

A “God” Vanquished by Worms – Part 1

Acts 12:1-24

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Introduction

We left off our sermon series in Acts with chapter 11.

- Chapter 11 opens with Peter explaining to the saints in Jerusalem why he had eaten with Gentiles...
 - He tells of how God sent him to bring the gospel to the Roman household of Cornelius and how he was expressly told that God had cleansed all foods,
 - and how while preaching the gospel to this Roman household, the Lord Jesus had poured out the Holy Spirit upon them even though they were uncircumcised.
 - Although the believers in Jerusalem rejoiced in this news,
 - you can be sure that the Jews who opposed the gospel used this an occasion against Peter and the other disciples.
 - This is almost surely a factor that leads to the new wave of persecution we find initiated by Herod Agrippa in chapter 12.
 - Nothing infuriated the unbelieving Jews more than the Christian churches’ ready acceptance of the Gentiles!
- And then at the end of that chapter 11, we found the gospel penetrating further into the Gentile world.
 - Barnabas goes from Jerusalem to minister in Antioch and many Greeks begin to respond to the gospel.
 - Barnabas wants help and goes to find Saul (or Paul) who comes and ministers with him.
 - The gospel was beginning to make great inroads among the Gentiles.
 - And these Greeks at Antioch, hearing prophecy of a famine, determine to send relieve to the poor believers back at Jerusalem.
 - They recognise that they are one with them.
 - That is where chapter 11 ends...

But what was happening back at Jerusalem while Barnabas and Saul were ministering in Antioch?

- Persecution again!
 - That is the subject of chapter 12—the chapter to which we come today.
 - In this chapter, Luke tells of Herod Agrippa, a desperate people pleaser who is brought to a miserable end.

- As in the past in Acts, we see here that the hand of God was made quite visible in the early days of the church:
 - first in delivering his servant Peter from persecution,
 - and then in bringing judgement upon King Herod Agrippa.
- God's openly revealing His hand helps us to learn of Him and of how He works in all ages...
 - In chapter 2 the outpouring of the Spirit was made both audible (the sound of wind) and visible (tongues of fire visibly descending)...
 - In chapter 4, God's answer to prayer was made visible by the shaking of the room where prayer was offered, showing that He had heard.
 - In chapter 5, God's displeasure with hypocrisy was shown in striking down Ananias and Sapphira for lying about their good works,
 - In chapter 7, God's acceptance of Stephen was shown by the visible appearance of Jesus standing in heaven.
 - In chapter 10, God's inclusion of the Gentiles was made evident by the demonstrable outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
 - We are not to look for God to repeat these displays—
 - He does not need to shake the room whenever he answers prayer or to give visible evidence of the outpouring of the Spirit every time a sinner is saved.
 - He has already done this and it is recorded for us in Acts.
 - It is for us to read and believe that God continues to work among us.
 - We do not need to be given fresh signs, but to believe the signs that are recorded for us.

So what are we to learn from Acts 12?

- In this chapter, the Lord makes visible to us the fact that He is sovereign even in persecution,
 - and that He will bring those who reject His Son to a miserable end.
 - His hand is made very visible in these works so that we might see here and learn how He operates.
- We are also given another lesson in this chapter, and it with that lesson that we will begin... namely,

I. Here in Acts 12, we learn that people-pleasing leads to more and more sin...

- Luke introduces us to Herod Agrippa, a man who lived for the applause of men rather than of God.
- A. Let me give you a little bit of his background which would have been familiar to Luke's readers.
1. He was the grandson of Herod the Great.

- In 7 BC, when he was only four, his father Aristobulus was executed,
 - And Agrippa's Hasmonaean (Jewish) mother, Mariamne, sent him to Rome for safety.
 - In Rome, he was brought up in Caesar's house, a close friend of Gaius and a schoolmate of Claudius.
 - Though he fell into disfavour with Tiberius for a time and was imprisoned with chains,
 - while in prison he saw an owl above his head and was told by a fellow prisoner that it was an omen of good fortune—
 - that he would be released, but that if he saw the owl again, it would be an omen of his demise.
 - Sure enough, Herod was released and good things came to him.
 - When his friends Gaius (Caligula) and Claudius grew up and came successively to the imperial chair, they bestowed honor upon Herod Agrippa.
 - Over the years he was given more and more authority until at last (in 41 AD),
 - the entire dominion of Herod the Great was given to him which upon Herod the Great's death had been divided into fourths (a tetrarchy).
2. Over the years, Agrippa became very adept at ingratiating himself to those who could be of service to him.
- Unlike his grandfather, who was despised by the Jews for his ill temper and unkindness toward them,
 - Agrippa won the favour of all the Jews, using his Hasmonaean ancestry to full advantage!
 - He was a very generous man who was courteous and liberal not only toward his subjects, but also toward strangers.
 - When he was in Rome, he lived fully as a Roman, but when he was in Jerusalem,
 - he carefully followed all of the dietary laws, offered daily sacrifices, and observed the feast days.
 - The Mishnah relates how he even followed the custom of the king reading the law at the Feast of Tabernacles,
 - and how he wept when he read the law of kingship in Deut 17:14-20 which states
 - “you shall not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother (v. 15)”
 - for he remembered Herod's Edomite ancestry.
 - This worked like a charm.

