

Extraordinary
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Acts 12:7-19

I don't know if Mark Twain really said this, but it's a powerful quote:
"The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why."

Some would say: *"That should be changed to read, the day your were born, and the day you were born again as a follower of Christ!"* That would be correct.

But before you get too theological on me, I believe those two concepts go together. So, let me re-write Twain (or whomever):
"The THREE most important days in your life are the day you were born; the day you followed Christ; and the day God revealed what you were born to do for Him."

Here's the big idea: God has a specific mission for every follower of Christ so we can participate in building His Kingdom. Before He can use us in our mission, He may have to remove some "chains" and "open some locked doors" that hold us back. Sometimes He'll do that in extraordinary ways that will surprise us!

- We read the story of Peter's miraculous "great escape" from a Jerusalem jail in Acts 12. Of course, it's a history lesson in how God displayed His extraordinary power to overcome the persecution of Rome and continue the spread of the gospel.
- In his case God unlocked literal chains and doors to free Peter to fulfill his God-given mission. And He did it in a miraculous and extraordinary way.
- I also see some real life lessons for you and me in this text.
- You and I may never be in a physical prison; but all of us need to be "freed up" to fulfill the mission we were born for.
- Let's read see what this text says; what it means; and how it should change us this week.
- First, some context:

- o Herod, the king in Jerusalem began to persecute followers of Christ with violence and death. He killed James the brother of John.
- o This Herod was the grandson of the one who murdered the male babies when Jesus was born. He was raised in Rome and was basically a power-hungry “puppet” of the Roman Empire.
- o James, who was killed in this story, was not the half-brother of Jesus; he was the brother of the apostle John.
- o After killing James, Herod’s next move to play up to the Jewish establishment was to arrest Peter. He couldn’t immediately kill Peter because it was Passover season, so he threw him in jail.

Acts 12:5–19 (ESV)

⁵ So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

Peter Is Rescued

⁶ Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. ⁷ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, “Get up quickly.” And the chains fell off his hands. ⁸ And the angel said to him, “Dress yourself and 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 followed him. 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 the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. ¹¹ 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.”

¹² When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. ¹³ And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ They said to her, “You

are out of your mind.” But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, “It is his angel!” ¹⁶ But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, 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 brought him out of the prison. And he said, “Tell these things to James and to the brothers.” Then he departed and went to another place.

¹⁸ Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. ¹⁹ And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there.

- Verse six: Peter was in maximum security. **How “maximum” was it?**
- **James was just martyred; Peter’s in jail. What do you think Peter’s state of mind was?**
- Though Peter and the church trusted God, it’s likely they were thinking he would be the next martyr. It seemed that Peter would not be released from bondage to continue his mission to spread the gospel to the world.
- What about you and me? Are we in bondage to something that’s keeping us from the unique mission God has called us to do? We’ll talk about it.
- Verse five: **How did the church respond to Peter’s situation?**
- NKJV: “constant prayer;” ESV: “very earnestly;” Message: “strenuously.”

1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NLT)

¹⁷ Never stop praying.

Ephesians 6:18 (NLT)

¹⁸ Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.

- Step number one when you need God to “break chains” and “open doors,” pray constantly, and strenuously; for yourself and for others.

- Verses 7 & 8: **How did the angel awaken Peter? What was said?**
- “Wake up! Get up! Get ready! Follow me!” **What did Peter do?**
- Verse nine: Even though he got going, **what was Peter thinking?**
- Peter was asking: “*Is this real?*” In a minute his friends will be too!
- Verse eleven: **What realization did Peter come to?**
- When God breaks “chains” and opens doors, we may find it hard to believe at first. Then we’ll see, “*It’s really true!*”
- Verse twelve: Peter immediately reported this miracle to his prayer partners. When God comes through for you, tell your prayer team.
- There’s some humor in this scene in verses 13-15, **what happened?**
- When God breaks “chains” and opens doors, even His faithful people may be amazed. Then they will praise Him for such amazing deliverance.
- Peter gave them instructions, and then it says he went to “another place.” **Why did Peter keep moving?** Note: It doesn’t say he went into hiding.
- God didn’t just open the door to save Peter’s life; he released him for the further spread of the gospel. He was unchained to continue his mission.
- So, how does this apply to you and me this week?
- God has a specific mission for every follower of Christ to participate in building His Kingdom. I believe a follower of Christ is most fulfilled and God is pleased when we’re engaged in that mission.
- Before we can fulfill our mission, God may have to remove some “chains” and “open some locked doors” that hold us back. Sometimes He’ll do that in extraordinary ways that will surprise us!
- **What is the first “bondage” only God can deliver us from?**
- Paul writes in Romans 6:17–18 (NLT)

¹⁷ Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you. ¹⁸ Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living.

- **What are some other kinds of “bondage” that might keep us from living out the life God has for us? How can we get free?**
- Maybe it’s not our own “chains” but some “locked doors” with others keeping us from sharing the gospel. We should be praying for God to open doors then be sensitive to when they open and we can share.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- God has a specific mission for every follower of Christ so we can participate in building His Kingdom.
- Before He can use us in our mission, He may have to remove some “chains” and “open some locked doors” that hold us back.
- Sometimes He’ll do that in extraordinary ways that will surprise us!
- What “chains” are holding you back? Is it fear? Is it a self-defeating belief that God can’t use someone like you? Is it inability to get past your past? Maybe it’s some emotional or relational bondage based on how others have hurt you in the past? Of course, none of us can even begin to live the life God has for us until we trust Jesus as our Savior and Lord and be freed from the bondage of sin and death.
- How can I get started living out the mission I was born for? We need to do what Peter and the early church modeled for us:
 - Like Peter, we need to WAKE UP; GET READY; and GET GOING!
 - WAKE UP! Do you need to be aroused from a spiritual nap?
 - GET READY. Get into God’s word to be prepared for your unique mission.
 - GET GOING. The Christian life isn’t lived on the sidelines.
 - PRAY strenuously and constantly for God to remove any chains that hold you back. Pray for God to open locked doors so we can love others; serve others; and share the gospel.

- o You will be amazed at how God will use you, and how He will open doors to other people that you thought were welded shut!
- o WAKE UP; GET READY; and GET GOING to live the life you were born to live for Christ!