

Series: **The Original**
Today's Title: **"God Always Wins"**

October 17, 2021 – Acts 12:20-25

Objective: To help people have confidence that no matter what happens, God always wins.

Turn to Acts 12:20-25 (p. 921)

This is our final sermon in this series - sermon #28.

Sometime in the next few years we will come back and work through the rest of Acts and the church planting trips of the Apostle Paul.

Next Sunday we will start a 6-week study: Aliens 2.0 - which will be a study of 6 hot-button issues in our culture.

These issues have been very divisive for so many - so many Christians have divided on these issues because they fail to look at these issues through the lens of Scripture.

What does the Bible say about:

*Wokeism - Gender & Transgenderism - CRT & Intersectionality
- Christian Nationalism - The Myth of Safety - Social Justice*

I hope you will join us for that study.

That will take us through the end of November.

Then, we will look at the birth of Christ throughout the month of December.

Opening prayer

Let's start out today with a riddle.

What do movies...crime dramas...sports... and even 'The Batchelor' - have in common?

You often don't know the ending.

There is suspense - drama - because you don't know how it will end or who will win.

A lot of people live their life - as if the ending is uncertain!

1. We all die - we all end up horizontal.
2. **God always wins.**

Some people believe they can live their life thumbing their nose at God - fighting against God - doing whatever they want - without a care in the world.

Ernest Hemingway thumbed his nose at God.

He said, "*All thinking men are atheists.*"

(https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/1455.Ernest_Hemingway)

He lived life apart from God - rejecting any sense of morality and proudly flaunted his lifestyle as proof that there is no such thing as divine justice against sin.

He ended his life by putting a shotgun in his mouth and pulling the trigger.

(<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ernest-Hemingway>)

Proverbs 21:30

"No human wisdom or understanding or plan can stand against the LORD."

Are you fighting against God?

- Do you look at Christians and feel pity for these people who believe in God - in a risen Jesus - and look to the Bible as their source of truth and guide in life?
- Do you live however you want - discounting any notion of God's truth and the implications of His truth in our life?
- Do you think you're better and smarter than all this God stuff?

Or...maybe you're a Christian...

- You get discouraged - and worried as you look around - and it looks like the devil is winning - taking over.
- The culture is moving further and further away from God.
- Society is losing all sense of right and wrong.
- It's getting more and more difficult to live as a follower of Christ because of the culture's view of those who take seriously the claims of Christ and His mission?

No matter what description fits you - know this:

God always wins.

God always wins.

In our passage today - we see King Herod - fighting against God - but in the end, we see that God is winning.

Fighting and ignoring God is a losing battle. vs. 20-23

Read vs. 20-23

We're not told why - but Herod "was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon".

These were 2 coastal cities - in Syria - the northern part of Herod's territory.

Herod's anger at them must have caused him to cut off the food he was supplying to them, which the end of **vs. 20** seems to indicate.

So, the leaders of Tyre and Sidon are working to resolve this problem - and they reach out to one of King Herod's close, trusted officials.

"Blastus, the king's chamberlain" - this would be the equivalent of our President's Chief of Staff.

vs. 21 - We're not told what Blastus does for them - or any other details about their negotiations.

But we see the delegates from Tyre and Sidon - and maybe some others - at some sort of event.

This event took place at the theatre in Caesarea.

PICS - This theatre is still there - some small sections date back to the 1st century - the time of this event in **Acts 12** - but much of the theatre has been rebuilt over the centuries - but for the most part, it does reflect what it would have been like in Herod's day.

The seats of the theatre face west - and beyond the stage you see the Mediterranean Sea.

It's a gorgeous setting.

The rising sun would rise behind the seating - and anyone on the stage would have the sun shining directly on them.

We can find out more details of this event through the writings of Josephus.

Josephus was a 1st century Jewish historian - who worked for the Romans.

He is not a Biblical author - but he is a respected and important historian for many events in the 1st century.

He wrote a detailed account of this gathering - which I will read for you.

Flavius Josephus writes:

Agrippa “exhibited shows in honor of Caesar, inaugurating this as a festival for the emperor's welfare. And there came together to it a large number of the provincial officials and others of distinguished position. On the second day of the shows Agrippa put on a robe made of silver throughout, of altogether wonderful weaving, and entered the theater at break of day. Then the silver shone and glittered wonderfully as the sun's first rays fell on it, and its resplendence inspired a sort of fear and trembling in those who gazed on it.

Immediately his flatterers called out from various directions, using language which boded him no good, for they addressed him as a god, and invoked him with the cry,

'Be gracious unto us! Hitherto we have revered thee as a man, but henceforth we acknowledge thee to be of more than mortal nature.'

He did not rebuke them, nor did he repudiate their impious flattery. But soon afterwards he looked up and saw an owl sitting on a rope above his head, and immediately recognized it as a messenger of evil...

At the same time, he was seized by a severe pain in his belly, which began with a most violent attack...

He was carried quickly into the palace...and when he had suffered continuously for five days from the pain in his belly, he died, in the 54th year of his age and the 7th of his reign."

(Antiquities xix.8.2 - <http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/text/josephus/ant19.html>)

Luke's account is minimal - because Luke is only concerned with the outcome - and the impact it had on the Church.

vs. 22 - And the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!"

Remember, these were people from Tyre and Sidon trying to get back onto Herod's good side.

They were doing everything they could to butter him up. Herod accepted this praise of him as deity.

- He had been fighting God by attacking the Church.
- He fought against God by attacking the Apostles.
- Now, he was fighting against God by taking what God alone deserves - worship of God.

