

**Sermon Notes of
Pastor Craig Kuhlman's Sermon on January 3, 2021:**

**"Transformation of the Early Church Series on
The Book of Acts – Moving Out of the Comfort Zone:
Expanding and Enduring
(Acts 11:19 – 12:25) (Part 12)"**

[In today's sermon, Pastor Craig Kuhlman on Zoom shows us that in these verses there are five spiritual principles that we can apply today in our lives even as we struggle with various issues.]

Introduction:

- Now there is certain anticipation with the coming of a new year like starting things new, starting things over.
- But just because we've entered the new year doesn't mean that we are out of the woods, we still have political issues and COVID-19 problems to deal with.
- What is so beautiful is that the first century church has provided us with 5 spiritual anchors that we can rely upon in 2021.

- This series on Acts is about our ongoing transformation through the Holy Spirit.
- The early church experienced a lot of transformation as Luke shows us in the book of Acts.

Overview of today's message:

1. Expansion: Antioch of Syria (Acts 11:19-30)
 - a. Endorsed by Barnabas (verses 22-24)
 - b. Consolidated by Paul (verses 25-26)
 - c. Authenticated by good works (verses 27-30)
 - d. Both miracles rebounded to the glory of Jesus

2. Opposition: the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:1-25)
 - a. Herod's plot (verses 1-4)
 - b. Herod's defeat (verses 5-19)
 - c. Herod's death (verses 19-25)

Poetic Preview of today's message – Pastor Craig's rhyming verses:

*The word continued spreading from the scattered to the Jews,
And some reached the Greeks in Antioch with Good News.
The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number Believed,
Turning to the Lord and away from being Deceived.*

*Once again to the church in Jerusalem this news did Reach,
And they sent Barnabas to Antioch so he could Preach.
When he arrived he witnessed God's Grace,
How the gospel was growing among the human Race.*

*Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul,
And brought him to Antioch, for a whole year they taught All.
This is where disciples were called Christians First,
A hunger for the word and teaching they did Thirst.*

*Then the prophet Agabus predicted famine in all Roman Land,
Disciples provided for family in Judea without Command.
Then King Herod began his persecution of the Church,
Taking the life of James, and for Peter began his Search.*

*Peter placed in prison during the time of the Feast,
While the church prayed his protection from the kingly Beast.
Then at night in the cell an angel Arrived,
Telling Peter to get up, he was spared Alive.*

*Passed the guards and through an Iron Gate,
Then Peter walked alone to where the disciples did Wait.
Rhoda announced, Peter is at the Door!
You're out of your mind! Not knowing what was in Store.*

*Peter kept knocking, Undeterred.
It must be his angel, they Referred.
They opened the door utterly Amazed.
Peter shared his story of release to them Unfazed.*

*All of this created a Stir.
Leaving Herod quite pissed as it Were.
He cross-examined the guards and ordered them Killed,
Meanwhile others sought his attention, his time was Filled.*

*There had been a dispute over food Supply,
Upon the king's support they did Rely.
Hailing him god and not a Man,
Then Herod was struck by an angel's Hand.*

*Herod didn't praise God we are Told,
He was eaten by worms and didn't grow Old.
But the word of God continued to Flourish,
The church through its leaders God continued to Nourish.*

Acts 11:19 (NIV), Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews.

- There was still an attitude going on in the church that the Jews were special, that they were God's chosen people.
- They were sought out over the Gentiles even though Peter had this vision and then welcomed Cornelius and his whole household into the faith of Christianity.

20) 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. 21) The

Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

- But God began moving them to begin sharing the good news about the Lord Jesus with the Greek Gentiles.
- Whenever there is the preaching of the gospel and an expansion of the church, the Lord is always involved as it says "The Lord's hand was with them."
- We need to remember that even today we participate in God's work, not ours.

22) News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23) 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. 24) He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

- Barnabas was an encourager and was therefore sent to Antioch to greet the new Gentiles who accepted Jesus.
- This is the first point for us learned from these verses: can we all commit in this new year to remain true to the Lord with all our hearts despite of what's going on in the world and in our lives?

25) Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26) 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.

- Barnabas knew he needed help to reach out to all these people and God inspired him to go find Saul.
- They taught a great number of people for a whole year.
- There wasn't a name given to Gentile believers until they were called "Christians" in Antioch.

