

Peter: Building Christ's Church
WHEN PRAYER COMES KNOCKING

Saturday, October 31

Reading: Acts 11-12

Acts 12:16 *But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.*

17 *Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison.*

"Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this," he said, and then he left for another place.

Peter's encounter with the centurion Cornelius had opened a crack in the church door to allow Gentiles in. Now the ministry in Antioch blows the door wide open! The Jerusalem church sends Barnabas to check out what is happening and he is so impressed that he stays to help lead and build the church. He soon realizes they need more help and he recruits Saul from Tarsus. The impact of their work in this major Roman city is seen by the fact that the believers receive a new nickname – "Christians" – which means "belonging to Christ." Society at large recognized the difference Christ made in their lives. This was also shown by their compassion and enthusiasm to help their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem who were starving.

It appears that during Barnabas and Saul's relief visit, Peter is arrested and thrown in prison by King Herod Agrippa I (grandson of the Herod from the Christmas story). This wicked king had already executed the apostle James (John's brother) and intended to do the same with Peter. But the night before his scheduled death, an angel releases Peter from prison. Once he realizes this is not a dream but reality, Peter rushes to the home of Mary, John Mark's mother, where the church was meeting to pray for Peter.

While we cannot be certain, it is possible that Saul and Barnabas were part of this prayer meeting. After all, Mary and John Mark were family to Barnabas (Colossians 4:10). While God had no problem getting Peter out of prison, Peter has a problem getting into the prayer meeting! The servant girl who answers the door is so excited she runs back inside without opening the gate. The wonderful believers who have spent days praying for Peter now don't believe that God has answered their prayer. They think either Rhoda is crazy or Peter is dead and his spirit is at their door! They are completely shocked when they open the door and it really is Peter. After leaving some final instructions, Peter leaves Jerusalem for parts unknown to escape recapture by Herod.

LESSON ONE: Are the doors of our church open to anyone and everyone? Do we shut people out just because of how they look or some other superficial reason? Do we need to pray for God to change our hearts to be welcoming to all who are seeking the Lord?

LESSON TWO: God is never late, but He is seldom early! Peter had probably been sitting in prison for a few days, but it was not until the night before his execution that God delivered him. What was Peter doing that night? He was sound asleep! He had placed his life securely in God's hands, so he was at peace with whatever happened the next morning. Do you have God's peace in the midst of difficulties?

LESSON THREE: The Christians had trouble believing that God had actually answered their prayers. But despite their doubts, God acted anyway. Have there been times when you were surprised when God answered your prayer? We need to learn the lesson from the father who brought his demon-possessed boy to Jesus when he prayed, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24).