is this spiritually dangerous?

WHAT DOES GOD WANT US TO DO?

What does the persecution of Christians look like today? How is that persecution different in first-world countries versus third-world countries?

What are some ways that Christians can unnecessarily provoke persecution upon themselves?

What are some healthy ways to respond to hostile people, especially those who take exception to your identification with Christ?

What are some impossible things you'd like to see happen— that can only happen— through God's miraculous, supernatural intervention?

What are some of your long-standing expectations about God's intentions that might be worth re-examining?

How can you humbly acknowledge God as the source of your talents, abilities, and skills without being garishly self-effacing?

What's the difference between veneration and legitimate praise? How do you graciously reject one and accept the other?

WHAT DOES GOD WANT ME TO DO?

Look for someone in your circle who is facing legitimate persecution and offer to stand with them, in front of them, or go to bat for them.

Ask Jesus to do some God-honoring thing so huge that only He could supernaturally accomplish it.

If and when that thing happens, how will God want you to use it?