

**2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters**  
**Sermon Series - The Book of Acts/God's Plan for His Church**  
**Sermon Title - Expect the Unexpected**  
**Sermon Text - Acts 10:1-48**  
**Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry**

**Introduction**

Glory glory we have no other King, But Jesus Lord of all  
We raise the anthem our loudest praises ring, We crown Him Lord of all

God's Word says this about Jesus...

Philippians 2:9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,  
Philippians 2:10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
Philippians 2:11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

When Jesus is Lord of all in your life, you can pray and begin expecting the unexpected! Let's pray and I'll explain! Pray!

**Introduction**

So many people do not expect God to work in their lives or to help them achieve their God-given dreams. They have all but given up on life. Bad things happen so they quit. Let me ask you a question. Have you ever wanted something good to happen really bad? Have you ever hoped something would happen, but you really didn't expect it to happen? Have you ever prayed for something to happen, but you really, down in your heart of hearts, didn't expect God to answer your prayer? You're not alone! Today's story is about an individual's faith and a group's faith, or lack thereof. Let's read our fascinating story and you'll see today's message unfold.

Acts 12:1 It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them.

Acts 12:2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.

Acts 12:3 When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Acts 12:4 After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

Acts 12:5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

Acts 12:6 The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance.

Acts 12:7 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

Acts 12:8 Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him.

Acts 12:9 Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision.

Acts 12:10 They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

Acts 12:11 Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating."

Acts 12:12 When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.

Acts 12:13 Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door.

Acts 12:14 When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"

Acts 12:15 "You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel."

Acts 12:16 But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.

Acts 12:17 Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the brothers about this," he said, and then he left for another place.

Acts 12:18 In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter.

Acts 12:19 After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.

There are some powerful truths about prayer to be gained from this amazing story. The first is that...

### **1. We should pray Earnestly**

Acts 12:5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

The followers of Jesus were praying earnestly. James, the brother of John, had been put to death by the sword at the command of King Herod! Their good friend and spiritual leader Peter had now been imprisoned and they did not know what fate awaited him. They also knew they might be next! I don't know what you're facing in your life, but how often do you spend time earnestly praying? It's one thing to pray a ritual prayer, and there's nothing wrong with that, but it's quite another thing when we pray from a place of deep need and desire for God to move and to show up in our lives and we pray from our hearts! When we pray earnestly and desperately

for God to move in our lives, it's not like begging God in a nagging sense, it's more like beseeching, and crying out to God and allowing God to His will for our lives. Some just pray when it's convenient and some pray reluctantly or halfheartedly. However, God wants us to earnestly seek Him. In fact the writer of Hebrews put it this way...

Heb 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek him.

And here's the beautiful thing about earnestly seeking God: Jesus said this...

Matthew 7:7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Matthew 7:8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

What does it mean to pray earnestly? It means...

Praying with humility, Praying with zeal, and Praying for God's will.

### **A. Earnestly praying is praying with Humility**

Why is humility such an important aspect of prayer? First of all, if we aren't humble then our prayers will either be pretentious, demanding, or simply insincere! When we pray in humility we are willing to admit this: "I can't do this Lord!" "Lord, without You I'd surely fail! Without You I will fall again and again!" In other words, praying humility is admitting this: "I need You Lord, more than anything, I need You!" The Psalmist said this...

Psa 95:6 Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;

Psa 95:7 for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care...

Bowing down represents humility, but it's more about the attitude of the heart than the position of the body! However, I have come to realize that when I take the time and trouble to get on my knees, it helps to prepare my heart to have the right kind of attitude! Again the Psalmist gives us important insight...

Psa 62:5 Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him.

Psa 62:6 He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.

Psa 62:7 My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge.

Psa 62:8 Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.

### **B. Earnestly praying is praying with Zeal (Godly Passion)**

Vocabulary.com defines zeal in this way...

“Zeal is dedication or enthusiasm for something. If you have zeal, you're willing, energized, and motivated.”

Are you dedicated in your prayer life? Are you enthusiastic about your praying? Are you willing, energized and motivated in your prayer life? The writer of Romans gives this powerful instruction...

Rom 12:11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

Rom 12:12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

The Psalmist once again weighs in. When you talk about earnest, motivated, energized praying this is certainly one of the best examples. Listen to what he says...

Psa 63:1 A psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah. O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Psa 63:2 I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.

Psa 63:3 Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.

Psa 63:4 I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.

