

Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Futility of Resisting God

Acts 12

Keywords: Acts 12, Persecution, Herod, Divine Judgment, Martyrdom, Prayer

PowerPoint Presentation included: none

SermonAudio Blurb: In this chapter we see what appears to be the triumph of evil and the reality that the only true victor is God Himself. We start with a murder of a humble Christian and we end with the death of an evil king and the ongoing spread of the gospel.

I. Introduction.

- A. Read 12.
- B. We come to an interesting passage that describes the ongoing persecution of Christians in the early days of the Church.
 - 1. I often try to show you how a passage is constructed if there are unique literary techniques being employed. The goal is to help you identify these yourself.
 - 2. Two of the most common you will find are called bookends and sandwiches. There are fancier names for these but these are easiest to remember.
 - a. A sandwich, or intercalation, is where a story is introduced, then something else is written, an apparent change of subject, after which the first story is picked back up and concluded.
 - b. Bookends is the idea of a subject introduced at the beginning of a section, then other activities and events take place, and then the subject is brought back up again.
 - 3. This gives us the purpose of this chapter, it is the idea that *people and nations may resist God but they can never triumph over God for He shall crush His enemies.*
- C. So we will learn a bit of the background of the key characters, then allow the story to develop as Luke writes it, and finally show that even when evil seems to be victorious, in the end it always loses.

II. The Futility of Resisting God.

- A. The background:
 - 1. Herod:

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- a. The bible mentions several Herods and they are a dynasty of rulers who are Idumean.
 - b. They are vitally connected to the biblical storyline. They originally were called Edomites whose father was Esau who came under the curse of God.
 - c. They began to rise to power with the Roman empire. They were appointed as kings of Israel by the Roman emperors.
 - d. Herod the Great was the one who sought to kill Jesus in Matthew 2.
 - e. His son, Herod Antipas or “the tetrarch” is found in Matthew 14:1 and ruled in Galilee. This is the Herod who was part of the false trial against Jesus. And this is the one who also had John the Baptist killed.
 - f. Our Herod is Agrippa I and was the grandson of Herod the Great.
2. James the brother of John (2).
 - a. There are several James in the bible. The one mentioned here is the son of Zebedee, who had another son, John, who also was a disciple of Jesus.
 - b. He and his brother John were also known as the son of thunder, likely due to the very passionate and zealous personalities. They were also the guys who wanted Jesus to bring down fire to destroy a village that did not want to receive Jesus.
 3. Peter (3).
- B. The Apparent Victory of Evil (1-4).
1. Notice the opening phrase, “Now about that time . . .” This is Luke connecting separate events that are happening around the same time.
 - a. The meeting Peter had with the leadership in Jerusalem is done.
 - b. Barnabas and Saul are either gathering the money or already on their way back to Jerusalem with the money to help the Judean church endure the coming famine.
 2. We have in vs 1 a purely political act by Herod.
 - a. By this time the Church was seen as a problem by the Jewish leaders in Israel.

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- b. Herod was a political animal and he was always looking for ways to get into the good graces of the Jews.
 - c. And so he is persecuting Christians and takes one prominent leader, James, and has him put to death.
 3. Once he sees that the majority liked this action he goes after Peter, who was one of the key leaders and apostles. So now we have Peter back in jail (4).
- C. The Initial Victory of The Church (5-17).
 1. On one hand we have the power of Rome and the local vassal king, Herod. They have the laws, the jails, the bindings and the weapons. Obviously they are the strong ones.
 2. But what did the Church have? Prayer.
 3. But as we work through this exciting event do not think it is about prayer and the power of prayer. It is the story of God's will and God as the ultimate victor in all things.
 4. So don't make this about us. What we are able to do. Remember that James wasn't rescued, he was killed. But Peter will be rescued. But both occurred within the purposes of God.
 5. An angel then shows up. Peter is unsure if this is a vision or reality. I like how it says that the angel struck his side and told him to get up.
 6. So, Peter, realizing God is rescuing him (11) goes to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark (who wrote the gospel).
 7. He then gives them the story and he leaves to go elsewhere.
- D. The Impotent Raging of Herod (18-21).
 1. Here we see the aftermath of the escape. A lot of scrambling around and trying to figure out what happened.
 2. Here we see his anger, but also his impotence in the whole thing.
 3. This was all too stressful for him so he needs to get away for a bit.
 4. Then we have this passing comment about Tyre and Sidon. Herod is mad and he now focuses it upon those two cities. So they send a delegation to appease him.
 5. And so, picture it in your mind. He sits on a throne with all his glory. He is surrounded by his guards and attendants. He has people falling before

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him hoping that he will grant them their desires. He is the center of everything.

6. Except, he is not.

E. The Fury of The Lord (22-23).

1. The crowds have been whipped up to a frenzy. They are calling him a god. They are dripping with praise for this man. And he is taking it all in.

2. And then he dies

3. And so ends a king. Great and powerful, holding the lives of so many in his grip. Until the One who holds his very life breath in His hands says that it is time to die.

F. The Weak Gospel Triumphs over The Strength of Evil (24-25).

1. Luke simply shrugs his shoulders here and moves on. The king is dead and the Church is still there preaching the gospel and bringing in many who believe and are saved from their sins.

2. Again, no fanfare. Just a simple statement of fact. The king dies but the gospel proceeds.

3. And during this time Barnabas and Saul come back from Jerusalem and the stage is set for the Gospel to go even deeper into the world.

4. And that is the point of this chapter. Psalm 2 says:

G. So now let us consider a few quick lessons that stood out to me while studying this chapter.

III. Conclusion.

A. Lesson #1: It is worth noting that Peter was asleep in the cell. He had no knowledge of the coming rescue. But, chained and closely guarded, he sleeps. I believe this comes from one who has died to self and is resting in Christ alone. Like the three men in Daniel facing the threat of death. They knew God could save them but even if He didn't, they would not bow to a false God. Either way is fine. This only happens when a person finds Jesus to be their true hope and joy and everything else becomes secondary.

B. Lesson #2: Remember that just because something happens to one person, it does not mean it is true for all. James was murdered, Peter was rescued. We like all our stories to end in happy ways. But we also like to define happy endings as something in the here and now. God's will is His, not yours. And so as you pray,

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work and play; remember how even your Lord said, “Not My will but Yours be done.”

- C. Lesson #3: Remember that if you are saved through faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ then you cannot lose. Even though you lose from the perspective of this age, you are safe in Christ.
- D. Lesson #4: Isaiah 45:9a, “Woe to the one who contends with his Maker. . . .” and the writer of Hebrews says, “Our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29). And “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31).
- E. Lesson #5: We can be paralyzed with fear about things we have no say in, or we can be busy about our Master’s commission of bringing the gospel to those we encounter.
 - 1. We have a king who had great power but did not honor God.
 - 2. We have an execution of an innocent man that fed the imagination of this king that he was truly sovereign. But he did not have eyes that could see how James died and was immediately gathered up into the presence of His Maker and Savior.
 - 3. And then we have the execution of a man by the power of God. And that man has only the terrifying expectation of the wrath of God upon him for all eternity.
- F. And so I again urge all here to commit yourself by faith to God alone. Come to Him because of what Jesus did on the cross as the perfect and sufficient sacrifice. Come to Him because of the defeat of death through Jesus’ resurrection. Find life and find forgiveness.

Benediction

May the Lord answer you in your day of trouble. May the name of YHWH set you in a secure place on high. May He remember your faithfulness and prayers and may He grant you the true desires of your heart. Amen