

RHODA – THE GIRL WHO ANSWERED THE DOOR

Acts 12:13,14

Often to our surprise, God answers our prayers! We ask Him, He provides ... and we are amazed! ... Why *would* God answer *our* prayers? The simple answer is ... **I Peter 3:12** the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers ... **I Jn. 5:14** this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us ... When the Lord answers our prayers in the affirmative, it is because the Holy Spirit has guided us to pray according to his will ... **Mt. 6:10** Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. ... And that is how we *are* to pray, that is, according to and in agreement with His will.

How do we know what His will is? Sometimes it is difficult to know for we do not have the same perspective *He* does. And yet the way we discover His will is to seek His glory in what we are praying for, **Mt. 6:13** For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the *glory*, for ever. ... And when we pray for His glory, the Holy Spirit leads us to pray as we ought, **Rom. 8:26** the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit [*Himself*] maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. ²⁷ And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints *according to the will of God*.

And the will of God is preeminent in every situation, including in those we do not understand. ... How do we know the will of God for our church fellowship? Here are some basic instructions. ... The writer to the Hebrews tells us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (**Heb. 10:25**). Following the Day of Pentecost, the new Christians **Acts 2:41** gladly received his word [*Peter's preaching*] and were baptized ... ⁴² And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. ... *That's* the will of God. Also, prior to Jesus ascending to Heaven, He instructed His disciples, **Mt. 28:19** Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰ Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. *That's* the will of God. ... In whatever brings God glory, empowered by the Holy Spirit, in accordance with the Word of God ... *that's* the will of God for God's people.

In the Book of Acts the early church was under severe attack. Herod Agrippa I was following in his family's opposition to Christ and His followers, **Acts 12:1** Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex [*oppress, afflict*] certain of the church. He was the grandson of Herod the Great who ordered the Bethlehem children to be murdered, and he was also the nephew of Herod Antipas who beheaded John the Baptist. A thoroughly evil family!

Acts 12:1 Now about that time ... In 44 AD a famine came upon the land, Acts 11:27 And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. ²⁸ And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. ²⁹ Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: ³⁰ Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. ... It had been fairly quiet for the Christians, with the exception of some of the leaders being told not to preach, and Stephen's martyrdom. Otherwise, it was 'quiet'.

Also, the church had grown significantly, and many of the thousands who were saved on the Day of Pentecost and the days after lived locally. As a consequence, Herod was feeling 'jittery' for he had heard they called Jesus their 'King'. Fearing a rebellion, he decided to 'cuddle up' to the Jewish leaders who were also worried about the influx of the Christians.

So, Herod started off very ominously, ² he killed James the brother of John with the sword. ... That is how the Talmud, - the Jewish rabbinical rule-book, - said anyone who led the people to worship other gods should be killed ... ³ And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also [*... with the intention of killing him too*]. (Then were the days of unleavened bread [*i.e. Passover time*].) ⁴ And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers [*la 'quaternion' was a 'shift' of four soldiers, therefore, sixteen soldiers watched over Paul, i.e. four 'shifts' of four soldiers*] to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. ... Peter was heavily guarded and would suffer the same fate as James in a few days', after all the commotion of Passover was completed. ... That was Herod's plan.

Meanwhile, a special prayer meeting was held in a private home praying for Peter to be freed from the prison. Late into the night, they earnestly prayed for God to make the release of Peter happen, prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him (v.5). ... It was how they were taught to pray, I Thess. 5:17 Pray without ceasing.

They were meeting in a home in Jerusalem belonging to John Mark's mother, Mary. They knew James had been killed. They knew Peter was to be next, and it would possibly be followed by more killings of Christians. A *slaughter* was imminent! ... And after the treachery of Judas Iscariot, there could well be more traitors lurking inside the groups of Christians! Indeed, James' death and Peter's imprisonment must have sent shockwaves across the believers.

So, Peter was in the cell, with sixteen soldiers guarding him ‘around the clock’, - two on either side of him, and two guarding the entrance to his cell. Incredibly, in those conditions he fell asleep! ... *How could* he sleep? He could sleep because he knew there would be believers praying for him, even though he was bound in chains, unable to escape, the prison doors locked ... God’s people were praying for him. ... While he was sleeping, a short distance, v.5 prayer was made *without ceasing* of the church unto God for him *!Peter!*

Unbeknownst to the people in the prayer meeting, God had sent an angel into Peter’s prison cell, and set him free. He left the jail and walked along the streets to John Mark’s mother’s home where inside, they were praying, including a young servant girl. There, all the people were pleading with God for Peter’s life to be saved. They knew how wicked Herod was.

But prayer (v.5) ... Prayer brings us to the turning point of the story. Thomas Watson, “The angel fetched Peter out of prison, but it was prayer that fetched the angel”. ... but *prayer* was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

And this young girl Rhoda is in the prayer meeting, - her eyes closed, her head bowed while God is listening to the prayers of His people. ... There’s a knock at the door. Sitting on the edge of that gathering, Rhoda got up to see who was there. ... It could have been anyone. ... It could have been the soldiers of Herod coming to arrest them all, and to throw them into prison!

