

Main Point: 2020 is a perfect year for God to do big things in your life, and in His church. The chaos and disruption in our lives and our world puts us completely at God's mercy. This is right where He wants us to be and give us an opportunity to experience His power in us and to share His glory through us.

- I. Intro – Greetings from the Source church in Uganda! I can't get back to my family, but my situation is in God's control and it is His timing.
  - A. People's response to 2020: Can we skip it already?
    - Can we skip 2020 like Apple skipped the iPhone 9?
    - On Change.org there is a petition circulating to skip 2020
  - B. Today, we turn to Acts 12. Open your bibles...
    - We will read Acts 12:1-19, w/ short stops along the way
    - If we think 2020 is bad, it was much worse for Christians in Jerusalem and Judea, just about 13 years after Jesus was killed.
  - C. We see in Chapter 11 that this is a time of famine – the church at Antioch took an offering for Christians at Jerusalem –
  - D. NOW, CH 12, adds persecution to this!
    - King Herod – grandson of Herod the Great
  - E. As bad as 2020 has been for many of us, what we are going through can't hold a candle to what the church was experiencing then!

*Acts 12* <sup>1</sup> About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. <sup>2</sup> He killed James the brother of John with the sword, <sup>3</sup> and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.

*This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. <sup>4</sup> And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.*

Unleavened Bread – 7 days after Passover.

- Jewish people celebrate deliverance from Egypt by sacrificing a lamb.
- Passover is when Jesus died. CHRISTIANS celebrate their deliverance from sin and death through Jesus, the Passover lamb who was sacrificed for them.
- KING HEROD wanted to make PETER a sacrificial lamb, an offering to the GOD OF POPULARITY – same god of political rulers (and would-be rulers) to this day.
  - 4 squads of 4 soldier each – Herod almost certainly heard about the first time when the Apostles miraculously escaped prison (Acts 5)!
  - They were not making the same mistake twice! And they chained him to the GUARDS.

*<sup>5</sup> So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. <sup>6</sup> 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.*

- Peter has been in prison before! He had been threatened with death before.
- He KNOWS Jesus can rescue him! He's seen that before – LIVED it before!
- So he is sound asleep, resting!
- Which explains why he has such a hard time waking up!

*<sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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."*

- You can almost visualize the scene that Luke wrote down:
- Angel appears [LIGHTS ON!] and stands there, but Peter is snoring away!
- Angel has to strike him to get him to wake up, and then:
  - ‘Peter, chains are off - Dress yourself...’
  - Put on your sandals...
  - Get your cloak on...
  - Now follow me...

*<sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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.”*

- Peter doesn’t know if he’s awake or asleep, thinks he is seeing an apparition
- Finally, safely out on the streets, the cool air of the early morning seems to wake him up!

*<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. <sup>14</sup> 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.*

- This is amazing detail, Rhona is so happy she can’t think straight! Clearly Peter told Luke (who wrote this story) this story.
- What is really amazing - Rhona recognizes his voice!
- Shows why Peter knew where to go, shows a LOT about this house
- Mary’s house – a true Christian home, the Christians gathered together
  - Time of persecution - Real COURAGE to open her home
  - Time of Famine – Mary was doubtless providing for and feeding many of the Christians, who were often poor and lower class!
  - God has given her the gift of abundance; she was using that to serve God’s church.

*<sup>15</sup> 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!” <sup>16</sup> But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed.*

*<sup>17</sup> But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison.*

- People are excited and asking questions and probably jumping for joy, but when it is time to speak Peter silences them.
- Sharing a testimony of God moving & God working =  
time for BREATHELESS SILENCE, for HANGING ON TO every word, SOAKING IN the glorious glimpse of God that we are being given!
- What can you say? God did this! Me? I got nothing!

Today, everybody has something to say.

- Social media amplifies voices, everybody’s voice, but most often the loudest and even the most obnoxious or opinionated voices are the ones that get heard.

I interact w/ America – with you – through social media – it is not pretty!

- You may believe you are a kind person – you may even be right! MAKE SURE your re-posts/forwards/tweets reflect that!
- WHAT DO YOU SOUND LIKE ON SOCIAL MEDIA? What voice do you have on the internet?
- We do a lot of talking to each other through the internet.
  - The internet and social media amplify talking into shouting,
  - It does NOT amplify HEARING, so turn it into LISTENING.
- So practice the spiritual art of Listening. Listen through the fear, listen through the fire.
- Take a cue from Africans – they never call if they can see you face to face, they will never send a message if they can call & hear you.

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*(vs 17 continued) And he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers." Then he departed and went to another place. <sup>18</sup> Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. <sup>19</sup> 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.*

#### PASSING THE BATON

- 'Went to another place' - but Luke doesn't tell us where.
- Peter also departs from the book of Acts – in the next chapter, the Holy Spirit's ministry through Paul takes center stage.
- Peter fades into background. The baton is handed over.
- Part of doing that is Peter sharing his testimony - a testimony of God's faithfulness, of God's deliverance, of God's trustworthiness!  
A testimony of how God has led us and taught him.

