

**Sunday October 23, 2022**

## **Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church**

### **Welcome & Prayer**

In Psalm 100: 5 we read *"For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations."* Let's start with a time of prayer.

*Heavenly Father, we come before You today because you are the one true God, both the God who loves us, and the God who saves us. We confess that time and again we are guilty of letting you down, and for this we are sorry. We thank-you for the completed work of salvation through the death and resurrection of your son Jesus. We pray for your presence this morning and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit as we remove distractions, focus on your word, and grow in our faith. We pray all this in Jesus' name, Amen.*

### **Song – Worthy of all** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEurB4o54M>

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|--|---|
| 1. Jesus, Lord of creation,<br>King of Salvation,<br>Great God of grace.<br>Messiah, promised redeemer<br>Our risen saviour,<br>Author of peace. | 2. For you sought us, wonderfully bought us<br>You paid for us dearly,<br>The price was your blood.<br>And you freed us, brought us to pardon,<br>Back to the garden,<br>Safe in your love. |
|--|---|

#### Chorus

You are worthy of all praise,  
Worthy of all honour,  
Worthy of glory, wisdom and strength.  
And so we'll sing through endless days  
That you alone are worthy;  
Worthy of all power,  
Worthy of all praise.

### **Bible Reading – Acts 11:19-30 (NIV)**

<sup>19</sup> Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. <sup>20</sup> Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. <sup>21</sup> The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. <sup>22</sup> News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. <sup>23</sup> When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. <sup>24</sup> He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. <sup>25</sup> Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, <sup>26</sup> and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. <sup>27</sup> During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. <sup>28</sup> One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) <sup>29</sup> The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. <sup>30</sup> This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

## Announcements

**Focus for October – Training.** We are blessed with so many opportunities to be equipped to serve. From great books, to YouTube videos, sermons from the best preachers in the world on the internet, resources that are ready made for Churches, even the people that God has placed around us mean that we should be the best equipped generation of all time. But the problem is time and energy. We don't always set aside the space to grow in our giftedness. That's why we are focusing on training this month. So that we can encourage one another to be better equipped for the task at hand.

**Ministry Training.** During the next two weeks we are closing down our home groups & encouraging everyone to come either Tuesday night 6:45pm (Dinner, bring your own followed by an input session 7:30-8:30pm) OR Wednesday lunchtime 12:15pm (Lunch, bring your own followed by an input session 1-2pm). This week we have the following topics available to us all... Tuesday night – Welcoming at Church (Simon M), Visiting on behalf of the church (Matt J), Leading a service (Alan W), Leading a small group (Rob H), Meeting one2one (Peter S), Supporting a missionary (Margaret W), Apologetics- how can we trust the bible (Paul B), Involvement in Creation Care (Stu B). and on Wednesday afternoon we have... Understanding Elvanto (Liz H), Praying our loud (Stephen T), How to share your faith (Jon B) and Supporting a missionary (Kathryn O).

**Parsons.** Next Sunday and on Tuesday evening and Wednesday lunchtime, our link missionaries from Japan, Steven and Sandra parsons will be visiting us and reporting back to us their work helping grow the Church in Japan.

### Upcoming Events

- Sat 5/11                      Gala Concert
- Sat 19/11                    Men's Breakfast (7-9am)
- Sat 19/11                    NSW State Moderator Visits Swansea Church for morning tea
- Sat 26/11                    Gingerbread House Night
- Sat 10/12                    Gather Round Christmas Celebration

**Resource.** At Resource 2022 (Wed 16<sup>th</sup> – Thurs 17<sup>th</sup> Nov) Kit will be helping us be better teachers of the Old Testament specifically in respect of Ezekiel. On each of the two mornings of Resource (formerly called HGM Bible Teacher's workshop) Kit will do two teaching sessions, and on each afternoon, there will be a hands-on workshop format helping us dig into the nitty-gritty of communicating to others the difficult book of Ezekiel. More details go to [hgm.org.au](http://hgm.org.au)

**Christmas boxes (Operation Christmas Child. Samaritans Purse).** These need to be filled and return by NEXT Sunday. If you have any questions, please speak to Kathryn O.

**Vanuatu.** Our church is planning on running a short-term mission to Vanuatu early next year. The dates are expected to be 4<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> January. Our aim will be to help the local with a physical project that allows them to minister more effectively to their community as well as doing some teaching, training and kids/youth work. If you are interested in knowing more details, please see Stephen. Numbers will need to be finalised by the end of November.

