**Unstoppable - wk 19 – The Great Escape**

**Acts is Jesus: The Sequel. Luke Vol 2 – The “what now?”**

**Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”**

**Supernatural growth & intense persecution - yet unstoppable.**

**Acts 12 – It’s now about 12 yrs since Jesus’ resurrection.**

**In Jerusalem Christians are getting arrested, tortured, and killed.**

**Today, what to do during a time of crisis. What are you facing?**

**Acts 12:1 It was about this time that King Herod (more like a local mayor - not Herod of Jesus time (Herod Antipas) this is his nephew - Herod Agrippa - job was to make Jewish people and Rome happy- known for a violent side) arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. (chains)**

**Q - Why all the persecution? Why were Christians hated so much?**

**\* Christianity confronts religion**

**- Jews threatened because Christians claim Jesus as God and messiah & fulfillment of law - pretty much overriding their religion**

**- Greeks felt threatened because their culture relied on acceptance of all gods as crucial for unity. Christians were considered a cult.**

**Jesus calls for exclusive Lordship as the way. Jo 14:6**

**\* Christianity confronts tradition**

**- Challenges all customs and traditions – saying all that matters is loving Jesus and loving others like Jesus loves us.**

**- Christianity teaches salvation thru Jesus alone – not tradition. They did not seek to conform people, but transform – inside out**

**\* Christianity confronts culture**

**- Cultures moral standards are challenged – purity, life, and design**

**- Christians are committed to serving, loving, caring for the sick, poor, and outcast.**

**At that time, clashed w/ society who discarded people as unnecessary / inconvenient. Church grows during plagues.**

**All this stirred the pot among all religions and authorities = as a result they were persecuted and wanted out.**

**To this day – these things still stir persecution.**

**Sudan (torture, slaughter), Iran (beheaded), China (imprisoned), Laos (homes burned down), India (anti-conversion laws), Nigeria (tortured), Sri Lanka (exiled to the jungle), Columbia (murders, displacement), India (limbs cut off, eyes gouged) – 200 mil Christians in 60 countries are persecuted – in chains - with 200,000 killed annually – Yet in America we are free and safe and live unaware.**

**Jesus told us the world would the us because they hate him – John 15**

**If you live to love the world – you will endure the wrath of the LORD.**

**If you live to love the LORD – you will endure the wrath of the world.**

**2 He (Herod) had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. (Beheaded - inner circle of Jesus - Peter, James, & John - saw and knew things about Jesus only they knew - dead) 3 When he (Herod) saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. (Week of Passover - 1000's in town, he was going to make it an event. The intention - kill Peter, like he killed James.)**

**First apostle killed - a huge loss - one of the top three - Wow - they can die? Now Peter. Put your self in Peter's place - a best friend murdered – arrested - he was next...**

**4 After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. (Platoon of 16 soldiers) Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. (like Jesus 12 yrs earlier) 5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.**

**Life and death, they prayed. I’m sure they prayed for James too, but we know how that turned out... God help us!**

**Have you been there? Life is unraveling - not making sense**

**Fear is setting in - your heart is hurting - experienced loss**

**6 The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, (day before his death) Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, (in chains) and sentries stood guard at the entrance. (I don't think I would be sleeping much – he had a peace that was beyond understanding – God is in control – If it’s my time – it’s my time) 7 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck (smite / hit him) Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists. (love - the chains fell off)**

**I love how this is played out - 8 Then the angel said to him, “Put on your clothes and sandals.” (Get your stuff - you're not coming back) And Peter did so. “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,” the angel told him. (Get ready to move) 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. (Half asleep – is this a dream? Happening so fast.) 10 They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, (Jedi wave) and they went through it. (When God is leading, He opens the doors - you won't have to kick and push and pry - God will open it) When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.**

**Angel could have ninja kicked the guards, blew up the place and slow-mo walked out. But it was a stealth mission and then disappeared. Peter could have disappeared into the night…**

**11 Then Peter came to himself (“whoa – what just happened? This was real!) 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.” (Where does he go?) 12 When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, (Barnabas cousin / aunt's house – location of last supper and Acts 2 - place they all hung out – “let’s go to John Marks house”) where many people had gathered and were praying. 13 Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. 14 When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, “Peter is at the door!” 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.” (Assumed locked up or dead)**

**I think we pray just like that sometime - we pray for things and don't think it will happen - how many times do we pray not really expecting God to answer our prayers?**

**16 But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. (shocked and loud) 17 Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. “Tell James (Jesus’ half-brother) and the other brothers and sisters about this,” he said, and then he left for another place.**

**18 In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. (people were mad) 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. (Herod furious had all the soldiers assigned put to death.)**

**James was not delivered and was beheaded.**

**Peter was delivered but 16 men lost their life because of it.**

**What happened to Herod? (2yrs later) Luke then follows up with Herod**

**Acts 12:19b Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. 20 He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; (just north of Judea) 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. (politics and provision) 21 On the appointed day Herod, (the day they were to meet) wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. 22 They shouted, “This is the voice of a god, not of a man.” (Many still look to political deliverers and political messiahs - not to God. Herod loved attention)**

