

Exodus: A Sequel

Acts 12

- Acts 12!
 - *excited for this morning, this text!*
 - *we got some story time ahead of us, great story*
 - *this is a real story, really happened in history*
 - *but it's also told by God - it is God's Word*
 - *means its got Holy Spirit power in it, we ready?*
 - *we're going to read the entire chapter together as we go,*
 - *read verse 23*
 - *pray before we begin*

Intro

- **my wife and I just finished watching a classic pair of movies - Terminator and Terminator 2**
 - **sequels are this interesting phenomenon**
 - some are good
 - some ruin the original
 - some are better (Toy Story 3)
 - wife and I are watching Terminator 1 & 2
- **here's the thing about sequels**
 - it gives us more time with the characters and the stories we love
 - we already know these characters, we already have this history, we already have an idea how its going to end
- **the Bible employs this type of thing**
 - in fact, every story told in the Old Testament - is retold in a sense in the life of Jesus
 - **Abraham & Isaac** - retold in Jesus, carrying the wood he'd be sacrificed on his back
 - **David** - a great king, who loves the Lord, and teaches the kingdom to worship

- **maybe the most famous story is the story of the Exodus**

- the people of God, enslaved by an oppressive king
- an unlikely hero, performs supernatural judgment and delivers his people
- an angel of the Lord kills all the firstborn unless your house is covered in the blood of the lamb
- this leader leads the people into the wilderness, through the impossible obstacle of the Red Sea
- judgment is wrought on this king
- the people are brought to a promised land of rest

**these stories are told and retold in Scripture - they are to form us - give us categories to understand the world, and our life with Jesus. Help us understand suffering and oppression, God's hand to deliver and save, God's judgment of evil*

**this morning, Luke and the Holy Spirit tell us a story in the early church - that is a mini version of the Exodus, a sequel of sorts*

- **Exodus 12 - Exodus, A Sequel**

- an wicked king is oppressing the people of God
- Peter is in chains
- then comes the night - the very night before Peter was to be executed, the VERY NIGHT the Jews are eating the unleavened bread to remember the night of Passover...
- an angel of the Lord comes again, and leads the way out of bondage
- he breaks Peter's chains, and impossible barriers like the very iron gates of the prison part of their own accord
- God delivers his people, and the oppressor is judged in an almost Old Testament plague type of way

- **this storyline of Exodus - is to shape how we think about such issues such as suffering and evil and God's hand of deliverance**

- **this, the story of Exodus, is really the story of the Bible**
- **it's the story of your own salvation if you've been delivered by God**
 - **there are three great acts in this story: Suffering, Deliverance, Judgment**

**verses 1-5, the first act: Suffering & Oppression*

Verse 1-5 The People of God Will Suffer

- this story begins, as any good story does, with a really bad dude - Herod
 - *who's Herod? many Herod's (4), all were bad dudes*
 - **Herod the Great: Ruled 47-4 BC** (built the Temple, ruled when Jesus was born, killed all the baby boys for fear of Jesus)
 - **Herod Antipas: Ruled 4 BC-39 AD** (beheaded John the Baptist, participated in the execution of Jesus)
 - **Herod Agrippa I: Ruled AD 37-44** (persecutor of the church in Acts 12)
 - **Herod Agrippa II: Ruled AD 50 -100** (participated in Paul's trial in Acts 26)

**read verses 1-3*

- **it's easy to pass over important stuff when we read these things in the Bible**
 - but James, one of the 3 closest disciples to Jesus was just killed
 - just like that
 - what?
 - James just dies?
 - what for?
 - just at a whim of a wicked man?
 - which is profound because...
- **sometimes our suffering feels so pointless**
 - like really?
 - sometimes suffering feels so meaningless, so sudden, just like that, a phone call, an accident, and everything is different
 - does anyone even notice or see or care?
- **As a child of God, suffering is never pointless.**
 - We don't live in an arbitrary universe.
 - God works all things according to the counsel of his will.
 - even the foolish whims of a wicked king - are like water in the hands of God - and God turns is exactly how he wishes

- **Jame's suffering fulfilled an unexpected purpose**

- *remember the time James and his brother John came to Jesus...*

- I want to sit at your right hand
- will you drink the cup? you will...
 - **James just drank the cup, and guess where he found himself that day - at the right hand of Jesus, on a throne prepared for him**
 - "if we suffer with him, we will reign with him" 2 Tim 2:12
- **a surprise about suffering - suffering is a direct path to Jesus**
 - it strips everything else away, so that all you have, all that remains is Jesus
 - sometimes it's your life
 - other times, it puts everything else in life in perspective - this is all passing, rubbish as Paul put it - compared to Jesus
 - I'm young, have suffered little, but there have been seasons - when the pressure and fire was on - and I've never longed for eternity and Jesus more
 - **so while we see James simply pass before our eyes, we know it was not in vain**

**read verses 4-5*

- the suffering of the church began gradually, with some unnamed members of the church
 - then it progressed to the death of James
 - now Peter is in prison
 - God is prepping the church every step -
 - prepping the church for more suffering
 - teaching them to respond in prayer
- **"sometimes suffering is gradual, because it training to become more like Jesus"**
 - **suffering is training to make us like Jesus**
- there's something else going on here
 - doesn't it seem a bit unfair that James would so suddenly be killed, but Peter would be arrested,
 - and as we've already read - delivered!