**HSC Students.** Please keep our HSC students in your prayers – Archie, Nic, Rebecca, Grace, Imogen & Josh

## Prayer Points for 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2022

**Psalms 34:3** "Proclaim the Lord's greatness with me; let us exalt His name together."

**Pray for Nepal:** Pray for Jesus to be made known among unreached peoples in hard-to-access locations. Pray for biblical training and Christlikeness for a rising generation of church leaders. Pray for the Living God to restore those devastated by the earthquakes.

**Pray for growth:** Pray the Lord would be growing and deepening our faith. Pray we would have a child-like dependence on the Lord and receive His Word humbly.

**Pray for Compassion.** Conflict, extreme weather and COVID-19 have created a global food crisis that is having a devastating impact on children in poverty. According to the UN, the world is now moving backwards in its efforts to fight food insecurity and malnutrition. Please pray for the families affected by

this crisis and for Compassion's local partners as they provide short and long-term solutions to fight hunger.

## Bible Reading – Acts 12:1-24

**12** *It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. <sup>2</sup> He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. <sup>3</sup> When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen." <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. <sup>14</sup> When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!" <sup>15</sup> "You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel." <sup>16</sup> But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. <sup>17</sup> 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 other brothers and sisters about this," he said, and then he left for another place. <sup>18</sup> In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. <sup>19</sup> 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.*

*Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. <sup>20</sup> He had been quarrelling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. After securing the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply. <sup>21</sup> On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. <sup>22</sup> They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." <sup>23</sup> Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died. <sup>24</sup> But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.*

## Song – What a friend we have in Jesus <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NITr7y-9Bvr-076Fypi12aKW1tjYIFyT/view>

1 What a friend we have in Jesus,  
all our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
everything to God in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear,

3. Are we weak and heavy laden,  
cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Saviour, still our refuge--  
take it to the Lord in prayer!  
Do your friends despise, forsake you?  
Take it to the Lord in prayer!

all because we do not carry  
everything to God in prayer!

In his arms he'll take and shield you;  
you will find a solace there.

2 Have we trials and temptations?  
Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged;  
take it to the Lord in prayer!  
Can we find a friend so faithful  
who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness;  
take it to the Lord in prayer!

## Sermon – The World vs the Church (Stephen T)

Sometimes we find ourselves in danger, in real danger. The Russian Orthodox priest, Alexander Borisov was one who normally didn't court danger, but this day it was different. The Russian troops were massing around the capital Moscow. The police were keeping people out. There was civil war in the air. The Soviet Union was collapsing. Borisov could see the possibilities - fighting, bloodshed, unrest. What would he be able to do? What could one man possibly do against the might of the Russian army?

He put on his priestly vestments, hoping that the flowing robes would intimidate others, and he and a few members of the newly formed Bible Society of the Soviet Union, took a bundle of Bibles each, and started giving them to the troops. If the troops declined to accept the Bibles, he climbed up onto the tanks and threw a copy inside.

Alexander Borisov's logic was that in his heart he did not believe that soldiers with NTs in their pockets would shoot their own brothers and sisters. He thought it was better to go into battle with the Word of God in your heart than with mighty weapons in your hand.

Slide 2

Here we see an example of the world fighting the Church. Its tanks vs Bibles. Guns vs prayers. Or if we take the illustration of David & Goliath it is sword & spear vs a few smooth stones. So what do you believe is more powerful? Who is going to win the victory? We only know the answer to that question when we step out in faith. The circumstances all around us tell us that the Christian has no chance, but if God is for us, then who then can be against us? This is a lesson the Church has to learn in every generation.

And this is the lesson of Acts 11 & 12. For as we read it, we are transported, as if in a time machine, back to about 45 AD. To a time when the Church is being persecuted by the religious establishment. Where it is being pushed around by a corrupt and self-centred leader like Herod and back to a time where life is tough due to a severe famine. It's the world against the Church. But the Church is not alone, for it possesses in its grasp

Slide 3

### 1. The Grace of God. (Acts 11:19-30)

<sup>19</sup>“Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. <sup>20</sup>Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. <sup>21</sup>The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.”

The heat is now on. The darkness is taking over the land and the people of God flee for their lives. But they take with them the source of their continued hope, the good news of Jesus Christ. And they gossip this

gospel wherever they go. And Jews far and wide get converted. God's Holy Spirit opens their hearts to getting their relationship with God right again.

This was not the apostles causing this revival, these guys were your ordinary believers. But the hand of God was upon them. And God is stronger than any opposition that is before Him. But then some of these people had a brain wave, If the gospel is good news to the Jew, surely it is also good news to the Gentiles as well? So, they started telling all people about Jesus & a great number of them believed and turned to the Lord. God is so powerful that he is turning a negative into a positive. He is shedding his light into this very dark place.

