

Unstoppable

(Acts 12)

3/4/20; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

I doubt anyone in here has heard of Kongo Gumi, but it is a Japanese construction company that specializes in the building of Buddhist temples.

Its headquarters were in Osaka, Japan.

In 2006, the company fell on hard times and it was purchased by Takamatsu Construction group.

But up until 2006, Kongo Gumi was the oldest continually operating company of any kind, having been in operation for over 1400 years.

According to ancient scroll that hung in company headquarters, the company began in 578 AD and was passed down through 40 generations of the same family.

The company president in 2006 was a man named Masakazu Kongo, the 50th Kongo to lead the company.

Needless to say, such longevity as a business is unheard of today.

Most companies today never make it to 5 years much less 50 years and certainly not 1500 years.

And why is that?

People change, markets change, needs change, and that usually means that businesses change or go out of business.

It takes much discipline and knowledge and courage to survive as a business in a fallen world for an extended period of time.

Though the church is not a business, the longevity of the church is remarkable.

But when you add in the survival of God's people all the way back to OT Israel, it can't be explained in human terms.

Yet we know that the survival of God's people in terms of Israel and the church is not really a human endeavor.

God has kept His people safe through the years, and tonight in Acts 12, we are going to see how God is active in preserving his people through the years.

Now remember, the book of Acts is a history of the church.

It is more descriptive than prescriptive, meaning that it is here to offer truth in principle.

We won't find many commands to follow in the book of Acts.

God simply inspired to help us understand that foundation and growth of the early church.

And from that history, we are able to see patterns in church life.

If you think back over what we have seen already in this book, we discovered a pattern of preaching in the church as Peter preached to the masses.

WE have discovered a pattern of leadership as the apostles led but then selected other to serve in other places of leadership in the church.

We have seen a pattern of fellowship and taking the Lord's Supper and baptism.

The book of Acts provides the history of the church and sets the pattern of church life.

Now, a negative pattern in the book of Acts in terms early church history has been persecution.

The church has felt the sting of opposition.

Most of that in the early church come from the Jews.

The Roman Gentiles will eventually take over that role of persecuting the church.

But the book of Acts makes it clear that the church will be persecuted.

And we have seen that persecution.

Peter and John were arrested.

The entire group of disciples were arrested and jailed.

Stephen was martyred.

And we are only been through 11 chapters.

Tonight, the persecution comes again, and it comes directly at Peter.

Now Peter has been the central character in the first part of the book of Acts.

He has preached, he had led, he has taught, he has traveled and evangelized.

But Peter has also been transformed over the last 2 chapters of Acts as he played a part in Gentiles coming to Christ.

Though Peter struggled with prejudice, God made it clear that Gentile would be saved, and Peter played a part in the salvation of Cornelius, a Roman Gentile soldier.

But tonight in Acts 12, we say goodbye to Peter.

He will show up one more time in Acts 15, but in Acts 13 until the end of the book, Paul takes center stage in Acts.

However before that happens, let's spend one more chapter with Peter as he is rushed off the stage under threat of death.

Lord willing, we will finish the chapter tonight..

I have divided it into 4 bites for us tonight.

Let's begin in verses 1-4 as...

I. The World Persecutes the Church (1-4)

1 Now about that time [a]Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. 2 And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. 3 When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now [b]it was during the days of Unleavened Bread. 4 When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four [c]squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people.

The New Testament is full of Herods.

Herod the Great was the one who tried to kill Jesus as a baby.

He is the first of the Herods.

Herod Agrippa was his grandson, and that's the one that we see here in Acts 12.

As they say, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree because Herod Agrippa is going after Jesus' followers, and he got one in verse 2.

He had James the brother of John put to death with the sword.

This James was the brother of John.

He was one of the apostles.

If you remember, it was James and John who wanted to sit beside Jesus when he ruled his kingdom.

In fact, they had their mother ask Jesus for them.

And do you remember how Jesus answered?

