

"GOD IS IN CONTROL"

(Acts 12:1-17)

(Chuck Swindoll)

I wish the application of this passage were simple. I wish I could say the enduring lesson is this: "The God of impossible circumstances will accomplish the impossible when you pray hard enough." But we all know that reality is more complicated than that. Even during this remarkable, unusual period when Holy Spirit miracles happened often, the church understood that Peter would most likely die by the sword before sunset the next day. They believed God, but they had seen their friend Stephen stoned to death, and they had just recently lost James the brother of John, one of the Twelve.

So, what do we learn from the incredulous believers who prayed and, to their shock, received a miraculous fulfillment of their greatest desires? How often have we prayed for the impossible, trusting God's ability, only to mourn our disappointment? While we live in a different time and our experiences will not necessarily duplicate theirs, I find two imperatives to apply.

First, *ask God for what you want—and be bold!* Too often we temper our requests—even good, godly requests like the healing of a friend or the restoration of a failing marriage—perhaps to protect ourselves from disappointment, or to pray responsibly, or to avoid presuming upon God, or to pray within the bounds of what we imagine the Lord's will might be: "Lord, if it be Your will, restore this failing marriage."

"If it be Your will ... ?" Really? Pray boldly for what is good. Don't hold back. Don't qualify your requests. God's sovereignty isn't threatened and His goodness isn't compromised if you plead earnestly—supplicate shamelessly—for good to prevail. He may not choose to alter the circumstances. He may allow a Stephen to suffer unjustly. He may allow a wicked authority to deprive the church of a godly leader. Nevertheless, He will honor your earnest desires, if not in the manner you hope, then in some unexpected way you cannot foresee.

Second, *trust the sovereignty and goodness of God to prevail.* The people in the home of Mary gathered to pray for Peter. We don't know the content of their prayers, but some must have asked God for a miraculous release, just like the earlier release. Clearly, however, no one really expected to see Peter alive again, or they wouldn't have been so dubious when he knocked. Still, they trusted God.

We can't expect the Lord always to do as we ask or to give us exactly what we want. (In my own prayers, I stopped telling God how to fulfill my requests a long time ago.) Even so, we can be sure He will always do what is right and will always act in the long-term best interests of everyone involved. No matter how your circumstances turn out after earnest prayer, assure yourself with these words—repeat them as often as necessary: The Lord is right in all His ways (see Deut. 32:4 and Dan. 4:37).