- this is important training for the Christian as well -

- **sometimes suffering feels unfair**

- why? why God? why deliver Peter and not James?
- why do some Christians suffer more or in different ways?
 - we don't know
 - but let God's Word here prepare you for future suffering
 - **it is coming, and it will often feel unfair**
 - let Peter's words he would write to a suffering church guide you
 - **"So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good" 1 Peter 4:19**

**these Christians received suffering as all these things - as intentionally designed by God, as an opportunity to be made more like Jesus, as a test - to respond in prayer, in faith to God...they committed themselves to a faithful God...*

- **Verse 5 - turning point in the story - prayer**

- **suffering is often a tool to teach us to pray**

- it gets us to a point of desperation - where our best hope is the LORD
- this is how the deliverance begins in Exodus as well
 - **"During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew." Exodus 2:23-25 ESV**
- *sometimes suffering is sudden like with James, yet sometimes it is gradual - because God is allowing us time to respond in prayer, to ask for relief, to cry out to him, to trust that he is somehow in control, and able to adjust our circumstances*
 - when you cry out to God in your pain - God hears, and he remembers his character and covenant to you his child
 - and hear me - prayer moves the hand of God
 - in fact, it's God's favorite way to act - in response to the prayers of his people

**the first act of Suffering is up, and the next act of Deliverance comes*

Verse 6-19 God is Our Deliverer

**read each verse as it comes*

Read Verse 6 “...that very night...Peter sleeping...between two soldiers...two chains...sentries...”

- **Sovereign timing of God**

- ***because God is sovereign, we can sleep***

- “Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat - for he grants sleep to those he loves” Psalm 127:1-2

- Peter learned this one from Jesus himself

- Peter trusted the Lord

- if its my time to go, its my time, if not, he can deliver me

- I can sleep

- anxiety, busy work schedules, trying to make everything ok - it's in vain

- God offers us relief from this

- **the Bible is so full of stories of desperation & deliverance**

- The Red Sea!

- Jerusalem surrounded by hundreds of thousands of soldiers

- Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego in the furnace

- Peter in prison

- **desperation is the very place God loves to show himself strong for those who would trust him**

- **Exile, everything, everyone captured**

- *God's Word to one faithful & fearful man - Ebed-melech*

- *“Behold, I will fulfill my words against this city for harm and not for good, and they shall be accomplished before you on that day. But I will deliver you on that day, declares the LORD, and you shall not be given into the hand of the men of whom you are afraid. For I will surely save you, and you shall not fall by the sword, but you shall have your life as a prize of war, because you have put your trust in me, declares the LORD” Jeremiah 39:16-18*

- **if in the judgment of an entire nation - the Lord gives special attention to one individual, he certainly will hear you and deliver you if you trust him!**

- like Rahab in Jericho, you will be spared if you put your trust in the Lord

• **“The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all”
Psalm 34:19**

• **no, you don't understand my situation**

- these are great stories for the Bible
 - but I have real rent to be paid
 - my history, my wounds of bitterness, my upbringing - you don't understand

• **let's be real - we feel the pressure - and we DON'T do what those who saw God's deliverance did**

- we go and take care of it ourselves
 - **as long as you try and take care of yourself, be your own God, be your own provider, be your own deliverer - you will NEVER experience the deliverance of God**
 - ***the Bible is also full of stories of those who would NOT trust God's deliverance***
 - the same story of Exile - king Zedekiah, did not trust God, and things fell apart, he was captured trying to escape to Egypt, had his eyes gouged out, life ended in tragedy

• **let's be even more real - often these trials are our excuse for sin**

- **“I have to live with this person who isn't my spouse - rent is just too much!”**
- **“I have to lie about income on taxes”**
- **“I have to keep my money - I can't afford to tithe or be generous”**
 - a struggle for us - was having children, on a youth pastor and teacher's salary in this area
 - the Lord convicted us - children are a blessing, don't fear, I will provide for you
 - and he did! in multiple ways!

• **Christian - you are a person of Faith - who follows the Living God. He is as alive as he ever was. He is as able to provide for you as he ever was.**

- **I wish we could hear Peter say -**
 - ***I was sleeping in a prison, chained to two soldiers with soldiers standing right outside my cell watching - and God delivered me***

- I wish we could hear Moses say -
 - *I had an army behind me, and 2 million homeless people standing at the shore of an ocean - and God delivered me*
- I wish we could hear David say -
 - I was a teenager with a slingshot - and God delivered me
- I wish we could hear Lazarus say -
 - *I was dead. Like literally dead. Not breathing. For 4 days. And Jesus rescued me from the jaws of death*

Read Verse 7 “...angel...struck Peter...Get up quickly...and the chains fell off”

