

Sound Asleep!

Joe Slater

No, this article isn't about sleeping in church! Actually, it's about sleeping in prison – the night before you are to be executed.

Herod Agrippa I (not to be confused with his son, Herod Agrippa II, before whom Paul gave his defense) had already *“killed James the brother of John with the sword”* (Acts 12:2). It made the Jews so happy that *“he proceeded further to seize Peter also”* (v. 3). Herod planned not to kill Peter, though, until after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. No need to distract from the holiday with a nasty execution!

If you were in Peter's shoes, what would you do? It is night, and Herod plans to kill you tomorrow. How about making a run for it? That would be challenging, since you are in prison, chained between two soldiers, two with more soldiers guarding the door.

Maybe you would feel like pacing the floor. The soldiers between whom you are chained would probably veto that idea. Praying would be appropriate – you could do that while stationary, and silent prayer wouldn't even disturb the soldiers.

Could you do what Peter did? I marvel that, within hours of his scheduled execution, *“Peter was sleeping”* (v. 6). Since you and I know the rest of the story – how Peter was rescued by an angel of God, escaped from prison, and lived to preach the gospel many more years – we can relax. But Peter didn't know this would happen; in fact, when it **did** happen, Peter thought at first that it wasn't real, that he was just having a vision (v. 9). How, then, could he simply sleep? What does this show us about Peter?

First, he obviously was at peace both with himself and with God. Previously, he had suffered imprisonment and beating for Jesus and the gospel's sake. He knew Stephen had been stoned by the Jews, and that Herod had already murdered James. Peter appears not to have been worried; severe anxiety usually makes sleep impossible. Execution would only let him be with Jesus again a little earlier than he otherwise expected.

Second, Peter was a far different man from just a decade ago. Herod Agrippa I came to power in AD 44. Back in AD 33, a panicked Peter had denied three times that he even knew Jesus. Now he calmly confronted what was, from a human perspective, certain and imminent death.

May each of us grow, as Peter did, so that we face the trials of life, and even death, with calm assurance.

x x x x x x x

Of Hail And Rain

The other day I overheard a conversation among several men who were complaining about a recent hail storm. Two of them had sad stories to tell about damaged cars and ruined roofs. During their discussion, a third voice chimed in: *“At least we got some rain.”* The other two more or less dismissed the comment and continued complaining. But I couldn't get it out of my head. What a different way to think about things!

We can fix roofs, we can buy new cars, but we can't make it rain. There are so many people praying for rain, we shouldn't let a drop fall without giving thanks. As disciples of Christ, looking at the brighter side of things is not only a good idea, it's a command! *“Rejoice in the Lord always”* (Philippians 4:4). *“Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things”* (Philippians 4:8). Next time you find yourself complaining about the hail life has thrown you, don't forget about the rain.

--Luke Bower (Abilene, TX) via Old Paths

ENEMY OCCUPIED TERRITORY

The world was created by God and declared by Him good at the time. Enter the Devil and his big lie: *“You will be like God”* (Genesis 3:5). In other words, you will know everything and you will be in control. The Devil also said, *“You surely will not die.”* God is not going to punish you.

Ever since then, this world has been enemy-occupied territory. It got so bad in the days of Noah that God stepped in and destroyed those who joined the enemy. After the Flood, people still bought into the lie of you can be in control. Today, the enemies occupying God's territory flaunt their defiance of God's word. Babies are killed, homosexuality is now the accepted norm, all religions are equal, and the family is considered a thing of the past. I could go on and on, but we need to wake up to the fact that as Christians we operate in enemy-occupied territory.

We have been silent far too long. We have huddled inside our buildings afraid to speak of God in the open. We must stand up and proclaim Jesus.

Following Hebrews chapter 11, that great list of heroes of faith, we read that we have a great cloud of witnesses that should encourage us to run the race with endurance. Then the writer reminds us of Jesus. *“For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart”* (Hebrews 12:3).

Brothers and sisters, we have the words of reconciliation to offer peace and pardon to those serving God's enemy knowingly and unknowingly. Let us be bold, gentle, and loving to rescue the captives.

Let us never forget that we are living in enemy-occupied territory.

--Ed Wittlif (Denver, CO)