- The people, remembering rather his Hasmonaean descent called out repeatedly, “Be not dismayed; you are indeed our brother.”
 - He was generally loved by the Jewish people (especially by the Pharisees who were pleased to see him observe the law) to his great delight.
- B. Our text in Acts makes it clear that Herod was not a God-fearer, but a people-pleaser...
1. Luke tells us that in verse 2 that he killed James, the son of Zebedee,
 - and verse 3 says that when he saw how much this pleased the Jews, he set his sights upon Peter!
 - From this statement, we learn that his motive for this persecution was ingratiating himself even more to the Jews...
 - Perhaps he was also acting as one who was known to oppose minorities—another thing that people-pleasing politicians do...
 - but it was certainly not in that he believed to the Christians to have done wrong or that he even had anything against them.
 - He was simply trying to gain the favour of the Jews and in this he was successful.
 - The time was right for this persecution to have that effect.
 - The ruling Sadducees in particular were increasingly displeased with the growing community of the disciples of Jesus...
 - and though their earlier attempts at persecution had been hindered by the displeasure of the multitudes,
 - now there was growing displeasure because of the inclusion of the Gentiles and a distancing of many of Christ’s disciples from Jewish customs which disturbed the Pharisees.
 - The conversion of Saul was an added offence.
 - The time was ripe to renew the persecution, and Herod found it be of great advantage to him to do so.
 - Herod Agrippa is willing to purchase the approval of men by the sacrifice of Jesus’ disciples!
 2. From this you can see how far the sin of people-pleasing will take a person!
 - The Bible teaches us that the fear of man brings a snare.
 - We ought to fear God rather than man—that is, we ought to seek to please God rather than people.
 - Of course this does not mean that we ought to endeavour to displease people—
 - part of pleasing God involves loving our neighbour and doing good to him...

- but we go completely wrong when we put man-pleasing at the top and give pleasing God second place!
 - Once we do that, we no longer have God's authority to restrain us because we have people in His place.
- Herod Agrippa got on the path of man-pleasing and it took him all the way to the point of killing the true servants of God.
 - Indeed, all through history many prophets and righteous men have been killed for this very purpose—man pleasing!
 - Often, as with Pilate, leaders do not act out of either justice or any particular malice toward those they persecute...
 - They persecute only because certain people seem to want it—people they want to please.
 - They are willing to stoop to such measures for their own personal comfort and advancement.
 - This is people-pleasing at its worst.

C. Recognising where this sin leads ought to cause you to hate it all the more.

1. It is true enough that man-pleasing does not lead to such extreme measures for most people, but really only for one reason...
 - most people don't have the opportunity to carry it as far as Herod Agrippa did—they don't have the authority to execute anyone...
 - But you need to understand that when you set your way to please people rather than God,
 - you would go just as far as Herod if you could get away with it.
 - You are capable of more than your self-flattery might suppose.
2. The vileness of the sin itself lies in the fact that pleasing man becomes more important to you than pleasing God.
 - You act as if God's will does not matter—as if people are more important than God and as if they are more worthy than God.
 - That is what a pastor does when he refuses to discipline a member for fear of losing that member's tithe...
 - That is the spirit of a teen who violates her conscience to watch a vile movie in order to fit in with her friends...
 - That is the way of a man in the work place who lies for his boss so that he can keep his job.
 - That is the way of a young Muslim who learns of Christ but who avoids baptism because of the opposition that will come from his family.
 - See this sin of man-pleasing for what it is!
 - It is a rejection of God's authority and place—
 - He who owns you and created you and gives you all that you have...

