

Unrivaled Supremacy—Acts 12:20-25—10/4/26
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Open your Bibles to Acts 12 & let's read that chapter again as we come to the final verses of it in our study—read Acts 12:1-25. [READ]

As we come to verses 20-25 today, we find more examples of how consistent the Scriptures are.

I love the transcendent timelessness of Scripture that is so consistent throughout the sixty-six books in different times by different authors.

The one Author—God the Holy Spirit—moved each writer to reveal the same one true God and His plan through the ages.

God has been revealed in all His supremacy and glory whether He was working to deliver His people or to discipline His people.

Whether He was allowing His adversaries to triumph for a time or He was bringing down His adversaries, He is the only God.

He is sovereign over all & He is working out His marvelous plans.

He has revealed His plans and promises & He is executing them hour by hour and century by century.

Such truths are precious help when we are tempted to doubt His involvement in the details of our lives or in the influences of culture.

We need hope when we see wicked leaders exalt themselves & we see His Word suppressed & silenced & sidelined.

We need truth when we wonder how some people get away with their sins or how the church can survive some situations.

We need reminders that God is still on His throne, that He has proven His trustworthiness in struggles like this before.

So in brief trials & extended burdens, on levels that are personal or societal or global, we can trust God.

We never have reason to doubt & we can recall His sovereign goodness in more stories than we have time to recount.

We'll see more of those truths this morning as we examine 2 proofs of His unrivaled supremacy from Acts 12:20-25.

By unrivaled, I mean unequaled, unchallenged & unbeatable.

There is no individual that can truly compete with God—there is no team that can play in His league—He does not have any real rivals.

Yes, He does have enemies—the devil is real & his demonic hoards are active in deception & destruction.

We must beware of evil in individual stories & international affairs.

But we can always trust that sin will not win in the end.

So no matter what, we can rely on & rest in God's Person & promises to carry us forward & to light our paths.

Acts 12:20-25 recounts His unrivaled supremacy in punishing King Herod & continuing to build His church.

And those 2 sections illustrate 2 proofs of God's unrivaled supremacy that can strengthen our trust in His sovereignty & goodness.

Last week we soaked in the surprising power of God through prayer as the Apostle Peter was rescued from certain death.

God overcame opposition & expectations arrayed against Peter & then today we see more connections that further certify God's supremacy.

The 1st point we can note that we observe in verses 20-23 is that **God will not give His glory to another.**

The 1st proof of God's unrivaled supremacy to note today from Acts 12:20-23 is that **God will not give His glory to another.**

If you hear that point & think you've heard it before, you have.

You have heard it from the Bible—twice almost explicitly in Isaiah—and you have likely heard the same theme many times in Scripture.

That is a phrase that summarizes the consistent theme of God's unrivaled supremacy that is repeatedly declared & displayed.

It is in **Isaiah 42:8** where God said, "*I am the LORD, that is My name; **I will not give My glory to another.** Nor My praise to graven images.*"

That's **Isaiah 42:8** & He also said it in **Isaiah 48:11**.

In **Isaiah 48:11**, God said, "*For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And **My glory I will not give to another.***"

That explanation also sums up God's dealings with this Herod Agrippa I after God had overruled his attempt to kill Peter.

Acts 12:19 says Herod left Judea & was spending time in Caesarea by the sea for some indefinite period.

Herod was a politician always working things to his own advantage, to guard his position & advance his prominence.

But he was never successful in stopping God's plans.

Instead, he was judged by God in publicly humiliating way.

Jewish historian Josephus even recorded his shameful death & linked it to Herod's blasphemous receiving of worship.

Let's read Luke's account again in verses 20-23. [READ]

Interestingly, this death of Herod Agrippa I in AD 44 was one of the events in the NT that helps in dating of other events.

But verses 20-21 set the context of Tyre & Sidon needing the food from King Herod's domain & he must have cut it off.

Several OT passages also indicate the interdependence of these regions with one another. [1 Kings 5:11; Ezra 3:7; Ezekiel 27:17]

Herod had disrupted that with some ban or economic sanction.

So the people of Tyre & Sidon unified to seek diplomacy with Herod.

Blastus was literally over the king's bedroom, meaning he kept watch over the king & who was allowed to enter or see him.

So with Blastus paid off or somehow persuaded, the people of Tyre & Sidon were making appeals for peace, perhaps for some time.

And since Herod craved the praise of men, appearance in the theater by the sea presented an opportunity for self-exaltation.

Josephus said this day was to honor the Emperor Claudius & added that Herod wore a garment of all silver that shone in the morning sun.

Herod sat on the judgment seat with a possible crowd of 4000 & was speaking to them from his official public post.

