“Rhoda Is Mad”

James 5:13-19

April 23, 2017

I’ve titled today’s message “Rhoda Is Mad.” First of all, who’s Rhoda? And is she really mad? And who thinks she’s mad? And why?

Please take your Bible with me and open to the story of “Rhoda Is Mad.” It’s found in the twelfth chapter of Acts.

Now, as we read, look for Rhoda and answer the question, “Is she mad?” Or, you might ask, “Who thinks Mary’s mad?” Look with me at the sixth verse.

Acts 12:6 *“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 [knew] 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. (18) Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. (19) And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode.”*

I’ve titled today’s message “Rhoda Is Mad.” Shall we pray?

Some of you, like Janet and I, have a rhododendron plant as part of your home’s landscaping. This name “Rhoda” is a Greek name. The English is Rose. So, your rhododendron is really a “rose tree.”

And Rhoda is a teenager; maybe younger. At least that’s what we read in verse thirteen. Acts 12:13 *“And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a* ***damsel*** *came to hearken, named Rhoda.”* A damsel was a young lady of marriageable age; likely a slave girl.

And Rhoda’s got a job. Her responsibility, while the Church is praying, was to answer the door. And, by the way, this young girl Rhoda, was hard-working. Here she is, at work, while the others in the house, were praying. Her name is Rhoda. But, as you are about to see, the people at the house that night called her “Manias,” meaning “out of her mind.”

Acts 12:15 *“And they said unto her, Thou art mad [Manias]. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel.”*

So, is Rhoda mad? How many times have people completely misjudged you? And how many times do you allow yourself to be affected by what they think rather than the way you really are? And once Peter walks through the door, Rhoda is likely disregarded. So, no, Rhoda is not mad.

Next, whose house is this? It was owned by the mother of a young man who would later be taken under the wing of the Apostle Paul. His name is Mark.

And who’s Mark? He’s the writer of the Book of Mark. And the Bible give us his full given; verse twelve. Acts 12:12 “*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.”*

So, the house belonged to a mother of one of the Bible writers. Here she is hosting Saints at a prayer meeting in her home.

Now, here was what I have on my heart today. **The Church is at prayer.** I’d like you to learn with me today a couple lessons on the one part of your life that you can never learn enough about; talking things over with your Heavenly Father.

First, the time for prayer. What time is it? It’s the middle of the night. Acts 12:6 *“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.”*

It tells you something about the spiritual temperature of a Church when prayer is not only a priority; but they see it as so important that it prays in the middle of the night. It says something about the hearts of these early Jerusalem Believers.

A number of weeks back you heard a sermon from one of our members, Michael Storm, who asked this question over and over in his message. “If everyone in this Church were just like you, what kind of Church would we be?”

What does the Church look like here in Acts 12? They were committed to prayer. They had heard the LORD’s call to pray. And they believed that praying together with other Believers was both important and effective. So, they made time for prayer. They met for prayer. They spent time at pray, even praying during the night time hours.

Now, they had all misjudged Rhoda and you might say they had very little faith when they prayed for Peter. But, don’t we often pray the same way? We pray. We ask the LORD for His blessing or His provision. And then we are shocked when He answers. So, yes, they had come to a wrong conclusion about Rhoda. But they did pray. And furthermore, God did answer their prayers.

So, how important is prayer? And how important is prayer to you? Is there anyone here who would sincerely apply this chapter to your life and take time to pray at this late hour? Or, to pray with others at midnight?

Now, is it really that important to pray in the middle of the night? Besides, isn’t the nighttime the time for sleep? And isn’t everyone so busy already that the last thing we need is for someone to lay a guilt trip on us and call us to start praying in the middle of the night?

Well, consider this. Other people beside Mary and her friends prayed at night. Here’s another prayer service in the Book of Acts.

Paul and his team of Christians are in Philippi. They’d preached the Gospel and a young damsel, a fortune teller was saved. The effect of her salvation was that her owners began to lose money. Paul and Silas, the leaders, are now in prison since this young damsel is no longer a fortune teller.

Acts 16:22 *“And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. (23) And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely:*

*(24)* *Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. (25) And* ***at midnight Paul and Silas prayed****, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.”*

Let me say a word today about the time for prayer.

Now, I wouldn’t be a bit surprised that nearly everyone here wakes us in the middle of the night. I know I do. And, why do you wake up night after night after night? Is some-thing wrong? I’m about to show you that something is right with you if you wake up at that time.

Victoria Allen is a science writer for the English publication “The Daily Mail.” On February 7, 2017, she wrote an article titled, “Why waking up in the night is natural.” She writes “People regularly use to have two periods of sleep and do tasks in between those two sleep periods.” *Daily Mail*, Feb. 7, 2017 [Found on www. history.vt.edu/Ekirch/sleepcommentary.html]

Then Dr. Robert Ekirch, a history professor at Virginia Tech wrote a lengthy article titled “At Day’s Close.”