As she walked towards that door, I reckon she was apprehensive, ... and approaching the door to lift the latch she calls out, “Who is there?” Then she heard Peter, and she recognised his voice. ... She would have heard Peter preach and pray ... so, she knew his Galilean accent. You can imagine her amazement for this was the man whose freedom everyone in the meeting was praying for. ... Just a moment ago she was with them pleading with God for Peter’s release from the prison cell, and now he was on the other side of that door! ... *God answered their prayer!* ... And she was so astonished, so amazed, so shocked!

This was the best place for Peter to come after getting out of prison, to the very people who had been upholding him before God ... and he wanted to tell them *God answers prayer!*

You know when you have been praying for something, and it has been on your mind for a long time, and you haven’t given up praying about it ... and then ‘out of the blue’ God answers your prayer. ... We prayed for the Lord to bring someone to purchase our church premises so we can move forward without the

increasing financial burdens associated with an old building. Someone came and offered us a price much less than what we were asking for, under rather obscure conditions, with which we were uncomfortable. ... Altogether we had many more interested parties than we could have imagined. ... We kept praying, and then someone else came ... and the solicitors or in the throes of completing the sale. ... *God answers even our prayers!*

And we— like Rhoda — are *amazed*. It's not that we don't believe God is able, because we *do* believe He is able, but we wonder why He would respond to the requests of ordinary people like us. ... *God answers prayer*. v.13 Peter knocked at the door ... 14 And ... [*Rhoda*] knew Peter's voice ...

And when she heard Peter on the other side of the door, she forgot what she had gone to the door for, *to open it!* She had prayed for Peter to be released from prison and there he was standing outside, and she opened not the gate for gladness! ... It wasn't because of fear, but it was because of gladness! ... She had been praying for this moment, but she didn't open the door because such was the gladness (*χαρά*, joy) in her heart ... *God answers our prayers!*

When we pray in His will and for His glory, He answers, and that in turn spills out into joy for His people. He is our God, our King, our Heavenly Father, and He promises, *Is. 65:24* before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. ... And when He does answer He reminds us how precious we are to Him ... even though we're still amazed He answers *our* prayers.

Rhoda was so excited she forgot to open the door. She turned and went back into the prayer meeting, and you could imagine her interrupting someone's prayer, "He's here!" "Who's here?!" ... "Peter is here!" ... She had left him standing outside! But how thrilled this young girl was that she wanted to tell the 'grown-ups' inside *God answered their prayer!* ... She ran and told them, but they didn't believe it. ... *Typical!*

"It's an angel", they said. But that made no sense for an angel could pass through a shut door! ... These people were praying without ceasing, but they would have been better praying, *Mk. 9:24* Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. ... Matthew Henry is so right, "Sometimes that which we most earnestly wish for, we are most backward to believe".

"Peter is at the door!" "Don't be silly, young girl!" The thing for which they had been praying, and they were not convinced it could happen. ... **13** And as

Peter knocked at the door of the gate ... **16** But Peter continued knocking ... It was not until Peter stood in the prayer meeting they realised God answered their prayer.

Rhoda is only mentioned once in the Bible and it is beautiful how she was the first in the meeting who witnessed the Lord answered their prayers.

In some ways, it's ironical God could get Peter out of a prison, but Peter found it hard getting into a prayer meeting! Notice though how Luke records this event, v.16 But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. ... What a message of encouragement Rhoda brought this prayer meeting for when her good news finally penetrated through to them, *they all* went to the door to witness and give thanks for how God answers prayer. ... God answers prayer in our fellowship too. He never disappoints and He often goes beyond what we even ask or think.

I have heard from some quarters our church fellowship is closing. Sadly, some who ought to know better have predicted it is inevitable. Someone sent me an email which included, "I take it a new Pastor can't be found to take on the dwindling conversation" ... I didn't even reply! ... We have a God Who raised His Son from the dead, Who brought His people out from slavery in Egypt, and bondage in Babylon, Who kept them through the centuries and millennia of cruel subjugation to their enemies, Who saved them from wickedness of Hitler, Who continues to keep them though they are surrounded by nations seeking their destruction, and He will continue to keep that same nation of Israel in their promised land ... and the God Who keeps His promises to them is the same God Who keeps His promises to those who are faithful to Him. ... Despise not the day of small things (Zech. 4:10) for 'little is much when God is in it', and 'the barrel will never run dry' as long as His people trust Him and uphold His glory ... as long as we honour His Name, preach His Word, be faithful to His commandments, and make Him known.

That is all we can do for that is what He expects us to do ... and as the story of the young girl Rhoda demonstrates, He keeps His promises! ... So, in these challenging times in the life of our fellowship, trust God to work mightily among us so that we shall bring Him the glory due onto His name. *Amen.*