



A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEKEND

22nd September, 2023

Continuing the theme of 'background' characters in the Bible.....

Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"

Acts 12:13-14

Poor Rhoda! Sent to answer the door in the threatening climate under which Christians gathered secretly, she must have gone fearfully. Possibly it was an outer door to a house-compound, so perhaps she peeped round the corner of the building. She was so surprised by what she saw that her emotions overwhelmed her and she rushed back in hysterical joy, only to be told *"You're out of your mind"* (v.15). Maybe it was said in a dismissive, demeaning way, 'she's only a servant girl; she's showing off, don't listen'.

But she kept insisting (thank God!) and Peter kept banging... so they all came. What a blessing she wasn't silenced while Peter waited in danger of re-arrest any second.

I wonder how often I, perhaps you, have received some blessing, some answer to prayer, without being *"overjoyed"* like Rhoda, -without pausing to consider -or to say- 'God has answered, I am profoundly grateful, to Him be the glory'. All too readily we attribute something to more earthly causes: medication, or 'nature', -or luck! I'm often reminded of this having seen leprosy surgery restoring function in a paralysed eyelid or a powerless hand. Not only has God shared with medical science the wonder of physiology, but the physical body he made (Psalm 139:13-16a) can heal its own wounds; the brain can re-learn the changed physical function to complete the healing. We must not deny the miraculous, even when we know how it works!

Back to Rhoda and the prayer meeting! The story goes of a drought-stricken community gathering to pray for rain; one child brought an umbrella. The matter of answered and unanswered (or *differently* answered) prayer is deep and mysterious. We cannot assume God's 'automatic' answer, as if He were a 'slot machine' (as 'prosperity theology' might suggest: put this in and you'll get this out). But many of us have been saddened when sincere prayers for something that felt so 'right'... weren't answered as we hoped. We are troubled by verses like Matthew 21:22, James 1:6 and 4:3, -is it *my* fault when prayer is 'unanswered'? Did I lack faith? But equally, have we been *"overjoyed"* like Rhoda at an unexpected(!) answer? Those are topics for another day!

What I learn from Rhoda and the group praying in Acts 12, is that there are examples of answered prayer, -even if unexpected; and all around us are the gifts and works of God from which we constantly benefit, but may not attribute to our loving Father. Am I *"overwhelmed"* with God's provision; and if I *"exclaim"* it, do I seem *"out of our mind"* (vv.14,15)? When Rhoda saw the answer to their prayers she struggled to believe what her eyes were telling her, and the others struggled to believe that what she was saying could be true. Do I all-too-easily *not* expect and *not* give credit where it's due? 'Open the eyes of my heart, Lord' (Paul Baloche)