- He who is worthy of all honour and glory!
 - He who is merciful and gracious, yet of God of justice and wrath who will by no means clear the guilty.
 - If you would set pleasing man before pleasing Him, there is no telling what else you might do!
3. To what extent have you ignored the most High God as if He were irrelevant and had no effect on your future happiness?
- To what extent do you seek to better your life by man pleasing?
 - There is no lasting future with that—your future is in God’s hands.
 - How foolish we are to think that we can prepare a better future for ourselves by playing up to mere men!
 - Oh but we all do this—even the most spiritual among you!
 - We are all unrighteous—we are all like Herod Agrippa...
 - So the great question is if you are looking to Jesus for your righteousness and redemption!
 - That is what you must do that you might become one who pleases God—
 - And if you have turned to Jesus to be saved,
 - you will have less and less interest in pleasing men.
 - You are growing out of this sin because you know that your future is with God...
 - You still find that you do evil, but you are not content to do evil.
 - You yearn for deliverance from this body of death.
 - If that is so with you, you have a happy future with God through the mercy of Jesus Christ.

TRANS> And that brings us to the next truth that we are shown Acts 12...

II. We are shown here that even in persecution, the outcome is with God.

- There is in this account a striking contrast between James and Peter.
 - James is arrested and becomes the first of the twelve apostles to be martyred.
 - Peter, on the other hand, is marvellously delivered by the hand of the Lord—
 - The passage goes to great lengths to show us that his deliverance is from God.
- And what does this teach us?
 - It teaches us that God has absolute control over what our enemies do to us.
 - If He was able to deliver Peter, He could just as easily have delivered James.

- The only reason He did not deliver James was because it was not His will to do so.
- This teaches us that it is for us to fully entrust the future to Him.
 - We are His servants—we are here for Him.
 - If it is His purpose that we should die at the hand of our persecutors, let us do so to the glory of God...
 - If it is not His purpose for us to die at their hands, we will not die but we will be delivered by the hand of the Lord.
 - It is His to decide that—it is ours to serve Him with joy as our gracious God and redeemer who has promised to do what is good concerning us if we are indeed in Jesus.

A. We need to consider the Lord's purpose with James...

- Granted, we are not expressly told what His purpose was in delivering James over to death at this juncture,
 - but by placing his execution next to Peter's deliverance we are shown that it was of God and it behooves us to consider why God does such things based on the wisdom we have from scripture...
- 1. First of all, we know that death was something that was good for James...
 - a. The Apostle Paul makes it clear to us in Philippians that the best thing that can happen to a person is to depart and to be with the Lord!
 - Just think!
 - James was the first of the disciples to go to be with His ascended Lord in glory!
 - Is this not what we are all waiting for as believers?
 - What a marvellous thing it will be!
 - We will be with Him forever!
 - We will see His beauty and His majesty and we will rest from our labours as we await the resurrection at the last day!
 - b. And not only that, but it was also the privilege of James to seal his testimony with his blood.
 - Don't you grow weary of the indifference of the people you witness to?
 - You try to tell them of your hope in Christ, but they do not really take you seriously.
 - They figure you have just found what makes you happy and that is good for you...
 - And even though you try to tell them how very important the Lord is to you, they think little of it...
 - But if the day ever comes that you are called to suffer for what you believe... even to die because of your connection to Jesus...
 - It is then that people will sit up and take notice!

- It has been true of many martyrs that more people were saved by their death than by their life!
- Jesus says that it is blessing for us to share with Him in His sufferings as a testimony to the world.

TRANS> And so you see that God has a beautiful purpose for His saints when He calls them to give their life for Him.

2. But He also has a purpose in the death of His saints for the church.

- a. You can be sure that the saints at Jerusalem were very sorry to see James go.
 - He had been greatly used of the Lord and as a pastor, had been a blessing to many of God's elect.
 - But part of our discipleship includes testing...
 - And whenever persecution comes among us as God's people, it puts us to great searchings of our heart:
 - Are we prepared to serve the Lord to the death?
 - Are we willing to continue under the threat of death?
 - If we know our Lord Jesus, such examination always leads us to see all the more how worthy and precious He is!
 - We come away from such testing loving Him more than ever because we have been forced to look at Him to see if it is worth it to go on for Him.
 - It is almost shameful that we should have to do this, but the fact is that we do need to because of our weakness.
 - And so in this way, our faith is strengthened when persecution comes.
- b. Consider how it would be if everyone in the church was always spared and none had to die for Christ or suffer for Him.
 - There would be many who would serve Him superficially and thoughtlessly for immediate comfort.
 - He is not interested in such disciples—opportunists who are not really there for holiness and for forgiveness of sin—
 - but who have come for what appears to be a better life in this world.
 - In times of prosperity for the church, there are many who come in this way—until persecution comes...
 - Then the false disciples are weeded out and the church is purified.
 - Persecution is necessary for the purification of the church as a whole.