### **C. Earnestly praying is praying according to God's Will**

Earnest praying is not selfish praying just to get what you want! Earnest praying is not about trying to manipulate God to get what you want. Earnestly praying is being willing to surrender your will and wants by trusting God's perfect plan for your life. The church in our text wanted God's will to be done and felt like it was God's will for Peter to be released from prison!!

1 John 5:13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

1 John 5:14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

1 John 5:15 And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him.

If it's His will, why wouldn't He answer your prayer? And you've got to believe that God's will is not bad. It is good for you. If we are to pray according to God's will, what are some ways we can discover God's will?

#### Study God's Word

Proverbs 2:1 My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you,

Proverbs 2:2 turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding—

Proverbs 2:3 indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding,

Proverbs 2:4 and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure,

Proverbs 2:5 then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.  
Proverbs 2:6 For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

But just studying and even knowing God's will is of little help if you do not...

### Acknowledge the Lord

Acknowledging the Lord is acknowledging that His will is the best thing for you! Once again the writer of Proverbs has wisdom for us...

Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;  
Proverbs 3:6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

But acknowledging God and that His will is best is not enough, you must be willing to...

### Obey The Lord

You can say you believe God's will is best all day, but you must live it out by trusting and obeying God's will. When King Saul disobeyed God in the Old Testament God's prophet Samuel spoke these words...

1 Samuel 15:22 But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

And to be willing to obey, we must...

### Desire The Lord God and His will

For that to happen we must delight in the Lord!

Psalms 37:4 Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Psalms 37:5 Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this:

Psalms 37:6 He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun.

In other words He must be your heart's desire. He must be your priority, and the love of your life. When we delight in The Lord and worship Him He gives us the desires of our heart or as it can be translated correctly in the Hebrew, He gives our heart its desires! The difference is between God just giving you whatever your old heart desires or by giving your old heart the right desires! And when this happens, He can then give you the desires of our heart because He put the right desires in your heart in the first place! Now here's another powerful truth on prayer from our story...

## **2. We should Pray Together**

Acts 12:12 When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.

The first thing the New Testament Church did after Jesus ascended back to heaven was pray!

Acts 1:12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city.

Acts 1:13 When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.

Acts 1:14 They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

It's great to always be in an attitude of prayer. It's great to have a personal prayer time daily and throughout the day! But praying together with other believers is encouraged by Jesus and has benefits...

Mat 18:18 "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Mat 18:19 "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

Mat 18:20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

And coming together in His Name was what Jesus so desired for His church, His people. Listen to Jesus' prayer in John 17...

John 17:22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:

John 17:23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

So let me encourage you to find another believer or two and get together with them from time to time to pray. Pray for each other, pray for God's will to be done in each of your lives. Now here's another powerful truth on prayer from our story...

## **3. We should pray when there is a need and after the need has been met!**

The New Testament prayed when they needed something and also after God answered their prayer! Back when Peter and John had been imprisoned and released, the church prayed.

Acts 4:23 On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.

Acts 4:24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.

So prayer is not just asking God for something according to His will, but thanking Him when He answers your prayers, even if His answer was different than what you expected. Sometimes God doesn't take you out of a storm as you might pray, but he calms you in the storm. Over 300 years ago a monk named Brother Lawrence, wrote these powerful words in a letter to a friend. They are found in a book, called "The Practice of the Presence of God." Listen...

"Take courage! God often allows us to go through difficulties to purify our souls and to teach us to rely on Him more (1 Peter 1:6&7)..."

1 Peter 1:6 In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

1 Peter 1:7 These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Brother Lawrence continues: So offer Him your problems unceasingly, and ask Him for the strength to overcome them. Talk to Him often; forget Him as seldom as possible. Praise Him. When the difficulties are at their worst, go to Him humbly and lovingly—as a child goes to a loving father—and ask for the help you need from His grace."

And by the way, sometimes thanking God needs to happen before the answer comes! It's an attitude of faith to pray a prayer of thanksgiving, acknowledging that God has heard your prayers and will answer accordingly and that you trust Him completely!! I have to read you Philippians 4:6 again this week because it just speaks to the point at hand...

Philippians 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

With thanksgiving, present your requests to God! What does this mean? It means that you pray expectantly! And this gives you peace because you know that God is going to do what's best in the end, even though we may not see it or understand it at the time! God is faithful! And this leads us to this final truth on prayer we can draw from our story.

#### **4. We should Pray Expectantly**

Acts 12:16 But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.

