Rhoda

(by Kent Heaton)

Peter had a vision that an angel came to him in the night and rescued him from the Roman prison Herod had put him in. The intention of the king was to kill Peter as he had killed James the brother of John. Leaving the prison the apostle came to himself and realized what he thought was a vision was in fact real; the Lord had sent His angel to set Peter free. ***“So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate”*** (**Acts 12:12-14**).

It must have been bemusing to the apostle to knock on the door and have Rhoda run away without opening the door. Standing in the dark street Peter worried about the soldiers finding him. He kept knocking. Finally the door opened and to the astonishment of those gathered there he stood. Luke records Peter motioning with his hand for everyone to remain quiet as he relayed to story of his release. He asked they let James and the other brethren know of his escape and then went into hiding at another place. Luke does not mention Peter again until his final reference in **Acts 15:7**.

Rhoda had recognized Peter’s voice when he knocked on the door. There were many brethren gathered at Mary’s house for prayer; no doubt for Peter’s safety. The execution of James the brother of John had shaken the faith of the disciples. With Peter imprisoned their prayers were much more fervent as they stretched into the night. When Rhoda came in saying Peter was standing at the door it seemed they could not believe such was possible. This could be a doubt on their part that prayer would deliver the apostle from the security of sixteen Roman soldiers. But Rhoda insisted she knew the voice of Peter. They found Peter knocking at the door.

How excited Rhoda was when she heard Peter’s voice. She did not doubt nor think it a trick but in her simple youthful faith rejoiced that God had delivered this wonderful man. There is a humorous side of the story as she leaves poor Peter knocking at the door. Leaving him there she could have jeopardized his escape. Bursting into the gathering of prayers being offered for Peter she was met with disbelief. A lesson of answered prayer was taught that night by a little girl.

Prayer is a tough thing sometimes. The disciples learned the nature of prayer when a man brought his son to Jesus complaining His disciples could not heal him (**Matthew 17:14-21**). They had the power but lacked the faith to overcome the demon. It is easy to view prayer as a tool effective for normal everyday use but becomes only a token of faith when faced with seemingly impossible odds. Did those gathered at Mary’s house believe in the power of prayer to deliver Peter from a Roman prison? There would be good reasons to believe like James that Peter would be killed. A Roman guard of sixteen men was impregnable. No one in their right mind would try to spring the apostle free nor did anyone (especially the disciples) have the manpower to accomplish such a feat. Yet when God shows His own power it seems to surprise them. They could not believe Rhoda.

This does not suggest that prayers of impossibilities are always answered. It would be safe to assume that prayer was offered for James when arrested by Herod. Saul of Tarsus had already persecuted the church spreading the remnants of the church throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria and beyond. This persecution included men and women being cast into prison, being put to death and tortured (**Acts 8:1-3**; **26:9-11**). The death of James would not have been a total surprise. But Peter was delivered. The answers to prayer reside in the mind of God alone and are according to His divine will and design. Saints must continue to pray - pray hard and fervently. And wait for the knock at the door and the voice of those delivered. When Rhoda comes running in telling us the Lord has delivered our loved one we must rejoice nothing doubting.

***“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins”*** (**James 5:13-20**).

James declares the power of prayer over suffering and the work of elders praying over the sick. Everyone expects the preacher to visit them in their dire straits but consider the impact of elders fulfilling their role of shepherding the flock in spending time praying with the members about their battles with sin, their families and marriages, their disagreements, their hopes and dreams – and their illness. Have we shelved this verse to the times of miracles because we do not anoint with oil or raise the dead? Has prayer lost its voice today? Rhoda cries out that Peter is standing at the door and we do not believe. We pray for rain but do not bring the umbrellas. Prayers are lifted for very ill brethren but faith may temper our belief that anything good will come of it.

Prayers are not answered simply because we ask. We will receive the blessing from God as He measures it out and this is only in accordance with His wish – ***“But they do not know the thoughts of the Lord, nor do they understand His counsel … For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts”*** (**Micah 4:12**; **Isaiah 55:8-9**). James died and Peter lived. Trusting in the Lord is the proof of our faith in prayer. ***“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you”*** (**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**).