

Read also Psalm 17:1-15

A man named James died for calling Jesus Christ Lord. Years before a man named Daniel was thrown into a lion's den for praying to his God rather than the king. The battle is an ancient one in which our opposition seeks to destroy those who live by faith.

In today's story two men fight this battle; both of them apostles of Jesus Christ. One man loses his life. The other one survives. **Some things are worth dying for.**

Men today who fight wars agree. Army Spec. Channing Moss, when hit by a live RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) while on duty in Afghanistan said, "When not knowing whether I would live or die, I thought, *if I die, I felt that peace that I died for the right cause and I did the right thing.*" When medics examined Moss and saw the live RPG protruding from his abdomen, they realized in trying to remove it, it could explode and they would all be blown up. What would they do? Protocol was that Moss be removed to a sandbag area for the safety of others, rather than trying to save his life. But, something in them called them to ignore the imminent danger to themselves. He was alive, talking, looking at them, and he needed help.

They were devoted to their brother and to their cause. God obviously honored their decision. A huge miracle occurred as they operated on him and removed the live round successfully.¹

Channing Moss says now, "I pray for them every day as they put their lives on the line, that God will protect them."

Some things are worth dying for. We watched this week in the Tucson tragedy as several people intervened to help the injured and who successfully stopped a madman's bullets. It was worth it to them.

Another madman needed to be stopped. He wore a crown. He wielded the power of the crown. Acts 12 begins with the news that King Herod "laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church." Literally, the word means "he stretched out his hand to do evil." He was an enemy of the church, and today we too have enemies.

Many ask, *why does God allow evil here?* That is a good question; we certainly need to explore the Bible for answers. But understanding the answer does not change the reality that evil comes against us. Perhaps a more helpful question is, *when evil comes against us, what does God do? What should we do? What are our weapons?* Let's turn to the Bible for answers. READ Acts 12:1-5

Peter's brothers and sisters in Christ understood his life and death circumstance; they had to do something. So they prayed.

They prayed? That's all?

¹http://www.militarytimes.com/multimedia/video/rpg_surgery/, accessed 1/10/2011.

The situation was extremely bleak. Doesn't it take more? Couldn't they engage an attorney or call the local television station for publicity or show up with signs of protest?

Of course they had none of those resources; as a matter of fact, they had no power at all. There was no hope, no possibilities. What could this tiny little group of men and women do against the might of the Roman government?

This group of people, this first little church that ever existed that had no structure yet, no institutional backing; no formal budget or building; this tiny group of powerless people subject to the will of Herod and Rome **battered heaven with prayer. They had no other plan.**

They **prayed fervently to God for Peter.** The word means

- they were praying unremittently
- they desperately pled with God
- their prayers were incessant
- they prayed eagerly
- That means they simply let out all of the stops and did not give up.

It's the same word for how hard Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane – you know, He sweat great drops of blood, and Peter and the disciples went to sleep.

When you have a battle on your hands, do you think of prayer first? Is your praying intense, fervent, incessant, and relentless? Or weak and sleepy?

Herod's actions weren't weak or sleepy. He used the power of the king who wields the sword and holds the key to the prison. Ah, but we have the power of praying to a God who holds the keys to the universe.

The people's actions were not a default. They believed that prayer worked.

Paul calls prayer a weapon. He writes in Ephesians, *Prayer is essential because we are in ongoing warfare against the devil . . . So, pray for your brothers and sisters. Pray hard and long. . . You are up against more than you can handle on your own . . . Use it and you will be able to stand up to everything the Devil throws your way* (6:10-18 excerpts).

Pastor E. M. Bounds says that we must "put God to work" by asking in prayer because God binds Himself to hear our prayers. He prayed from 4-7 am every day. He felt it was part of his job as a pastor.

The Psalmist says, "I call upon the Lord so I shall be saved from my enemies . . . You girded me with strength for the battle; you made my assailants sink under me" (Ps 18:3, 39).

Are you in trouble? Do you sense yourself in the midst of enemies? Call to God. Do not delay! Get on your knees and pray. I've seen us get faithful answers right here in this place just in the last year as God tore down many enemies. I've seen evil restrained, overcome, and defeated, because our God is the same as the God in these pages.

Let's listen to what God did then. READ Acts 12:6-11. Maybe you have had such a great release as that.

Now Peter wasn't the greatest pray-er, remember? He often got distracted. Last week he couldn't concentrate; during prayer time he got hungry. In the garden of Gethsemane he fell asleep. Jesus even said to him, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour?" (Mk 14:37-38).

Once Jesus got up really early in the morning and went out to a deserted place to pray. And Peter and friends went out and hunted for him saying, "Everyone is searching for you" (Mk 1:35-36). The implication was *why are you wasting your time; we got work to do*.

We too can fall into thinking prayer is perfunctory; a waste of time, and we need to get to the "important work." Peter didn't have it all together. Maybe he fell asleep once again. Reading the next part, you might even think that most of the early believers didn't have it all together either! READ Acts 12:12-17

Let us embrace the power of prayer! We may be shocked when evil comes against us. Let us believe in our weapon so that we may not be shocked when we receive winning answers.

We may be stunned when blessing falls into our laps, but God is the victor. We honor God when we pray. Do you honor God by praying?

God makes wars cease; breaks the bow and shatters spears; God burns shields. God overcomes those who "speak friendly words to their neighbors while evil is in their hearts. Be still and know that your God is a God who is very present for you and will work for you" (Ps 46:9-10).

As I was preparing this message I got the sense that we don't always take this to heart but I want to live into expecting answers to prayer so that I am not the one that says, "You are out of your mind!"

It is so much fun to experience the victory of answered prayer. Are you praying and looking for answers?

Be still before God. Expect answers. But it's better not to orchestrate the answer! How would these people have ever been able to come up with this answer! God knows best.

Do you pray for friends or family members who are coming up against evil things that threaten their life or livelihood? PRAY! God will break chains and open doors to set you and your loved ones free! Come to prayer meeting on the first Wednesday of the month. If you think prayer is boring, come and make it lively.

Evil is inevitable but do not despair. God holds the keys to the universe. God is in charge. (Scroll through Acts 12:20-23)

We must come before Him in constant prayer and learn not to fret, get restless, give up, but "be still" in the confidence that our God hears us.

(Show Acts 12:24)

Let us be in awe of answered prayer.

AMEN