

#18 Prayer Connects the Impotence of Man With The Omnipotence of God

Scripture – Acts 12:1-17, "Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. [2] And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. [3] And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) [4] And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. [5] Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. [6] And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. [7] And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. [8] And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. [9] And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. [10] When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. [11] And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. [12] And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. [13] And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. [14] And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. [15] And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. [16] But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. [17] But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place."

According to the Order Book of Chesterfield County, Virginia, Number 5, page 400, David Tinsley was arrested on February 4, 1774. The charges were as follows:

David Tinsley being committed, charged with having assembled and preached to the people at sundry times and places in this county as a Baptist preacher, and the said David acknowledging in court that he has done so. On consideration thereof the court being of opinion that the same is the breach of the peace and good behavior, it is ordered that he give

surety for keeping the peach & of being of good behavior for one year next ensuing himself in the penalty of 50 pounds & two sureties in penalty of 25 pounds each [1]

The statement of the court on this occasion indicates that it was a crime to be a Baptist and to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. On March 4th of this same year, Archibald W. Roberts was indicted for using hymns and poems instead of the psalms of David following Communion and the sermon. The state and its church were using every avenue to stifle the voices of these Baptists evangelists who were heralding the message of the grace of God.

Tinsley was confined for four months and sixteen days, during which time he, with others of his fellow prisoners, preached to the assembled crowds through the grates of the prison. The Chesterfield officials were debating what really constituted the law in these cases while Tinsley languished in prison. He appealed by letter to his brethren in association assembled at Hall's Meeting House in Halifax County, on the second Saturday in May 1774.

The associational record has this to say about Tinsley's appeal in part: *"The hearts of their brethren were affected at their sufferings, in consequence of which it was agreed to raise contributions for their aid. A resolution was entered into to set apart for second and third Saturdays in June as public fast days to preach for the 'poor blind persecutors, and for the releasement of our brethren.'" [2]*

The money raised was sent, wrapped in a handkerchief, to Patrick Henry for his employment in behalf of the preachers' release. It was returned that way by that noble patriot even though he interceded in their behalf.

When a wall was erected about the jail to prevent the preachers from exhorting the people, a handkerchief was displayed on a pole as a signal that the people were ready to hear. This fellowship, formed between all those involved, became known as the "bandana brigade." Historic handkerchief! Never did a standard give signal in a worthier cause or float before a nobler beleaguered band.

The fasting and prayer were effectual. The date of Tinsley's release was close to, if not on, the second public fast day. Prayer is the link that connects earth and Heaven, the impotence of man with the omnipotence of God. Not only was David Tinsley released about that time, but the series of imprisonments was drawing to a close. Only two more arrests are known to have been made throughout the colony and Commonwealth of Virginia – one in 1775 and another in 1778.

During the course of these imprisonments, many a curious person went to the jail to hear and ridicule these preachers, only to fall under deep conviction of sin by their message of truth. Great numbers were saved and became Baptist, and some became Baptist preachers.

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