He told them that those seats were assigned by the Father but that they would be near Jesus in their death.

Jesus even told them that they would drink the cup of suffering and death that he would drink.

And now here in Acts 12, James is killed for his faith in Christ becoming the second martyr in the church age at the hands of Herod Agrippa.

Now understand, Herod is a Jew, but he is more of a politician.

So when he sees that James death pleased the Jews, he set his sights on Peter.

And he finds him at the feast of Unleavened Bread, which begins with Passover.

So he finds him in the spring of the year in Jerusalem where all the Jews gather for Passover.

He arrests him and jails him intends to kill him publicly after the Passover.

The Jews would love such a public execution as they saw Christians as enemies of God.

I am sure that Herod is even thinking that the death of Peter at Passover would parallel the death of Christ at Passover.

So things are all set for Peter to die.

And all I want us to see in the first 4 verses is something that we already know and that is the world's hatred of the church.

Look, I desire religious freedom.

I want to be able to preach the gospel without restriction but understand that religious freedom has rarely be the norm in society.

The norm for the church is persecution.

The fact that America hasn't seen religious persecution is very unusual and certainly a result of God's grace.

This is why I am not shocked at attempts to muzzle the church or trouble the church.

The church should expect this every time we meet.

Now that doesn't mean I throw my hands in the air and let persecution begin, but it also doesn't mean that I am surprised when the church is troubled.

This is how it has been since the beginning and this is how it will be until the rapture.

Persecution is part of the church's DNA, but so is God's protection.

Look at verse 5.

II. The Lord Protects the Church (5-17)

Verse 5..

*5 So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God. 6 On [d]the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. 7 And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands. 8 And the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and [e]put on your sandals." And he did so. And he *said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." 9 And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. 10 When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. 11 When Peter came [f]to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all [g]that the Jewish people were expecting."*

Peter is no stranger to prison escapees but this one was incredibly difficult.

Not only was sleeping between two guards, he was chained to those guards, and then there were guards at the door.

But the Lord sends an angel to wake Peter up, but keep the guards asleep.

And that is exactly what the angel does.

He pokes Peter to get him up, but never disturbs the sleeping guards.

Now isn't it interesting that Peter is sleeping so sound that the angel has to nudge him to get him up?

Not only is he sleeping between two guards on the floor most likely, he is scheduled to die the next morning.

Not exactly the ideal conditions for sound sleep.

But guess what?

Peter knew this wasn't his time to die.

Do you remember what Jesus told Peter on the beach in Galilee in John 21?

John 21:18-19.

18 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.”
19 Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He *said to him, “Follow Me!”

First of all, Peter was not an old man in Acts 12.

He was likely in his 40s here.

Second, the Jews would not be crucifying him.

He would likely be killed by a sword in the same way that Herod executed James.

So Peter is sleeping good, but the angel gets him to get him out.

For a while, Peter thinks that this is all a dream or vision but once he is outside the prison gate and the angel leaves, verse 11 says that Peter realized that the Lord was responsible for his rescue.

So what do you do when you escape prison in the middle of the night?

You go to the church.

Verse 12..

12 And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

John Mark is the author of the gospel of Mark.

In fact, many believe that God inspired Mark to write the gospel with the help of Peter.

But even if that isn't the case, Peter knew Mark well.

And Mark's mother was also a believer and a wealthy one at that.

Her home provided a safe place for the church to gather and pray for Peter, and Peter would know this.

So he heads to her house fresh out of prison.

Verse 13.

13 When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer. 14 When

she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate.

You have to love the Bible.

God simply provides a comedy break in the midst of a serious section of Scripture, as Rhoda hears Peter's voice but doesn't let him in.

Instead, she runs back inside to tell everyone that Peter is outside.

Talk about missing the forest for the trees.

But we can't be too hard on Rhoda because those inside the house praying for Peter to get out of prison don't believe it is him either..

Verse 15..

15 They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, "It is his angel."

I don't think I need to say this here, but I will anyway.

If you are going to pray for something, make sure you are paying attention because God may quickly answer that prayer.

A house full of people praying for Peter to be released from prison, yet none of them are prepared for Peter to be released that night.

Poor Peter.

He is still outside as the people inside are filled with unbelief.

So he keeps knocking..

Verse 16..

16 But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed. 17 But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, "Report these things to [h]James and the brethren." Then he left and went to another place.

Eventually, they all come to the door and see Peter, but he tells them to keep quiet.

He simply wants to let them know that God was responsible for his escape.

Which was also accomplished through their prayers.

This is the apparent paradox of prayer.

We are commanded to pray, and God uses those prayers to accomplish his will.

Absolutely remarkable that God would use the prayers of his people to carry out his sovereign, yet He does it all the time.

So Peter reports to them to encourage their prayers, but also to make communicate to the other believers in the church at Jerusalem.

The James that Peter mentions here is not the James, the brother of John, since he was killed by Herod.

This James is the half brother of Jesus.

He was not an apostle.

In fact, he only came to faith in his half brother after the resurrection.

But he did become the leader of the church in Jerusalem.

And Peter would want that church to know because Herod would probably assume they had a hand in helping Peter escape.

So Peter wants to make sure that James know that the Lord orchestrated his release and not anyone else.

Then the end of verse 17 says that Peter left and went to another place.

And we don't know where that place was.

In fact, we won't hear from Peter again in this book except for a brief moment in Acts 15.

It seems that Peter went beyond the border of Israel at this point and preached the gospel to Jews who were scattered all over the Mediterranean world.

He may have even time evangelizing Gentiles, now that his heart had been transformed to see God's grace extending salvation to them.

We simply don't know where Peter went.

He will write two letters to the church about 20 years after this.

And he will finish the race strong and die by crucifixion as Christ had told him.

The main thing to see in verses 5-17 is that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church.

God will preserve his church until the final saint has been saved and the church is raptured to heaven.

Though the culture around us is changing and becoming more and more hostile to the church, the church will survive and even thrive because the Lord is our protector.

Now that doesn't mean that He will rescue every saint from prison, but He will keep the church safe despite the storm around us.

And he will also destroy the enemy that comes attacking us..

Look at verses 18-23..

III. The World Passes Away (18-23)

18 Now when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers as to [i]what could have become of Peter. 19 When Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away to execution. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there.

After word of Peter's escape reaches Herod, he looks for someone to pay.

And that someone are the guards who were assigned to Peter that night.

Herod interviews them and then executes them.

Then Herod leaves Jerusalem and heads to Caesarea to mostly likely escape the embarrassment of having let Peter escape.

The Jews would be upset a such a blunder of the king, but those in Caesearea would either not know or not care.

So Herod heads there, but even he can make trouble there.

Verse 20..

20 Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one accord they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king's country. 21 On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the [j]rostrum and began delivering an address to them. 22 The people kept crying out, "The voice of a god and not of a man!"

Tyre and Sidon were two cities to the north of Caesarea, but they were dependent upon Caesarea for trade.

In particular, Caesarea and other parts of Israel were a main supplier of food for Tyre and Sidon, but Herod cuts off their food since he was angry with them.

So the people of Tyre and Sidon came to Caesarea to meet with Herod.

They won over his chamberlain, which was essentially Herod's right hand man who handled his affairs.

And Herod must have agree to peace only if the people of Tyre and Sidon would listen to him speak.

Needless to say, Herod was egotistical, and his ego was suffering after Peter's escape.

And having people listen to him would be just what the doctor order.

So he dresses in his royal attire and stands before the people and address them..

They “oooohhhh” and “ahhhhh”.

Most likely, they are putting on a show to win his favor, but then they tell Herod that he has the voice of a god.

Now the Jews had a long history of idol worship, but God’s discipline had always been server when Israel chased after false gods.

And for the last few hundred years, Israel never engaged in idol worship.

And now the crowd was making an idol out of Herod.