Slide 4

*<sup>22</sup> "News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. <sup>23</sup> When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. <sup>24</sup> He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord."*

The Jerusalem Church then sends Barnabas to have a look at what is going on? And what better person to send than Him. "The man with the biggest heart in the Bible" William Barclay calls him. And I am sure he had a look around and there was much that was less than perfect. But he could see the grace of God at work in these people. And that gladdened his heart. The work of God, the hand of God, godliness gave him great joy. It's put a spring in his step. And so, he sets about discipling these new converts. But soon it became obvious the work was too big for just him. Now who could he get to help him out? And the name that came to mind was Saul, whom the Jerusalem Church had sent away some 8 years ago.

Slide 5

*<sup>25</sup> "Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, <sup>26</sup> and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch." (It sounds like it took Barnabas a while to find him too!) "So, for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people." What these new converts needed was a teacher. Someone who knew the word of God and had experienced the power of God. And so, Barnabas shows great humility. Yes, he was capable of doing this himself. But this was also an opportunity to bring Saul in from the cold. And this partnership of Barnabas and Saul would prove a dynamic duo for many years to come.*

Which makes me wonder. Is there a Saul out there, possibly connected with you or maybe this church, who is gifted, called but possible discouraged and somewhat sidelined from ministry that we could look for? And encourage? And work together in the days to come? There are so many hurt believers out there, people who have done so much for the Lord in the past who are nursing hurts. What if we were to get beside them once more? Is there any Barnabas' amongst us today that will search them out, for the sake of the kingdom?

Slide 6

*<sup>27</sup> "During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. <sup>28</sup> One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) <sup>29</sup> The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. <sup>30</sup> This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul."*

Notice the Jerusalem Church doesn't ask for help, the Church in Antioch are instead moved by their plight. They had received the gospel from them, so they were more than happy to help them back financially in return. They had obviously been properly discipled because they were now outward focused, willing to help out their brothers and sisters in need. It was Slide 7. Winston Churchill who said "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." And so, the grace of God flows from God to the Church and onto others.

Slide 8

*"The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch."* That's how Christ centred they were! They were not just believers they were Christians. Followers of Christ. Servants of Christ. Changed by Christ & this stood out to the unbelievers. For they were the ones who called them Christians & it might have been a term of abuse but the believers took it as a badge of honour. That the nickname they receive points everyone else to Jesus Christ.

Slide 9

Alexander the Great once learned that in his army was a namesake, another Alexander who was a notorious coward. Alexander the great found out that this soldier had actually been named after him. So, he said to the young man "then either be brave or change your name!" And friends, if we are taking the name Christian, we need to either be gracious or change our name. For God's grace should be on our lips as we gossip the gospel. It should be on our minds as we look to partner with others and it should affect our wallets as we show care & concern for those all around us. Yes, the world surrounds us constantly but you and I have

Slide 10

## 2. The grace of God and the ability to **pray to God**

Because in chapter 12 we see the power of this world again flexing its muscles. *"It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. <sup>2</sup> He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. <sup>3</sup> When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also."*

Herod's grandfather had once tried to kill Jesus as a baby but in the end had killed dozens of small children in Bethlehem. Herod's uncle had killed John the Baptist. Now this Herod, King Herod kills the apostle James, the brother of John. And no number of prayers were able to stop him. And so emboldened, Herod arrests their leader Peter with plans to kill him also.

Slide 11

This is a real threat. Here is a man who has real power. This is like fighting a tank with a Bible. For how can Christians fight against such raw power? How can the church possibly win against such overwhelming odds? And what weapons does the Church have to fight with? Well, we see from the story that the early Church uses the weapon of prayer.

It seems a bit of a mismatch, doesn't it? Soldiers versus prayer. Brute force versus bended knee. But while Peter is in prison, we see that the church meets earnestly, constantly, committedly for Peter in prayer. This is their biggest weapon. This is the churches' powerhouse, for this is where they tap into the power of an Almighty God, who rules the world, who goes into battle with and for his people. This brings out the big guns so to speak. So that we see that it is now a direct battle between Herod & God. And when we put it this way, we begin to see that Herod probably isn't the favourite in that sort of a contest, is he?