3. But there is yet more that our Lord does through persecution...

- a. He also uses it to expose the sinfulness of man.

- As we have seen, there are many who, if given the right circumstances, would do horrendous things to the followers of Jesus if restraint was taken away.
 - They are restrained by any number of things...
 - By the justice system within the land—they do not wish to get in trouble...
 - And even more, they are restrained by popular sentiment that makes them ashamed to do violence.

- b. But how many there are that once that restraint is removed—
 - because they are given a seat of power and the hearts of the people are with them to approve whatever they do...
 - will carry out horrendous deeds!
 - Has this not been with men like Hitler and Stalin and Mao?
 - Did we not see this in our society—when racism was widely accepted that it was also widely practiced?
 - Do we not see this with abortion?
 - What was unthinkable only a couple of generations ago is now readily practiced because it is publically accepted?
 - There is no telling what vile and cruel deeds we might participate in if restraint is taken away.
 - What about the riots that have recently occurred?

- c. And so God takes away the restraint from those who reject Christ and exposes their wickedness at times.
 - In this way, the wickedness of man’s heart that is spoken of in scripture is openly manifested.
 - For some, this only leads to even greater hardening as they go deeper and deeper into sin,
 - It is designed to prepare them for judgement by exposing the depravity of their hearts...
 - But for others, it is designed by the Lord to lead them to repentance!
 - They come to see the wrong in what they have done and the depths to which they have stooped and they cannot go on...
 - They say, “What a wretch I have been” and they repent.
 - They repent and turn to the Lord.

TRANS> And so you see that you do not need to be terrified by the thought of persecution—

- You may indeed suffer for Christ, but if you do, it will be for His purposes.

- B. But now let me show you how God reveals His sovereign hand through the deliverance of Peter from the persecutor's hands!
- It is a marvellous, humorous, faith-building account that is given to us here.
 - It clearly shows us and reminds us that the Lord is able to deliver us and will deliver us whenever He so chooses.
 - He has absolute control over the situation.
1. The situation is presented to us in verse 3 & 4.
 - a. Herod Agrippa, seeing that James's execution has pleased the Jews, now reaches out his hand to take Peter!
 - But as one who observed the law, at least while in Jerusalem, verse 4 tells us that Herod kept Peter in custody because it was the feast of Unleavened Bread.
 - No one was supposed to be tried or executed during this feast, so Peter is held with the intention of executing him after the feast.
 - b. Notice how Luke presents the measures that were taken to ensure that Peter could not get away.
 - Verse 4 says that four squads of soldiers were appointed to guard him.
 - A squad is made up of four soldiers, so there were 16 men to guard this one apostle...
 - At any given time, two would be guarding the door and two would be chained to this dangerous prisoner—one on each side of him!
 - Herod must have heard about how Peter and John had previously escaped from prison to the embarrassment of the chief priests and the Sanhedrin.
 - He wanted to make sure it did not happen again!
 - He would make escape impossible for Peter...
 2. "But constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church!"
 - That is what it says in verse 5!
 - Isn't it marvellous the way Luke presents this?
 - There was Peter, all locked up securely under guards—**but** prayer was made!
 - It was not,
 - "but the church began to scheme!"
 - or "but the church raised up an army"
 - or "but Peter was able to bribe the guards"
 - It is "but prayer was offered to God for him by the church."
 - This is not the slimy old doctrine of God as the cosmic bell hop who is ready to do whatever we want if we only ask in faith...