Sadly, Herod knew these things since he was Jew himself, and the more you know, the more you are accountable.

Verse 23.

23 And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and [k]died.

Though the Bible doesn't say this, Jewish historian Josephus tells us that Herod fell and worms invaded his body, covering him for 5 days before he eventually died.

Needless to say, the world may persecute the church of God but God always has the final say.

And evil always bows to God power.

Someone once said that an egg has a better chance of knocking down a granite wall than a man has of stopping the plans of God.

And I would agree.

Just ask Cain or Judas how things went when they tried to stop what God had planned.

I don't like this word or use this word often, but it stupid for anyone to think that fight against what God has willed.

And Herod is just another example of what happens to those who try to stand in God's way.

Let's end with this..

Verses 24-25..

IV. The Church Presses Onward (24-25)

24 But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.

25 And Barnabas and Saul returned [l]from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their [m]mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.

Two things to note that you already know.

#1 - Persecution is the fertilizer of church growth.

After Stephen was killed, the church spread and grew.

After James is killed and Peter is jailed, the church spreads and grows.

Everybody today has a plan to grow the church.

We literally could spend 1000s of dollars to have an expert come and tell us how to grow this church.

Most if not all of that supposed expertise would be hogwash.

The church grows as the Word grows among the church.

The church grows as it feels the heat persecutions and stays the course.

That is how you grow a church.

Plant the word, obey the word, and trust the protection of the Lord.

#2 - Evil never even delays the work of God.

If you look back to the last verse of Acts 11, it reads...

30 And this they did, sending it [aj]in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.

If you remember, the Gentile church in Antioch sent an offering to the Jewish church in Jerusalem to help with a coming famine.

Now look to the last verse of chapter 12..

25 And Barnabas and Saul returned [l]from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their [m]mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.

Honestly, it is almost as if chapter 12 wasn't needed.

It is almost as if the events of chapter 12 didn't happen.

And you see the point is simple.

Evil men do their evil, but God's work is never even delayed or thrown off course by it.

Barnabas and Saul went to deliver an offering to the Jerusalem church.

Herod tried to destroy the church, but a chapter later, Barnabas and Saul finished their mission, while God finished off Herod.

That is incredible encouragement in the midst of a world that is growing increasingly hostile to believers.

The church continues to press onward in the world.

Conclusion

So what do we learn from Acts 12?

#1 - Trouble may come to the believer.

I am so sick and tired of prosperity gospel preachers who say that salvation brings health and wealth and peace.

Let me tell you.

In Acts 12, James is killed, Peter is jailed, and the church is hurting.

And that is but one chapter of church history.

There are countless other believers and Christ Himself who experienced nothing but sorrow and heartache in this world.

I wish I could tell you that coming to Christ would ease your pain but it is likely to increase it.

Sadly, that is not the gospel that many preach today, but it is the only gospel that saves.

#2 - Trouble may go for the believer.

At the start of chapter 12, James is dead, Peter is in jail, and evil Herod is winning.

By the end of chapter 12, Peter is free, Herod is dead, and the church is growing.

Talk about a quick turnaround, but that is what the Lord can do for His people.

Even in the midst of trouble, pray and hope for the Lord to turn things around.

But even if he doesn't, He is still the Lord.

#3 - Eternal trouble has been avoided by the believer.

How can we leave this passage without speaking of the glory of the gospel.

Why is James dead?

Because he put his faith in Christ and preached the gospel.

Why is Peter in jail and then on the run?

Because he put his faith in Christ and preached the gospel?

Why is Herod dead?

Because he opposed the gospel.

Look, the good news that Christ died in the place of the guilty sinner is the greatest news because it means that the sinner can avoid eternal trouble in hell.

The gospel is why you are her tonight.

Christ has saved you, and you love his church and his word.

And you seek to obey and grow so that you can take that gospel to others.

In a sense, the history of the church is still being written.

I pray that you are part of that history and that you are putting much on the line for the gospel of Christ everyday.

He is worth it.

Let us pray.