And likely out of flattery, the crowd was responding to him by describing his voice as that of God and not of man.

And Herod received such blasphemy & did not correct it.

So the true God did not delay his response.

At once, an angel of the Lord slayed Herod, struck him down.

Josephus wrote of Herod's immediate pain & certainty of death & Luke described what seems to be internal destruction by worms.

So Herod breathed his last breath shortly after that, as Luke explained, because he did not give God the glory.

As we noted from Isaiah 42:8 & 48:11—God will not give His glory to another—& Herod had received praises giving him glory as God.

God made clear to everyone that Herod was not God.

When you read that, do you want God to do that kind of thing again?

Do you want God to show His supremacy like that more often?

I can think of situations where I did not want someone to be eaten by worms, but I did want God to show how another was clearly wrong.

I can think of ways I have wished that God would reveal the whole truth & vindicate what's right & set things straight.

I can think of sinful motives & reactions I've had like that & hopefully even godly motives & Christ-exalting longings mixed in at times.

Yet whatever our mixture of motives, we can be sure that God will one day right all wrongs & prove His supremacy.

And asking God to show His glory is surely a biblical request to pray.

But if we doubt God still does that or we think this was a rare exception, we may need a little review of the Bible & history.

We can start in Genesis 3 after Satan had led Adam into sin & God immediately promised a Deliverer to come crush Satan's head.

And we can recall the Tower of Babel when people wanted to make a name for themselves & God spread them into diverse languages that would have many different names.

We can think of God using Joseph in Egypt to save many from famine & to save Israel as a nation despite his brothers' sins against him.

We can recount the plagues in Egypt that showed God's supremacy over Pharaoh as the world leader at that time.

Among great world leaders in their time, we can add what God did with Nebuchadnezzar & Belshazzar in Daniel's time.

We can even point to the sins of the kings of Israel & Judah & how God used pagan nations to rebuke His own people.

We could tell of God overruling a false prophet like Balaam & a genocidal zealot like Haman the Agagite in Esther's time.

And I skipped over other stories where God proved His supremacy over other kings & kingdoms & others.

We could even look at church history & see the repeated theme that the blood of the martyrs has been the seed to grow the church.

Then finally, Revelation tells of future leaders & a future Antichrist who will rise against God before being punished.

Revelation tells of the coming unmistakable victory of Jesus Christ in His return to crush all evil & establish His kingdom on earth.

So we should not doubt that God can & does prove His supremacy in unmistakable ways.

And we should also know that judgment is not only for the future if we have read Romans 1:18-32 & realize its applications in recent history.

The sexual revolution evidenced God's abandonment wrath.

In a downward spiral, Romans 1:18-32 tells how God gives people what they wanted by abandoning them to degrading depths of sin.

God does so because He will not give His glory to another.

And if you are tempted to ask why God would do that, recall that the most loving thing for God to do is to show that He alone is God.

I mean, it would not be loving to allow someone to believe that they would find good health by eating poison, would it?

The best thing for every person is to know is that God is the source of all good & thus to rightly thank & honor Him.

That's why it is good & wise & desirable for God to be a jealous God, as Exodus 20:5 & Deuteronomy 5:9 say.

Since there are no other real gods, the 1st & 2nd of the 10 Commandments say to have no other gods & not to worship idols.

So it is loving & right for God not to give His glory to another & to make that clear by punishing evil impostors like Herod.

Peter's response after he was rescued or used by God was not like Herod's—Peter gave credit to God alone. [Acts 3:12-16; 9:34; 10:26]

That's the only proper response—we reflect all praise to God; we ascribe glory to Him & do not try to steal any for ourselves.

As Jeremiah 9:23-24 says: *Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, & let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice & righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things.*

And as Paul said in 1st Corinthians 4:7, “*What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?*”

And this is not only for evil leaders or those who obviously defy God.

We must also consider the dangers of pride in our own hearts, knowing that *God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble*, as is said in 1st Peter 5:5 & James 4:8.

We must be warned not to line up against God to fight for glory.

You do not want to war against Him for credit for the gifts & blessings He has given you.

We must attack the evil Herod fostered at the level of our own hearts.

Yet we can receive encouragement while also praising God.

We can be thankful to others & have joy in our own experiences while also reflecting thanks to God.

You know the value of thanking God for others & genuinely sharing that to build up others in faith & joy.

So we do not need to hold back from encouraging others out of fear that we would tempt them to pride or detract from God's glory.

We can overflow with delight in others while sharing that with a focus toward God as the source.

That's helpful to remember because we must speak & not be silent—we must boast in the Lord & we need to know how to do so.

And that leads to the guidelines & guardrails for our speech to be governed by the Word of God.

We can & should speak with assurance that God's Word will not return void or empty but will accomplish what He desired.