**Like the great theologian Steve Rogers (aka Captain America) once said “There is one God and I’m pretty sure he doesn’t dress like that.**

**23 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.**

**Ancient historian Josephus writes longer description - Just as people were shouting Herod’s praise - his garments reflecting the sun like a god – he declared that is pleases God for him to be called a god – then a sudden severe violent pain hit him and was carried out. He was sick in bed 5 days and died.**

**The pride of man – ended with the wrath of God**

**Chap started w/ Herod on a rampage and ends w/ dying of worms.**

**This section ends with a great sentence! - 24 But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.**

**\*\*\* You can’t stop God and the Power of His Word!**

**People will try / authorities will try and some will be silenced and stopped – but they can’t stop God and his purposes!**

**What's your crisis? How should we respond?**

**Your Great Escape - When you are in crisis remember**

**1. God still answers prayer (Acts 12:5, Matthew 17:14-21)**

**I’ve seen it – experienced it - rescues among the persecuted / miracles in the court system – sickness – God still does miracles**

* + **Our role is to pray and believe – leave the rest to him**

**But I don’t know if I have enough faith – just need mustard seed**

**It’s not the amount of faith; it’s the object of our faith that matters**

**I know God uses Dr. but my faith is in God, I know a judge can get him out, but my faith is in God, I know my boss can give me a raise, but my faith is in God – our role is…**

**2. It's not over - till God says it's over**

**It was over for James - but not for Peter – they were convinced Peter was dead – But God said not today… you might think it’s too late – but it’s not over till God says so.**

**Story of Lazarus death John 11. Lazarus, friends of Jesus, gets seriously ill - his sisters travel to get Jesus to heal him. But then John makes an amazing statement (John 11:5-6) “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.” What?!! Jesus loved them so he did what? He shows up days later – he was dead 4 days - how is that Love? Jesus was in charge and was doing something they did not understand. \*\* Jesus said it’s not over till I say it’s over – Lazarus come out!**

**Jeremiah 32:17 “Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.**

**Big essential: God is sovereign - God is in control – always.**

**Knowing this is a source of comfort and encouragement and a motivation to worship God in the face of our crisis.**

**When life turns up the heat - discouragement may set in -**

* + **Our role is to stand and persevere**

**God keeps his promises - his word is true. Don't give up, don't give in - it's not over till God says it’s over.**

**With that said… sometimes the miracle does not come…**

**3. Things don't always end up the way we pray**

**This is often used to talk about God gets us out of our crises - but the obvious is often skipped - v2. James was Beheaded. I'm sure they prayed for James, but yet James died a horrific death**

**When our prayers seem to go unanswered... Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.**

**The deal is - We ask for what we need, but God decides what we get.**

**Is that okay with you - was that fair for James family? Our role…**

* + - **Our role is to trust and obey**

**God gives his kids what we need to get thru. When kids we could not see beyond our 3 yr old world - but when we grow up we see. One day we will see him and we'll see it... but till then - we trust.**

**Romans 8:26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God. 28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. – I trust and obey**

**4. Prayer isn’t just something we do; it’s someone we’re with**

**Psalm 34 – God hears and keeps his eyes on those who are His**

**John 9:31 – Jesus said God hears those who are His**

**A great benefit of knowing Jesus is knowing- your dad’s got you**

**1 John 3:1 - See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (Through Jesus alone)**

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

**Since prayer isn’t just something we do; it’s someone we’re with**

* + **Our role is to rest in Him**

**Plane trip - business man flies 5X a week – Brings book / relaxes / knows everyone on the route. A child - never flies travels to see family - nervous / scared / needs courage. Plane takes off - Bm sleeps - C is white knuckled.**

**Who gets there first?**

**It's not about them – it’s about what they put their faith in - pilot & plane. The destination has nothing to do with what people think about flying – They had enough faith to get on the plane and the pilot did the rest…**

**In Christ we have the comfort of knowing the one who in control of all things – we can pray and rest in Him.**

**Philippians 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

**Kids riding roller coasters - as long I'm with Dad. When summer got hurt she did not ask for a neighbor - she asked for her mom / her dad - she knew if we were there. She would be okay.**

**Prayer is knowing... God is with you.**

**Our greatest resource (prayer) - should not be a last resort**

**In Christ you are a child of God – and you have access to God (creator and controller of all) and he brings peace - hope - and security in the face of any crisis.**

**Chains**

**James was set free too - his chains fell off - years before when he trusted Jesus – the chains of sin dropped to the ground.**

**The great escape for Peter came for James too - as he escaped this world and saw his savior once again.**

**Peters was again eventually arrested, tortured and no angel came that time – He was crucified upside down**

**And that moment he experienced an even greater escape... to leave this world and be home with his savior like his friend James years earlier.**

**You can be free - your chains can fall off - in Jesus name!**

**Salvation:**

**If you are not a Christian, this is the most important you will ever make. Pick your love and pick your wrath. To follow Jesus is to know you will be hated and misunderstood.**