Now, Acts 12 is passing the baton

From Peter to Paul, ALSO from the Jews as the messengers of God's salvation, as the missionary nation... to God's work in and through the Gentiles.

- Antioch – provides for the Jewish church in famine
- Believers were first called Christians as Antioch
- The Antioch church becomes the mother of mission

The American church is in a season of passing the baton.

We have been blessed with resources

we have testimonies to share of God's faithfulness and provision and deliverance.

African Christians, Uganda is one of the youngest countries on earth, average age is 16. It is a source of life, there are many young Christians there. They are serving God.

We need to pass the baton.

But HOW DO WE DO THAT? Like Peter does here! Shares his testimony of what God has done to all the believers in the room and says pass it on!

- EBC has an amazing testimony of God's faithfulness, of God's salvation, to share.

REWORK - 2020 is right where God wants us! A perfect year for God to do big things in your life, and in His church. ONCE IN A LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY! WHY NOW?

- The chaos and disruption in our lives and our world puts us completely at God's mercy.
- This is right where He wants us to be, and give us an opportunity to experience His POWER IN US ... doing something you could NEVER do for yourself.

#### II. Personal Application

## A. Personal disruption

1. Because it is only when Peter was in Prison that we get to see his sleeping, filled with PEACE, filled with the Fruit for the Spirit.
2. When circumstances lock us down, RUIN our PLANS, our natural reaction is to run around picking up the pieces, & try to rebuild them into something that looks like a kind-of scaled down version of the original. RESIST that!
3. Drop the pieces and Embrace Jesus!
4. These broken pieces are an opportunity – He is trying to talk to us! Listen:
  - Remember a thought, an idea, a dream, you had about what you could do for God? But life was just happening too fast to seriously consider it, maybe it just seemed impossible (too difficult, too costly, just plan too risky)
  - OR maybe it's time to Listen to Him afresh: 'Jesus, my ears are open.'
    - NOW is the time to say 'what prevents me from that? Is that really an impossibility, or just an obstacle?'
    - Now is the time to take that first step on the journey.
5. At the end of it all, when we finally wake up with a new and cool breeze on our face, we will have no choice but to say 'Now I KNOW that it is God who saved us!' ONLY GOD could have done this because I was in chains!
6. DANGER is that we let this opportunity pass
  - a. We know that a cool breeze will come again
  - b. The president that we vote for will be elected
  - c. The world will find a vaccine
  - d. NO, do not let this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity pass!
  - e. God wants to give you an amazing testimony in 2020!

NOBODY looks good in this story!

7. Peter does not come across all that well in the details – only God looks good!
8. Rhona – so happy she cannot think straight, giddy irresponsible teenager
9. Disciples – look even worse – they do not believe Rhona, do not believe God was answered the prayers that they were praying!

God is the only one who looks good in this story!

## III. Our Church application

1. Our church – not go back to the hotel we rented. As church elders, we prayed and felt God wants us to take a step forward.
2. What can we do as a church? Feed, save for missions, sustain families around us that are suffering.
3. Mission Home-made plans, then virus. Everything stopped. Prayed
4. Mission Home Video – where God has been leading US during this time of lockdown.

## IV. Video application

1. My brother Sam Opolot asked 'Is this something God is asking you to be a part of?'
  - a. That is a rhetorical question (not sure Sam meant it that way)
  - b. Because the answer is YES
2. Pray! When Peter was in prison, 'earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.'

- Earnest prayer!

- Urgent prayer!
  - Pray NOW, before your life get back to normal or even a new normal!
3. WHEN airports open & travel is possible, come with an EBC team
- a. If you want to be a part of what God is doing in East Africa, come share YOUR testimony of what God has done for you in 2020!
  - b. Share what God has done for EBC, how he has brought you to the cusp of finishing an AMAZING building project, with no debt! That could be so encouraging to our church, who are at the far side of this!
4. Rescuing angels or do you have closed doors?
- I had big plans for this year for our Church, for our Mission Discipleship Class, big plans for our family to come to the USA this summer and do a giant road trip around the US to see family and friends everywhere. And then all of that blew up.
  - And the timing felt like it could not have been worse! I was a little bit worried. I had a pit in my stomach, can you relate?
    - It was the day of a small prayer meeting when I saw some message on Facebook about skipping or cancelling 2020.
    - Prayer meeting @ Bernadette's home, Bernadette is a Godly woman like Mary.
    - God impressed on me that 2020 was NOT a lost year, a worthless and wasted year. And I was convicted.
    - Then Bernadette shared from Acts 12, and I was filled with JOY
  - I don't know what God is doing – all I know that in some ways my heart was in lockdown early this year, and God has freed me from those chains.
    - Don't know if I will be met with a Rescuing Angel, or if I will be met with a closed door that should be opened
    - Sharing this message with you because I believe God asked me to.
    - Because I KNOW He has BIG plans this year – he has you right where he wants you to be – in a cell, in chains, but trusting in our God who is not in lockdown!

PRAY