The O.T. is full of historical accounts of Kings and nations who fought God - who ignored God - and they all eventually lost their battle.

God always wins.

Throughout human history, there have been kings and rulers - entire nations that have raised their fist in defiance of God.

Some of those kingdoms had success in their pursuits - some had kingdoms that lasted for many generations. However, eventually those kingdoms all failed.

Isaiah 45:9

“What sorrow awaits those who argue with their Creator.”

Every one of those God-defying leaders, when they died, faced the judgment of God.

Hebrews 9:27

“And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment...”

The religious leaders of Israel got rid of Jesus - had Him crucified by the Romans.

‘We finally got rid of Him!’

But Jesus rose from the dead.

God always wins.

The followers of Jesus kept teaching what Jesus taught - they were the beginning of the Church - which took the

world by surprise - and the world has never been the same.

In our world today - the followers of Christ - Christianity - has more followers than Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism.

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/religion-by-country>

In sports - leading in the 3rd inning - in the 2nd quarter - or in the 1st half - isn't the point.

Some human leaders and kingdoms seem to be winning in the 1st half.

But by the end of the game - God always wins!

vs. 23 - The Bible is clear - God doesn't share His glory.

Isaiah 42:8

“I am the LORD; that is My name; My glory I give to no other...”

Herod was taking part of the glory that was God's alone.

As a result, Luke tells us that, “an angel of the Lord struck him down”.

Luke tells us the reason for God's judgment on Herod:

“because he did not give God the glory”

This may not seem like a big deal - but it is a huge deal.

Stealing is bad enough - one of the 10 commandments.

But stealing what is God's?

Herod had exhausted God's grace toward him.

God had allowed him to persecute the Church - murder the Apostle James - arrest the Apostle Peter with the intent to murder him.

- God gave Herod so many chances to repent.
- God gave Herod so much grace.
- But God will not let someone reject Him forever without judgment.

Stealing God's glory was the last straw.

Luke says, "he was eaten by worms and breathed his last."

Modern Physicians are confident that Herod died from a bursting cyst(s) in his abdomen, formed by a tapeworm.

Echinococcus granulosus

The details we learn from Josephus was that Herod suffered with this condition for the next 5 days before he died.

But death would not be a respite from his suffering and agony, but the beginning.

Because God always wins - and God's justice is always realized.

A wise Pharisee was a man by the name of Gamaliel. He was very well respected, and in **Acts 5**, Luke records some of his wisdom that he told to his fellow Pharisees.

Acts 5:38-39 - *Gamaliel - a very respected Pharisee*

"So, in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will

fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!”

They listened to him in that moment, but soon disregarded his advice - and they continued to fight against God.

The mission of God cannot be stopped. vs. 24-25

What is the mission of God?

To reach the nations.

To reconcile the world to Himself.

I often talk of the mission God has given His Church - the Great Commission.

While this is true, it fails to capture the fullness of the issue.

It's not that the Church has a mission - rather, God's mission has the Church.

Do you see the difference there?

It's a vast difference - because the mission is bigger than even the Church!

1 Timothy 2:4

“God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

The Church is the means that God is now using to reach the nations - to reconcile the world - which He has been doing throughout human history!

The mission of God will not be stopped.

Read vs. 24-25

Herod is judged by God.

But the Church - the messengers and ambassadors of God's Word - of the Gospel - continue moving into the world.

The number of believers continues to increase.

Jesus said He would build His Church “and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matt. 16:18)

Throughout history, whenever the Church faced persecution, it grew in both size and strength.

Countries and rulers have tried to cancel the Church.

They outlawed Church services.

They banned Christian gatherings.

They burned Bibles and Christian writings.

They even burned some of the leaders at the stake - or simply cut off their heads.

But God always wins!

We know how it ends.

The Apostle Paul writes:

Philippians 2:10-11

“...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

The shift now happens from Peter - to Paul, Barnabas, and their church planting trips throughout the eastern Mediterranean.

John-Mark goes with them but will not remain with them for the duration of their first trip.

Apply it...

Over the past 28 Sundays (+ or -) we've walked through **Acts 1-12** to try and get a sense of the 'Original' Church. Church 1.0 - because the Church is not something to be recreated for each generation.

Methods may change, but the mission and the message don't change.

We wanted to look at the 'Original' church - to see what it's priorities - practices - passions were.

We believe it's vital for us to copy or imitate the 'Original' - because the 'Original' is still the best - the primary means God uses to reach the nations!

Passion for the Word of God - the Gospel message.

From the very beginning, one of the passions and priorities for the believers - and their leaders - was the teaching of the Word - the message of Jesus.

The Gospel - the Good News of the risen Jesus and His love and forgiveness for those who believe in Him - was always a passion and priority.

Commitment to prayer

Many times, we have seen those first Christians praying together. Sometimes on their own, but often together.

Practice of meeting together

Sometimes they met in a large group - at the Temple. Other times we see them gathering in homes for fellowship, prayer, and teaching. (Small groups??)

Desire to share the Gospel with non-believers

Nobody could stop the early Christians from telling others about Jesus. It wasn't just the leaders / the Apostles telling people about Jesus - it was all of them!

Willing to suffer for the Gospel mission

Threats - intimidation - physical abuse and injury - it didn't matter.

The 'Original' Church was going to keep on telling others about Jesus.

Even Stephen - moments before he would be murdered - made sure to tell the Sanhedrin the Gospel and their need to be saved.

Close in prayer