“In *At Day’s Close*, he put together [some five hundred references from] diaries, court records, anthropology, and high literature to demonstrate that many people slept in two sittings (dual sleeping). There was a first sleep, which began after dusk, followed by a waking period of one to two hours, and then a second sleeping period.” [Candida Moss, “We’ve Never Agreed on How to Sleep,” *Daily Beast*, April 17, 2016].

He’s what he says. *It may bring some comfort to those who go to bed, only to wake up in the middle of the night frustratedly unable to get back to sleep. While today this is seen as insomnia, until the end of the 19th century, people did it on purpose. Well after the Industrial Revolution, many people in Britain still swore by the health benefits of a ‘first sleep’ and ‘second sleep’.*

*Although insomnia is often thought of as a problem now, until the late 1800s, it was usual to wake up in the night and do chores before going back to bed. For centuries, according to a sleep historian, they would use the time when they woke up at night to do household chores…”* (Roger Ekirch). “First sleep” – until midnight; Second sleep; until dawn.

*“References to two phases of sleep go back to Chaucer, with a character in The Squire’s Tale, in the Canterbury Tales, deciding to go back to bed after her ‘firste sleep’.” “Our ancestors had, in fact, a rhythm very different from ours. The latter were sleeping in twice, with a waking phase between the two during which they prayed,…*

*However, with the arrival of electricity, which prolongs the days, families began to stay awake later and later to delay the time of their bed, and thus to suppress the waking hour in the middle of the night.*

“Pourquoi Dormir D’une Traite la Nuit N’est Peut-Être Pas si Naturel,” *GQ France*, Mar. 24, 2017

“Why Sleep At Night Might Not Be So Natural.”

*“When artificial lighting became widely available, people began realizing that tasks they had previously been unable to do in the dark were suddenly doable. Consequently, they began shifting their bedtimes later and later. As they did that, the space between the two sleep shifts shrank. Soon enough, it was just easier to sleep in one long shift through the night.”* ["*Sleep We Have Lost: Pre-Industrial Slumber in the British Isles"* by Dr. Roger Ekirch].

And, historically, the interval in between the two sleeps had this wonderful name. It was called “the watching” or “the watch.”

*“We know that before the machine age, people slept in a variety of ways, including (famously) ‘segmented sleep,’ or sleep in two shifts.”* [Jennifer Senior, *New York Times*, March 1, 2017].

And Dr. Michael Moseley, British Television journalist, writes this.

*“Thanks to fascinating research I've recently come across, I've realized that what I'm doing is entirely natural. It turns out that I'm not an insomniac with a medical problem, but someone whose sleeping pattern harks back to an earlier time. I am sleeping less like a 21st century man and much more like our ancestors did.*

*And knowing that has helped me conquer my anxiety so that I am sleeping better than I have in years. .* *.*” **[Dr. Michael Moseley, “Doctor Michael Moseley Reveals How He Defeated His Sleep Problem,” *Daily Mail*, Oct. 25, 2016].**

So, historically, biologically, Biblically, and spiritually you’ve got precedent for waking up in the middle of the night. And what is the one thing every single one of us can do at that time of the night? We can pray. There are many other things available in our modern day from vacuuming to planning for the next day to worrying. But, since you are already waking up at night, instead of taking medicine to go back to sleep, do what hundreds and thousands of people have done through the centuries; spend that time in prayer.

I’ve done this for years and years. I’ve heard people say “How can I possibly find time for prayer?” You already have the time, you just aren’t using it as you should.

So, first the time for prayer.

Second, the power of prayer.

Look with me at Acts12 verse sixteen. Acts 12:16 *“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.”*

The LORD sent an angel into the cell in which Peter was sleeping to wake him up. God was answering the prayers of those people who were at Mary’s house praying in the middle of the night.

Now some people say that the reason they were praying together in the middle of the night was because of persecution and it wasn’t safe to pray during the day.

But that’s completely incorrect. It was very safe to pray during the daylight hours. Actually the Jews had specific hours of prayer when they would to gather and pray in those days. Here’s an example from Acts 3:1 *“Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.”*

Acts 10:3 *“He [Peter] saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.”*

Does anyone here know when the ninth hour of the day was? The ninth hour of the day was 3:00 p.m. because the Jewish day began at 6:00 a.m. So, to say that the reason they prayed at night was because of persecution is not right.

And one more thing regarding the ninth hour. Matthew 27:46 *“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”*

The LORD Jesus died on the Cross at the ninth hour.

Well, what do we see here as to the power of prayer. Who here prays until God’s answer comes? That’s likely the main reason why these people were praying that night.

They prayed until God answered. They may have met other nights and prayed together. And they hadn’t received the answer yet.