- You can be sure that prayer was made for James as well—and God answered the prayer that time by delivering him over to die...
 - That is God’s prerogative...
 - But this time, God is going to deliver Peter and Luke sets us up for it by saying, “but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.”
 - Ordinarily, when God brings about a great deliverance, He does it in answer to prayer.
 - He delights in answering prayer because by prayer those who are praying are put in position to see that He has delivered.
 - My family just drove 15,000 km, and we prayed a lot for our safety and for our van to hold up.
 - It was good that we prayed because then we were more able to see God’s hand.
 - There are lots of other people on the road who did not pray and God gave them safety too...
 - but they did not see that God did it because they did not pray.
 - The Lord makes prayer integral to His working in our lives, and here the thing that made a difference for Peter was prayer...
 - Constant prayer—or fervent prayer.
 - The church believed that God could deliver Peter even though they did not necessarily expect it because He had not delivered James.
3. And now look at how the Lord delivers Him—making it plain that the deliverance is from Him!
- a. He waits until the last day—the day before Peter was to be tried and executed.
 - He might have delivered him on the first day he was incarcerated...
 - He might have saved all of His elect on the day they were born...
 - But He often waits to deliver us to increase the tension—in order that the deliverance might be all the greater and all the more manifest when it comes!
 - He allows things to develop and worsen.
 - He might have delivered Israel from Egypt before they were made slaves,
 - but instead he waited until their oppression had increased and then they saw all the more how great the deliverance was.
 - This is His way of revealing Himself to us because we are dull and do not readily appreciate our deliverance.

- And there is something remarkable here—
 - Peter is to be executed the next day and he is fast asleep!
 - We are kept awake by a financial burden or some other trivial matter, but Peter sleeps on the night before his execution!

- b. So Peter is chained to a guard on each side with sentries posted at the door besides as described before...fast asleep...
 - And an angel appears and fills the prison with light—
 - and has to strike Peter hard—the word translated *strike* is usually used for a death blow—to wake him up!
 - And even with all this Peter does not fully awaken for some time!
 - The angel tells him to get up and the chains fall off of him...
 - Then in his sleepiness, the angel speaks to him as a child...
 - Look at verse 8:
 - **Then the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and tie on your sandals"; and so he did. And he said to him, "Put on your garment and follow me."**
 - And even after all of this Peter supposes that he must be seeing a vision—that this is not really happening—see verse 9.
 - Then the angel leads him past two guard posts and at last to the outer gate of the prison—a big iron gate—which opens of open own accord, and they go down the street (v. 10)...
 - and the angel departs and finally Peter fully awakens!

- c. Verse 11 says:
 - **Acts 12:11: And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people."**
 - This is so obvious that it is hilarious the way Peter says this to himself!
 - How this highlights for us the fact that it is indeed the hand of the Lord!
 - How foolish are those commentators who try to explain this miracle away as an inside job.
 - That is not at all how it is presented.
 - It is a miraculous deliverance by the hand of the Lord that we might know that our Lord can do whatever He pleases.
 - He might have delivered Peter all at once—just transported him to another place...
 - but instead He does it by steps, each which cause us to see His hand—because we are dull!
 - He wants us to know that it is He who delivers us.

TRANS> But this is not all that is done to highlight God's hand in this matter.

- The point is really being driven home here!
- 4. Now we have the humorous account of the church's recognition that God has delivered Peter...
 - a. In verse 12, Peter decides to go to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark (the one who went with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey).
 - Mary is apparently a wealthy woman because she is a big house like the high priest—with a courtyard and with room enough for an assembly.
 - Some have suggested that this is where Jesus ate the Passover and where the church was gathered on the day of Pentecost...
 - Whether that is the case or not, many were gathered at this house praying for Peter and Peter seems to know that some would be there.
 - b. And when Peter arrives, he knocks at the gate and a servant girl named Rhoda goes to answer the door.
 - She immediately recognises his voice and is so overcome with joy that she leaves him standing outside in the street and runs inside to tell the others!
 - They think she is crazy!
 - But she insists that Peter is there.
 - Then they put up the silly idea that perhaps it is his angel—based on an odd notion held by some of the Jews that the angels that are assigned to protect us can assume our aspect...
 - This is hardly the response of a group that has plotted an escape!
 - Poor Peter is left standing outside knocking—perhaps wondering when Herod's guards are going to come to search for him...
 - and finally they return to the gate and when they see him, they are astonished!
 - It is Peter!
 - No criticism ought to be leveled at these brothers and sisters!
 - We ought to be amazed when God answers our prayers like this!
 - We ought to be surprised and overcome with joy!
 - Woe to the disciple who is healed and shrugs his shoulders and says, "Well, I knew that God would do this."
 - They were absolutely delighted to see their dear brother, freed and standing before them!
 - They make such a clamour that Peter has to silence them just so he can tell them what the Lord did for him.
 - And again you see the language in verse 17...