27) During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28) 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.) 29) The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. 30) This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

- The Hellenistic Jews and the Greek Gentiles, as a whole, were more prosperous than the Jewish community in Judea, and so they reached out and provided for their fellow Christians who were struggling.
- They did this without anyone telling them to do what they did.
- One of our members, Christine, shared what a blessing it was for the help she received from numerous people that she needed concerning her mother's apartment.
- People were moved by the Holy Spirit.
- The second point from this passage: to live generously and give to others in need, as we're able.

Acts 12:1 (NIV) It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. 2) He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. 3) 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. 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.

- King Harold Agrippa, the grandson of Herod the Great, practiced the Jewish faith for political reasons when he became ruler in the area even though he wasn't Jewish.
- To further achieve popularity with the orthodox Jews, he began to attack Christians especially their leaders.
- James was put to death by the sword which means he was beheaded.
- Why didn't God spare James life? No, it wasn't that God didn't love James, but it was just James' time to depart from this life.
- So, it doesn't mean that God loved James less favorably than the other disciples.
- It's interesting that Jesus told His disciples that they would be martyred because of their faith.
- As we'll see, Peter was miraculously saved because his mission wasn't yet accomplished.
- But when it was, Peter was martyred, as well – in fact he was crucified.
- Even though James wasn't given a trial, Herod wanted to give Peter one, before he was executed, which was Herod's plan.
- So that Peter couldn't escape he was bound in chains and guarded by 16 Roman soldiers.

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

- Interestingly, the response of the church wasn't to organize a massive mob to try to bring Peter out of incarceration, but to pray for his release.
- Our response today is the same – we reach out to God about the things we can't control.
- It's a correlational relationship of prayer but not a causal one.
- Our third point in 2021: to be earnestly praying to God for our protection in the midst of political tension and social unrest.

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. 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.

- It's interesting to note that Peter experienced Godly peace and fell into a deep sleep, even though he felt he was going to be martyred.
- The first century Christians believed that to live is to live in Christ and to die is to gain more of Christ.
- We know that after death, we will go into eternity with the Father, Son and Spirit, which will be so much more fantastic than anything we've experienced in this life.

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. 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. 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.

- Peter may have first thought this was just a vision and not really what was happening.
- Because of this, the angel had to tell Peter what to do, so he would leave the prison.

11) 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.”

- Peter never questioned God’s love, but he didn’t have the expectancy or the expectation that he would be saved from death.
- Our fourth point is: to trust that God, has under His control, the things we can’t control ourselves.

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. 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!”

- This is in the middle of the night that people were praying for Peter.

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.”

- Now, there was some Jewish thought that a guardian angel could take on the form of the person they were guarding.
- Perhaps, they had already presumed that Peter had already been killed ahead of his trial.
- Even though they were praying earnestly for Peter’s release, when it happened, they didn’t quite believe it.

16) But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. 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 other brothers and sisters about this,” he said, and then he left for another place.

- In this last comment, Luke is telling us that Peter is going to move away from the front of the leadership and made room for Paul to bring about his ministry.
- We’re not told where Peter moved to – some scholars say Babylon for a while and then Rome.

18) In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. 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. Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there.

- Herod, in ordering that the guards be executed, was fulfilling Roman law that said the guards were held responsible if a prisoner escaped.

20) He had been quarreling 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.

21) On the appointed day Herod, 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." 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.

- Now the historian Josephus said that it took 5 days for Herod to die.

24) But the word of God continued to spread and flourish. 25) When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.

- Our fifth point: Whatever pressures we face, whether it be physical or spiritual, God continues to move us forward.
- That's because we are in the process of our transformation where the truth of our being is becoming the way of our being.
- And when we live out the way of our being that matches the truth of our being, God's glory is brought about.

Summary application in 2021 of the anchors given to us in these verses:

1. Remain true to the Lord with all our heart.
2. As you are able, live generously.
3. Remain earnest in prayer to God for protection.
4. Sleep well, and be at peace with health issues and even in death knowing God is in control what we can't control.
5. Place your trust in God (not self) to address political unrest and tension.

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Concluding comments:

- So, let this be our hope in 2021 that we continue to flourish, that we continue to nourish and that we leave in God's hands the things that we, ourselves, can't control.
- We also need to be at peace and to share the gospel and to love each other.
- That's our role today.

Closing prayer: