

THE POWER OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER IN CRISIS TIME

Acts 12:1-7

Our text described the martyrdom of Apostle James one of the twelve disciples of Christ and son Zebedee, and how the intercessory prayer of the church on behalf of Peter averted his being subjected to the same fate. We from it learn about the necessity and importance of intercessory prayer in the ministry of the church and in the life of every follower of Christ.

For proper understanding of this message, we shall consider three subtopics:

1. Passionate prayer of saintly men
2. Purposeful prayer of believing church
3. Powerful deliverance in crisis time

1. Passionate prayer of saintly men

Acts 12:1-5, Habakkuk 1:13a, Proverbs 15:8, Isaiah 1:4, 15, Psalm 66:18, Proverbs 28:13, James 5:13-16

In our text, Luke the writer presented clear and positive association and relationship between corporate prayer meeting that the church held and Peter's deliverance. While we cannot precisely state that the absence of such a meeting caused the martyrdom of James, the early church knows as we also know today that the eight days' Passover Feast period, in line with Jewish custom, presented a small window of opportunity for the church to pray for Peter's deliverance. They took advantage of it, prayed, and God delivered him.

According to the scriptures, effectiveness in prayer or should I say effectiveness in entire Christian living demands saintliness, godliness and righteous living. The eye of the Lord is so pure that He cannot behold evil; He cannot look on iniquity. Habakkuk 1:13a. The sacrifice (including prayer) of the wicked is abomination in the sight of God Proverbs 15:8. Sinfulness, waywardness and wickedness is in part responsible for many cases of unanswered prayers Psalm 66:18. God spoke through Prophet Isaiah that when sinners spread out their blood-stained hands in prayer before Him, He will hide His face from them Isaiah 1:4, 15. On the other hand, believers should know and note that saintliness or godliness does not excuse men from coming to God to ask for what they need and receive. Prayer is key and central in receiving from God.

Apostle James stated that some people did not receive because they did not ask. He also stated that a righteous man must pray and pray fervently to obtain great, powerful and wonderful result James 5:16(NLT). To get the best from God in our walk with Him, we need to deal with sin and walk in holiness Isaiah 1:16-19, Proverbs 28:13, Job 22:21-27. We also need to lead a prayerful life. Men who come to God to ask and receive must lift up holy hands in prayers 1Timothy 2:8. For a righteous man to be delivered, to live in

freedom from life's afflictions, he must be a praying man Psalm 34:19. God ordained that to get the best in life, holy men must be supplicating men, and supplicating men who sincerely wanted God's attention at prayer time must be holy men James 5:16. What God joined together, let no man put asunder.

2. Purposeful prayer of believing church

Acts 12:5, Ezekiel 22:29-31, 2 Chronicles 16:12-13, 2 Kings 1:1-6, Psalm 127:1, John 15:5, Luke 18:1 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2

"Peter therefore was kept in prison, but prayer was made without ceasing of the church to God for him" Acts 12:5. This is intercessory prayer. Intercessory prayer is praying on behalf of others motivated by love and compassion. It involves praying for individuals, families, communities and nations. Often guided by the Holy Spirit, believers through it express our concern and care for others as we request on their behalf for divine intervention. Nehemiah, Abraham, Samuel, Moses, Paul the Apostle and even our Lord Jesus Christ at various times did. They requested for help, healing, protection, blessings, and deliverance for specific individuals or groups of people concerning whom they have burdens. Prophet Ezekiel linked absence of intercessors with incidence and perpetuation of social disorder, chaos and crisis Ezekiel 18:29-31. A society in which believers live selfish lives is in danger.

Believers always and will always have prayer points, and a reason to pray. For as long as multitude remains in spiritual darkness and prison, lost and facing the prospect of eternal death, we must pray. Prayer should be a believer's first, primary and main response to problems and crisis. All other responses should flow from it, from the leading of the Spirit in response to it. When confronted with challenges, prayer and praying should not be an afterthought or additional strategy. It should be our first line response 2 Chronicles 16:12-13, 2 Kings 1:1-6. If a believer or a church does not pray, it may be because they do not realise that they have problem or how serious the problems they are in is.

Sin is a problem; the greatest problem in the world. For as long as sinning problem exists in the world, there will be need for prayer; prayer by the sinner, prayer for the sinner, and prayer for those that are in danger of being affected or influenced by the sinner's waywardness and sinfulness. Otherwise, anything can happen at any time, happen to the sinner as result of devils' constant hunt and/or God's displeasure and to others around him. Sinful men are slaves to Satan 1 John 3:8, Ephesians 2:1-3. We must pray to be delivered from sin, from sinful and wicked men, and from Satan. We must pray to be delivered from evil and temptation. Even our glorification requires prayer. It is he that endures to the end that shall be saved Luke 21:36, Philippians 1:6. Actually we need prayer even for the most basic and simple activities of life Psalm 127:1, John 15:5. Men always ought to pray Luke 18:1 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2.

3. Powerful deliverance in crisis time

Acts 12:5-7, Psalm 50:15, Acts 5:18-19, Malachi 3:6, Acts 12:11, 2 Timothy 4:16-18, Daniel 6:20-22

The phrase "*without ceasing*" in our text described the earnestness, fervency and duration of the church's intercession for Peter's deliverance. It means hot, glowing, boiling, bubbling, passionate and persevering; praying till the early morning hours when Peter will be brought out for mock, grandstanding trial, only for show, to be followed by execution. The persistent nature of their prayer revealed how the church refused to give Peter up. They wrestled over his life till the last day and last minute. They understand that men may be imprisoned, prayer cannot. When every other gate is shut and locked, the gate to heaven remains wide open. In times of public danger, we have God as our hiding place Psalm 50:15. Previous supernatural deliverance that Peter enjoyed may have helped their faith and motivated their response Acts 5:18-19. Previous miracles in our own lives or that of others have a way of enhancing our conviction and faith on the power of prayer and possibilities through prayer because God remains the same Malachi 3:6.

Eventually Peter was delivered. Saint Luke the historian recorded his testimony. Peter said "... Now *I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews*" Acts 12:11. We have in this story and in his testimony clear proof that believers' importunate intercessory prayers can frustrate enemy plans, effect deliverance in situations that men thought impossible and hopeless, remove chains and shackles, open prison doors and lead and guide men to a land of freedom to be and to do all that God ordained. Let it be written in gold, always to be remembered that "*God's praying people are prevailing and powerful people*". Now it is your turn, the hour of your deliverance has come. Rise up and call upon the name of the Lord now!