If you recognize that phrase, it's from **Isaiah 55:11** in reference to God's higher ways in working out His plans.

In Isaiah 55:10-11 God said, “*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.*”

Hear that: God’s Word will not return to Him empty or void.

God’s Word **will accomplish what He desired for it**, succeeding in the matter for which He sent it.

So we can trust God to do His work through His Word.

The most powerful tool for change & blessing is the Word of God.

The majestic actions of God’s Spirit are unleashed as the Word of God is spoken and heard and applied.

And that is what could not be stopped in Acts and throughout history.

So that’s how I phrased a **2nd proof of God’s unrivaled supremacy** that we note today as we move on to verses 24-25.

Proof #2 of God’s unrivaled supremacy today is that God’s Word will not return void or empty.

Again, that’s a quote from **Isaiah 55:11**, just as the 1st point was a quote from Isaiah 42:8 & 48:11.

As we see the consistency of Scripture revealing the One true God & the way He works, we note how God’s Word will not return void.

Read of that theme in Acts 12:24-25. [READ]

As with Luke’s other progress reports through this book, he pointed to **the spread of the Word of the Lord**.

The Word continued to grow & be multiplied, to increase the **extent** of its reach & the **number** of those reached.

The church was being built & spreading by the **ministry of the Word**.

That’s what God does to confound the world’s wisdom & to overpower men’s strength, as 1st Corinthians 1:20-25 says.

Paul wrote that “*God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.*”

That’s why the weapons of warfare in 2nd Corinthians 10:3-5 point to taking every thought captive in obedience to Christ.

Also in Ephesians 6, the armor of God focuses on prayer & the Word.

So that tells us where to run when we know we are in the fight, when we feel overwhelmed in a battle, when we feel helpless.

We **run to God & His Word**—we seek Him in prayer as we read & respond to His Word.

And we move forward **in ministry to others with the Word**.

We speak & counsel & apply God’s Word to **our** lives & issues as believers & we proclaim & share God’s Word with unbelievers.

We do not know the specifics of what God will do, but we do know that God works through His Word.

God fulfills what He **plans** to do and His Word does not return void or empty without accomplishing His purpose.

We see that word ‘fulfilled’ in verse 25 about the mission or ministry of Barnabas & Saul.

They brought a gift from Antioch to the churches in Judea as Acts 11:28-30 described before Acts 12 recounted what else had happened.

So that gift trip occurred after Herod died & the famine came.

Herod died & his persecutions failed to stop the church & so the focus spread to Antioch from which the first missionary journeys began.

So this final verse of chapter 12 connects back to Acts 11:30 & moves the narrative away from the Jerusalem church.

To prepare for the 1st missionary journey that Barnabas & Saul, Luke reintroduced the man who would accompany them—John Mark.

We know John Mark because his mother's house was where believers were praying & where Peter went after being rescued.

So again, verse 25 is a completion & a connection to what's next.

But that transition builds on what verse 24 reports as the continued theme of Acts—the Word of God kept spreading.

The church was being built by the ministry of the Word & prayer.

And that would continue just as we continue by faith today.

Not only is that a theme in Acts—it's the repeated emphasis for ministry in the letters to the churches in the rest of the NT.

And you know that—we give attention to the Word & prayer—we read & respond to the Word in all our gatherings.

You know that & we see it in Acts as the foundation of church growth & as a way God proves His supremacy for the good of His people.

But what we've covered today should make you want to be sure you are one of God's people.

God's dealings with Herod should make you never want to be aligned in pride against God.

So in whatever ways you may be fighting for or defending your own glory, surrender it all to Him for His glory.

God gives grace to the humble & you can trust His Word—that's what He said & so He will do it.

So humble yourself under the mighty hand of God & let Him exalt you at His proper time.

First of all, beg Him to save you—turn from your self-rule & sin & entrust yourself now & forever into His faithful hands.

Jesus has died to pay sin's penalty & crush sin's power so that you can be accepted by God & free to serve Him.

And His resurrection certifies His victory that is ours freely by faith.

So trust Jesus Christ as your Lord & Savior & walk in the secure light of His unrivaled supremacy.

And if you know Jesus like that, seriously praise & honor Him today as we remember His work until He comes again.

If you don't know Jesus, pray & watch now as we close with this ceremony symbolizing His body & blood given for us.

We'd love to lead you to Him if you want to talk after the service.

Jesus is God the Son who became a Man whose sinless life qualified Him to be the sacrifice for others' sins who trust Him.

He commanded us as His followers to remember His death for our sins as a regular renewal of our trust & love toward Him.

So let's all bow in prayer now & respond to God & His Word as we prepare for communion at the Lord's Table.