- No chain, no circumstance, no person can stop God’s deliverance
 - no bondage is powerful enough to withstand his power to deliver
 - chains fall off
 - addictions
 - past guilt and shame
 - rent, illness - it’s nothing to him
- **look at me: God is able to deliver you today**
 - he is able to deliver you from yourself, from your sin, your wounds, your needs
 - God is always able to deliver you

Read Verse 8 “And the angel said...’wrap your cloak around you and follow me”

- **always follow your deliverer**
 - **why would we get delivered, then go our own way?**
 - **often we wander back into the cell, put the chains back on**
- *“Those who are delivered out of a spiritual imprisonment must follow their deliverer, as Israel when they went out of the house of bondage did; they went out, not knowing whither they went, but whom they followed” Matthew Henry*
 - where am I going Jesus?
 - you don’t need to know - you just need to follow your deliverer
 - he’s your shepherd. he’s delivered you. surely he can lead you. stick with him, trust his Word, he’ll lead the way

Read Verse 9-11 “...he did not know what as being done...was real...”

- there are times when we follow the Lord when it seems to good to be true
 - “When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream” Psalm 126:1

Read Verse 12-17 “...where may were gathered and were praying”

- imagine this scene...
 - “Oh God, please deliver Peter, you are able!...”
 - knock on the door...it’s Peter
- aren’t we funny?
 - we believe in God, we know he’s powerful, we pray
 - and when he actually answers - what we were specifically were praying for - even in that moment we have unbelief
 - “No! There’s no way it’s Peter!”
 - “It must be his angel”
 - they start making up weird theology before they simply believed that God answered their prayer!
 - God is real! He answers prayer!

**verse 17 reminds us of the main point: “...how the Lord had brought him out...” (vs 17)*

- **remember the main point here: GOD delivered**
 - Peter knew he had no part in this, he was asleep
 - he simply did what he was told
 - it was the Lord who delivered
 - our God is a great deliverer

Verse 18-25 God Judges The Oppressor

**read 18-22*

- **Herod's Wickedness**

- **wanted to please man (vs 3)**

- the reason he imprisoned Peter was because it made everyone happy he killed James
 - Oh! The crowd likes this evil, I'll do even more!
 - hear me church: the fear of man is a trap

**and it leads to another type of wickedness*

- **oppressed the innocent (vs 3)**

- when pleasing people rules your life, oppression is the result
 - you'll do whatever it takes to keep the crowd happy

- **this is how oppression happens on a personal level, and a systemic level (keep? gentle)**

- babies are killed to keep the constituency happy
- human beings are called impersonal names like "illegal aliens" rather than the Biblical sojourner, to keep the constituency happy
 - this matters church - we're willing to say the law is unjust when it comes to the oppression of some people - unborn babies - but then we turn and claim the law when it comes to oppressing other people - the sojourner
 - I know it's complicated, I know we're already generous as a nation - I'm mostly speaking to the language and attitude by the church - towards people - are we compassionate, gracious, generous, defending the weaker and poor?
 - **when pleasing people rules your life, oppression is the result**

- **accepted the praises of man (vs 22)**

- "the voice of a god!"
- A Jewish historian also tells this story
 - he also mentions Herod's royal robes - he tells us that Herod's robes were made "wholly of silver and of a contexture truly wonderful"
 - he adds that when Herod stood up to address the crowd in the morning light, the robe shone so brightly that they began to hail him as a god
 - **whereas Peter gave all the credit and glory to God, here Herod simply receives these praises**
 - **and God judges him for it, on the spot**

**read vs 23*

- *God will make things right*
 - **and what about this whole “eaten by worms” (vs 23)**
- Dr. A Rendle Short, a professor of surgery, wrote a book called “The Bible and Modern Medicine”
 - in it he talks about a very common illness in those times - intestinal worms
 - often form a tight ball in the intestines, does not allow anything to pass through the intestines, and is extremely painful
 - **it is likely this painful disease is how God struck down Herod**
- **every sin ever committed is punished by God**
 - **either on the cross, or on that day when every person will stand before God**
- **and yet it ends “But the Word of God continued to spread and flourish” (vs 24)**
 - this chapter begins with James struck dead, the Peter imprisoned and Herod triumphing
 - and it ends with Herod struck dead, Peter free, and the Word of God is triumphing
 - evil has its day, but it never wins
 - Jesus is building his church
 - his word will spread and flourish
 - as crazy as it sounds to our modern ears, and our modern sensibilities, God and His Word will spread and flourish, and our culture and it’s rulers will pass away
 - **who would have predicted the fall of Herod, of the Roman Empire, the British Empire? Who can imagine a day when The United States is but another drop in the bucket of nations that have faded from glory?**
 - **Jesus, and his kingdom, his church, his Word will spread**

Gospel Application

- area that you’re in chains
- Christian, area you’ve walked back into your cell
- maybe you’ve been a Herod - oppressing, abusing, proud, fearing people
 - Jesus is a great deliverer
 - he has broken the power of sin through his death on the cross
 - let’s come to him - communion, remember his love, his sacrifice
 - let’s worship the King of Kings