This just makes me laugh! They were astonished! They were praying earnestly, with humility, with zeal and according to God's will, but they were not praying expectantly! They really didn't expect God to answer their prayers and so when God answered their prayer they were

astonished! Has God ever done something in your life which totally astounded you and maybe even caught you by surprise? We should always be amazed at the awesome way God works in our lives, however, we should not be astonished.

As believers we should come to expect the unexpected because our God is faithful. So we should pray expectantly!

In most religions, people hope their prayers are heard...We know our prayers are heard! Not because we are better than anyone else, but because our God is faithful and cares for our needs.

Mat 6:7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

Mat 6:8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

But what if we are going through really tough and painful times? Does God really know what we need before we ask Him? And how will He provide what we need? Peter wrote the following words some time later...

1 Peter 4:12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

1 Peter 4:13 But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

1 Peter 4:14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

Pray expectantly because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you! So we know that God hears our prayers, but that doesn't mean that He will answer our prayers just the way we want them answered! Remember, He knows things we don't know, understands things we don't understand, and sees things we simply cannot see! So God sometimes answers our prayers with "no!" He knows something you don't know! Sometimes He answers "Not now!" Sometimes He says "absolutely, that's exactly what I want for you!" But at the end of the day we need to pray knowing that God has heard our prayer and expecting that He will answer according to what is ultimately the best for us. And by the way, Jesus practiced what He preached! Listen to how He prayed when He raised Lazarus from the dead...

John 11:41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

John 11:42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

John 11:43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

John 11:44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."



Jesus knew the Father would always hear Him! In our text the people are about to hear Peter speak about how God had worked miracles to free him, in answer to their prayers.

Acts 12:17 Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the brothers about this," he said, and then he left for another place.

What a lesson for us all when it comes to praying expectantly! God had answered their prayer but they didn't expect it! Now as I end today's message and before we have Communion I would like to share a prayer with you that some in this room may need to pray! It's the prayer to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior! And I want to tell you that if you are willing to pray this prayer, God will hear it and you can expect the unexpected to begin happening in your life in a good way! Here's the beautiful thing: If you admit you've done wrong and are in need of a Savior to forgive you, and you believe Jesus died on the Cross to save you from your sins and you're willing to call on His Name, you can be saved today and filled with His precious and powerful Holy Spirit, who will be your comforter, your counselor, your teacher, your guide, and oh so much more! Expect this to change your life! We are about to observe The Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, which reminds us of the staggering price Jesus paid in order to take away the guilt of our sin! Parents, if you want to get your children who you want to participate in the Lord's Supper you may do so now. Let's all stand. And if you would please bow your heads with me. If you know Jesus as your Savior, please take this time to thank Him and to make sure your heart is right with Him! If you've never trusted Jesus, you could do that today by praying this simple prayer. I'll say it slowly enough for you to pray with me if you would like. It goes like this...Dear Jesus, I know that I have sinned against You.....I need Your forgiveness..... I believe You died on the old rugged cross.... to pay the price for my wrong doing....Thank You! I need You to be my Savior....and I call on Your name today....With the help of Your Holy Spirit I will live a new life....Thank You for loving me so much....In Jesus name I pray and believe, Amen!

### **The Lord's Supper!**

If you prayed that prayer today or have previously accepted Jesus as your Savior, you are welcome to share communion with us because it's not about being a member of a particular church body, but it's about being a member of the Body of Christ through faith! If you want to participate, while the praise band plays, just make your way to one of the tables around the auditorium and get a piece of bread and a cup of juice. Then return to your seats and I'll give you further explanations in just a moment.

Luke tells us...

Luke 22:14 When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table.

Luke 22:15 And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

Luke 22:16 For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

Luke 22:17 After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you.

Luke 22:18 For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”

Luke 22:19 And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

We eat this bread to remember the broken flesh of Jesus’ body, broken and bruised because He was taking the punishment we deserved! Never forget that He suffered for you!

### **Take the Bread!**

Luke then says...

Luke 22:20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

We drink this cup to remember the precious blood of Jesus which was poured out to cover the filth of our sin and shame! Never forget His sacrifice to cleanse and make you right with God!

### **Drink the Cup!**

Thank You Jesus! Amen! Our praise band will lead us in this final praise song. If you would want to come to the altar and pray or if you would like to pray with me or one of our counselors we will be in the youth room, out the back doors to my left and across to the youth room! Love you!