Slide 12

*<sup>4</sup> After arresting him, he put him (Peter) 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. <sup>5</sup> So Peter was kept in prison but the church was earnestly praying to God for him."*

Now let's think for a moment, what would we pray for Peter in these circumstances? Would we pray that Peter courageously hangs on to his faith until the very end? Or that he might witness to Jesus in the way that he dies? Or would we pray "Lord you delivered Daniel from the lion's den, now deliver Peter. Don't let him die like James. But not my will but your will."

I think part of the confusion that occurred when Peter was released was due to the fact that the Church was praying for different things. Some believed that God could release Peter while others prayed for Peter's plight in jail. It is a bit like when a family member is dying with a disease do we pray for healing or

comfort? Do we believe that God still heals? Do we believe that God rules over the Herod's of this world? And do our prayers reflect that belief?

Slide 13

But God hadn't answered their prayers for James' release so why would he now release Peter? I am sure they prayed when James was arrested but there was no miracle answer that time. But if you know your Bible well enough there is a clue hidden in it that explains why. Remember James & John had come to Jesus in his last week of his ministry with their mum. And they asked to be able to sit at the right and left hand of Jesus when he came again. Jesus replied that to receive that sort of glory involves suffering with him. And he goes on to predict that both will die for him. Which is exactly what is happening.

A little later, Peter says to Jesus that he was willing to follow him everywhere. And Jesus had said that Peter too would suffer for his faith. That when he was an old man, that someone would stretch out his hands, and dress him and lead him to a place where he would die. So Jesus knew that James would die under Herod & that Peter would escape and only die when he was an old man. Even when Jesus was alive, he knew that the Church's prayer for James would not be answered and their prayer for Peter would! God is sovereign and our prayers are not always answered the way we wish. But that doesn't diminish the power of prayer.

Slide 14

In the words of Puritan preacher Thomas Watson, "The angel fetched Peter out of prison but it was prayer that fetched the angel." <sup>6</sup> *"The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, & sentries stood guard at the entrance. <sup>7</sup> Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared & a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side & woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said & the chains fell off Peter's wrists."*

The power of Herod, the power of the guards, the power of the prison, the power of the gates and the chains are huge but they are not powerful enough to stop God! They are not as strong as the Church's prayers. Missionaries Carol and Edwin Carlson, spent 50 years on the mission field in China and Tibet but one time had to flee for their lives through a lonely mountain area where bandits were known to be. Their path even took them through a little village where their headquarters were located. But as they fled, they prayed and prayed and were safely delivered. How come? "They were escorted by "people in white, as usual"

Slide 15

In the words of Warren Wiersbe *"God alone can do the extraordinary but his people must do the ordinary. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but the men had to roll the stone from the tomb. The same angel that removed the chains from Peter's hands, could have put the shoes on Peter's feet but he told Peter to do it."* And then this angel delivers Peter from prison because the Church was praying for his release.

Here are two communities, the world and the Church fighting against each other and each are using their best weapons. On the one side is the power of the sword, the security of the prison, the authority of the King but that is nothing compared to the Church praying to a sovereign and almighty God.

Friends I wonder if you and I believe that? That our strongest weapon is our praying together? I don't think we do. Our prayer groups struggle to survive. Our prayerlessness hinders much of our work. Our dependence upon people or programmes or even ourselves shows that we have many, many lessons to learn about prayer. It is said that Mary Queen of Scots was more terrified of John Knox's prayers than she was of any army. But I don't think anyone in our community is truly scared of our prayers. Both individually and together.

Slide 16

But even the early church had its faults. It was meeting in the middle of the night to pray for Peter's release but it didn't really believe that its prayers were answered. Because even though God got Peter out

of a prison it seems that Peter couldn't get himself into the prayer meeting. He had casually walked past the king's guard to escape execution but he couldn't get a servant girl to let him in to join the prayer meeting which was held on his behalf!

For once the angel leaves Peter, he goes to the house of Mary and Rhoda is so amazed that he is now knocking at the door that she leaves him there and goes to get the others but the rest of the Church don't believe that it's really Peter. They are praying but like most of us when we pray, they didn't always believe in the words that they are saying.

A story is told of a nightclub opening up on the main street of a small mid-western American town. The Church was so aghast at this sort of an institution that it organised an all-night prayer meeting. The church members prayed that God would burn down the club. Amazingly enough, that night lightning struck the club, and it burned down to the ground. The owner of the nightclub decided to sue the church, but the Church denied responsibility. After hearing both sides of the case, the judge made his conclusion. *"It seems that wherever the guilt may lie, the nightclub owner believes in prayer, while the Church doesn't."*

Friends we need to believe in prayer. That it is the most powerful weapon that we have to fight what is going on in the world. And we need to take up that weapon with faith. Believing that God is truly sovereign. Believing that God can do the miraculous. Believing that God can answer any prayer. And showing that belief by finding time and more time and even more time after that to pray and to continue to pray – individually and as a church.