Some of you have prayed for a long time for some specific things. Do you think the LORD isn’t listening? Do you think He lied when He said this? Matthew 21:22 *“And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.”*

John 14:13 *“And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (14) If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.”*

How do you know there’s power in prayer? Is it just because your prayer was answered? No, it’s because Jesus promised to answer. That’s how I know there’s power in prayer. Yes, there are plenty of prayers I’ve prayed that have yet to be answered. But they can never negate the fact of the power in prayer. Actually, the power is in the One Who answers your prayers.

Folks, *“Prayer is an effort of will.”* – Oswald Chambers.

And *don’t pray when you feel like it. Have an appointment with the Lord and keep it. A man is powerful on his knees.”* – Corrie Ten Boom.

James 5:16 *“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”*

The Dutch Theologian Henry Nouwen wrote a book he titled “The Only Necessary Thing.” In it he says this. *“Prayer makes us reach out to God, not on our own but on God’s terms, then prayer pulls us away from self-preoccupations, encourages us to leave familiar ground, and challenges us to enter into a new world which cannot be contained within the narrow boundaries of our mind or heart.”*

And listen to Jesus on the subject of making time to pray at night. Matthew 26:40 *“And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? (41) Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

Do you remember what Jesus was doing while the disciples were crossing the Mediterranean Sea during the night? They had just experience the LORD multiplying five loaves and two fish for some 15,000 people.

Here’s Mark 6:45 *“And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida, while he sent away the people. (46) And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray.*

*(47) And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land. (48) And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night [between 3:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m.] he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them.*

*(49) But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out: (50) for they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.*

*(51) And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered. (52) For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.”*

Jesus sent the Apostles across the sea when it was evening. Then He went up into the mountain to pray. And during the fourth watch of the night He comes to them, walking on the water.

This tells us two things. One, Jesus prayed through until 2:00 or even 3:00 a.m. And two, these men rowed from evening until 2:00 or 3:00 a.m., a trip that normally would take just a few hours at the most. But here they are many hours into the night struggling with the oars. And Jesus arrives, walking on the water.

Should you pray at night? Should you pray in between your first and second sleep? Here’s mighty King David. Psalm 119:62 *“At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments.”*

So, here are two questions for you to apply Acts 12. First, who here will take time in between his first and second sleep to pray tonight?

Second, will you join us for prayer this Wednesday?

We’re not good prayers, folks. None of us are good prayers. But we join together in prayer. We take a look at God’s Word. Then we share some requests and we pray.

East Indian Evangelist K. P. Yohannan says he will never forget one of his first prayer meetings in an American Church. K.P. is the founder and president of an organization called “Gospel for Asia.” He’s written a number of books on missions.

He came to the U.S eager to meet some of its spiritual giants and leaders. One man in particular held his interest, a preacher well-known even in India for his powerful sermons.

More than 3,000 people attended services on the Sunday Yohannan visited his church. The choirs sang and the preaching was everything he'd hoped it would be. But he was especially taken by an announcement the pastor made about the midweek prayer meeting. He said there were some things lying heavy on his heart—would the people come and pray about them? Then he announced the name of a certain chapel on the Church campus. Excited, Yohannan determined he would attend.

When he arrived later that week, he brought with him some definite assumptions. The most basic was that prayer meetings are essential, of primary importance. In India, and in many other parts of the world where Christians are persecuted, the prayer meeting is the centerpiece of the Church's life. Everyone comes, the meetings often last long into the night, and it is not unusual for believers to arise daily before sunup to pray together for the work of the church.

Fearing a huge crowd, he came early to get a seat. But when he arrived he was surprised to discover a chapel with a capacity for only 500—that was empty! A few people eventually came in, but there was no leader, no songs or worship, just chit chat about news, weather, and sports.

Forty-five minutes later an elderly man, the leader, but not the pastor, walked into the chapel to offer a few devotional thoughts from the Bible and give a brief prayer. The meeting was over, and as the seven attendees filed out of the chapel, Yohannan sat in stunned silence.” [Found on <http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/1999/fall/9l4120.html>, “Whatever Happened to Prayer Meeting?” by Ben Patterson; Introductory paragraph, chapter ten of “Deepening Your Conversation with God.”

There is a time for prayer. It might be in the middle of the night. And there is power in prayer. Jesus promised He would answer.

So, what will it be? What will you do today with Acts 12?

Here’s what you can do.

The next time you wake up in the middle of the night, make the decision that you will pray. First, quietly wait before the LORD. Second, ask Him to teach you to pray. Then, as you remember specific people and things you need to pray for, begin by submitting your heart to the LORD and asking for His will to be done. Then, as you more and more realize that the LORD wants to hear from you, add more people and situations to your prayers. And always set your heart on His will for you.

The LORD is more than willing to teach you if you are more than willing to learn. It’s your choice.

Today, pray this prayer along with me.

*“LORD, I admit that I am a slow learner when it comes to prayer. Teach me to pray. Thank you.”*

Shall we pray?

Hymn # \_\_\_\_\_ “\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_”