- that **“he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison.”**

c. Clearly, this was the Lord’s doing!

- Let it stand as a permanent testimony to us that our Lord can and will deliver us if He chooses to do so.
 - Nothing is too difficult for Him.
 - We can fully trust Him in sickness or in persecution or in any kind of calamity that befalls us.
 - It is not there without good reason and it is never beyond His power to remove it from us.
- Peter instructs them to make all this known to James and to the other brethren.
 - The story needs to be told to all for the encouragement of all that all might know that God is able to deliver is own.
 - Peter departs, we are not told where, knowing that soon Herod will be looking for him.

TRANS> And so you see the sovereign hand of God who took James to be with Himself and left Peter to continue in His apostolic service.

- We do not know why God delivers one to death and another from death,
 - but what we must know is that whatever befalls us is from His loving hand.
 - Oh trust Him dearly beloved, fully trust Him.
 - Even with persecution, the outcome is with Him and you can trust Him.
- But it is not just the outcome for us that is in His sovereign hand...

III. We are also shown in this passage that the outcome for our persecutors is in His hand.

- We have already noted how Herod Agrippa wrongly sought to secure a good outcome for himself by pleasing the Jews.
 - He was elevated with success when he executed James, but now with Peter he is humbled... but not for long.
- Interestingly, after interrogating the guards and searching for Peter and not finding him,
 - Herod decides to depart from Jerusalem and spend some time in Caesarea.
 - Verse 19 says:
 - **And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed there.**
 - This was a way for him to save embarrassment from his escaped prisoner.

A. But what is very surprising is that things go well for Herod in Caesarea!

1. In Caesarea, he has the good pleasure of having the Phoenicians of the wealthy port cities of Tyre and Sidon come to him on their knees (as it were)!
 - Verse 20 explains:
 - **v. 20: Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's country.**
 - Tyre and Sidon were very wealthy cities, but they did not have much farm land.
 - They made the money by importing goods from all around the world.
 - But one thing they did not have to import from far away was their food because for a thousand years or so,
 - they had relied on Palestine.
 - They did not want to see this change on account of Herod's anger, so they did a little people pleasing of their own...
 - They made Blastus who was Herod's Chamberlain their friend.
 - It is easy to guess what means two of the wealthiest cities in the world might have used to secure his friendship!
 - And having done that, they petitioned for peace with Herod.
2. And then things get even better for Herod!
 - Herod responded to Phoenicia's offer for peace by giving them an oration at a festival which happened to be at the time of the harvest when games were put on to celebrate the birthday of Claudius...
 - At least, that is what the event was according to Josephus, the Jewish historian, whose account parallels that of Luke and provides some additional details...
 - But look what these Phoenicians did when Herod came out to speak to them on the morning of the second day of the festival!
 - Josephus tells us that they were greatly excited when they saw what Luke calls his royal apparel,
 - which Josephus describes as being made of silver which picked up the rays of the morning sun so that Herod shone brightly like the sun God the Phoenicians worshipped...
 - and so they began to worship him as a god...
 - And Luke tells us that they were impressed by his oration and began to say, "The voice of a god and not of a man!"
 - What could make the day of a man who yearned for the approbation of his subjects more than this!
 - He was like a rock star with the crowd going crazy before him!
 - It was a dream come true for a people pleaser!

3. But is this not what is at the root of all our sin from the fall?
 - Did Satan not originally tempt us with the suggestion that we would be like God—in the place of God—on the throne of God?
 - No longer under Him as His subjects, but ruling our own lives according to our own pleasures and desires.
 - Is this not at the root of our every sin we commit? “I will be like the most high”?

TRANS> Most of us don't get as far as Herod did,

B. But the Lord deliberately raised him up to this great height!

- He did it in order to make a fool out of him for his pride and vanity.
 - He did it in order to ripen him for judgement.
 - The worst thing that can happen for a sinner is to have everything go his way—to kill God's servant and have no consequences...
 - but rather to have the praise and honour of men...
 - to have success without any repercussions.
- One of the preachers we heard while we were on the road pointed out that in the many times when we are told that Pharaoh's heart was hardened,
 - it was not during a plague, but after the plague was taken away.
 - Sinners can harden their hearts under troubles to be sure, but a worse and more severe hardening comes when they are given prosperity.
 - Herod's hardness is seen by his sacrilegious pride.
 - Unlike Paul and Barnabas who cried out in protest when men tried to worship them,
 - Herod gladly receives worship as a god.
 - He was sitting on a very high horse!
 - He had seen the Roman emperors receive such acclamation.