Slide 17

### 3. The Grace of God, our prayers to God and finally **the word of God**

*"Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. <sup>20</sup> He had been quarrelling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. After securing the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply. <sup>21</sup> On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. <sup>22</sup> They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man."*

Our story then reverts back to Herod and we see him in all his pomp and glory. Here is he on the throne. The nations are all grovelling to him. This is not a man, they declare, this is a god & I am sure that is what Herod wanted to hear. That he is sovereign, in complete control.

But do you know what? He looks like he is in control. He is acting like he is in control but God is still in control. <sup>23</sup>*"Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died. <sup>24</sup> But the word of God continued to spread and flourish."*

Here we see the voice of a god compared to the word of God. One holds sway for the time being, the other will prove more powerful in the end. One captures the imagination of the people but the other can change the hearts of the people. You see all it takes is for the angel of the Lord to strike him. And its all-over red rover. The fame, the fortune, the power, it's all gone. Whereas earlier in the chapter an angel, maybe even the same angel had struck Peter while he was asleep and had woken and freed him from his chains

Which means that instead of Peter being killed by Herod, Herod is killed by Peter's God! For the word of God is stronger than the word of men. The power of the throne is nothing compared to the power of prayer. And the persecution that may or may not come our way is nothing compared to the provision of God's grace that can change our hearts and allow us to be gracious to the people all around us.

Slide 19

Friends, as Christians we are living in a world that is becoming more and more secular. More and more turning against its Christian foundations. In recent time we have seen legislation legalising brothels,



abortion, same sex marriage, euthanasia, and at the same time seeking to drive back the influences of Christians at home, in schools, in charities and in the military. But where is the prayer? Where are you and I using the weapons of grace, prayer and the word of God? Have we lost our nerve? Don't we believe in an all-powerful God? Is the humble prayer meeting not as important as our kids sport or dancing? As scrolling on our phones? As having a coffee with the girls or a beer with our mates?

The early Church changed the world because it knew that they were partnering with a sovereign and almighty God. So they would share God's grace and God would open people's hearts. They would share their wealth & God would bring unity amongst the Christians. They would pray and the powers of this world would be bound by their prayers. And they would let loose the word of God and the words of men would have no power to stand against it. And so we see at the beginning of chapter 12, Herod seems to be in control and the Church is fighting a losing battle. But at the end of the chapter Herod is dead and the Church is very much alive and growing rapidly.

Slide 20

Donald Caskie was the minister of Scots Kirk in Paris when the Nazi's invaded in 1939. He fled to Marseilles where he was involved in the resistance but he was betrayed, tortured & imprisoned. But he was a man of prayer and prayed and prayed like never before. And as he prayed, he remembered a hymn from his early years *"Art thou afraid His power shall fail? When comes thy evil day? And can an all-creating arm; grow weary and decay?"*

As he sang these words, he later wrote, "I felt his arm go round me. I was with God & God was with me." That's the key, isn't it? Prayer connects us to the presence of God, the source of all power. So, it doesn't really matter what weapons are pointing at us today, we have the grace of God, access to God and the word of God and that my friends is all that you and I need!

## Song – This I believe <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNiYUPsHgls>

- |                                    |                                     |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Our Father everlasting          | Bridge                              |
| The all-creating One               | I believe in You                    |
| God Almighty                       | I believe You rose again            |
| Through your Holy Spirit           | I believe that Jesus Christ is Lord |
| Conceiving Christ the Son          | (Repeat)                            |
| Jesus our Saviour                  |                                     |
| <br>I believe in God our Father    | Chorus                              |
| I believe in Christ the Son        |                                     |
| I believe in the Holy Spirit       | 3. I believe in life eternal        |
| Our God is three in One            | I believe in the virgin birth       |
| I believe in the resurrection      | I believe in the saints' communion  |
| That we will rise again            | And in Your Holy Church             |
| For I believe in the Name of Jesus | I believe in the resurrection       |
| (In the name o' Lord)              | When Jesus comes again              |
|                                    | For I believe in the Name of Jesus  |
| <br>2. Our Judge and our Defender  |                                     |
| Suffered and crucified             | Chorus                              |
| Forgiveness is in You              |                                     |
| Descended into darkness            |                                     |
| You rose in glorious light         |                                     |
| Forever seated high                |                                     |
| Chorus                             |                                     |

## **Benediction.**

<sup>21</sup> *“The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.”*