C. But his great day is suddenly transformed into a dreadful day of terror.

1. See what befalls him...

- In verse 23, Luke says:
 - **Acts 12:23: Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God.**
 - The reason is given—because he did not give glory to God.
 - God is a jealous God because all glory is properly due to Him.
 - God will not give His glory to another.
 - An angel had struck Peter in order wake him up and to deliver him to freedom
 - And now an angel of the Lord strikes Herod to wake him up and deliver him to judgement.

- This is like our Lord Jesus Himself in Psalm 110, our Psalm of Focus, when He is seen coming to put all things under His feet.
 - He is seen on the one hand coming to His elect to richly bless them by making them His willing servants and by Himself serving as their priest forever after the order of Melchizadek....to take away their sin...
 - And He is seen on the other hand coming to destroy His enemies and to slay kings who rebel against Him.
 - He has all dominion and He will reign until he has put all things under His feet.
 - In an account like this with Herod, we are given a preview of what will happen to all His enemies if they do not repent and turn to Him as their priest for salvation.
- Josephus tells us that Herod was struck with a terrible pain in his midsection and immediately saw the owl above his head...and confessed:
 - “Behold me, whom you call a god; I am enforced to finish my life most miserably”
 - Eusebius, the church historian, says that the owl was the messenger or angel of the Lord that came to execute judgement on Herod for his sacrilege.
 - Herod was in so much pain that he had to be carried out and he remained in terrible pain for five days until he died.
- Luke tells us that Herod was eaten by worms.
 - The pains he felt were apparently on account of worms that began to consume him.
 - 2 Macc 9:9 gives an account of a similar judgement that fell upon Antiochus Epiphanes, the proud Greek who persecuted the Jews in the period between the old and new testaments...
 - It says:
 - **2 Macc 9:9: “And so the ungodly man’s body swarmed with worms, and while he was still living in anguish and pain, his flesh rotted away, and because of his stench the whole army felt revulsion at his decay.”**
- Such a death is what men deserve who try to make themselves as gods.
 - God brings a death upon Herod, the assumed god, that is far from noble or princely!
 - The lowliest, most stupid filthy creatures are used to destroy him—to eat him—to show that he is mortal.

- It is no great intelligence that overcomes him but creatures with very little wit outwit him.
 - It is no great army of power that overcomes him, but creatures with very little power that could be crushed underfoot if only he could get to them.
2. Learn from this how quickly and how completely the fortunes of proud men who deny God and refuse to give Him the glory will be turned when God's judgement falls on them.
- The fact is, this terrible humiliating judgement is to fall upon every sinner.
 - Ever since the fall, there is not one sinner that does not die and return to dust, eaten, as it were, by worms.
 - Death is the ultimate humiliation...
 - The ground that we were created to subdue and to walk upon subdues us.
 - There is not a one of us that deserves a better end.
 - In Herod, we are given a visible display of what God's judgement is like.
 - Somehow, seeing it fall upon a living man makes it more real to us.
 - But understand that this will be the end of all unless they be delivered.
 - It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God.
 - It is terrible because our sin is terrible—we do not give God the glory that is due to Him.
 - Since the fall, we are all by nature the enemies of God, and this is the end we all deserve.
3. But there is good news—it is the same good news that James and Peter were preaching.
- And that is that there is forgiveness with God through Jesus Christ...
 - That Jesus came into the world to deliver us from sin and death...
 - That He Himself took the curse of God for us so that through Him we might obtain eternal life and the full remission of sins.
 - Tell me, do you want to go on playing god until you are eaten by worms?
 - Do you see the great wickedness in ignoring God?
 - Do you not want to be reconciled to Him and brought under Him as His worshipper?
 - If you refuse salvation through Jesus Christ, you will be brought under Him for judgement and there will be no escape.
 - But how happy you will be if you will come to Him and be saved.

Conclusion

The conclusion is given in verse 24.

- After all of this was done, the outcome was that “the word of God grew and multiplied.”
 - This gospel that James and Peter had been preaching was now heard and received by even more people on account of what happened to James and to Peter and to Herod.
 - Our gracious Lord used these events to further His kingdom.
 - May He use our reading of them today to further His kingdom even among us.