



Sermon Text: Acts 12:1-25

Sermon Date: March 18, 2018

On Sunday our passage transported us back to Jerusalem where we saw the church encountering a new wave of persecution. Luke reminds us that the gospel of Jesus Christ is unstoppable. It will be opposed. Its messengers may be executed or imprisoned, yet the kingdom of God marches on.

HEROD'S DESIGN— vv. 1-5

King Herod designed a plan to destroy Christianity by systematically eliminating its leadership. He executes the Apostle James. Once he sees how pleased the Jews are with his ruthlessness, he arrests Peter with the plan to execute him immediately following the Passover celebration. Peter is guarded night and day by four guards at a time. John Stott says, “The situation looked extremely bleak, even hopeless. There appeared to be no possibility of Peter’s escape. What could the little community of Jesus, in its powerlessness, do against the armed might of Rome?”

In their desperate situation, the church pleads with God in desperate prayer (v 5).

HEROD'S DEFEAT – vv. 6-19

On the final night before his execution, an angel enters Peter’s cell, wakes him up, commands him to get dressed and to follow, and miraculously leads Peter past armed guards and locked doors—undetected. All the while, Peter is convinced this is a dream! When he finally comes to his senses, Peter goes and finds the gathered church in an all-night prayer vigil, interceding on his behalf. Yet, ironically, they ridicule the idea that God has actually answered their prayer. Both Peter and the gathered church are humorously presented as clueless. Peter is delivered and the church’s prayers are answered, not because of their great might or profound faith, but because of God’s staggering mercy and kindness.

The next day, the guards are shocked and Herod is baffled that his maximum security prisoner is gone. All of Herod’s might is defeated by a single angelic servant of the Lord.

HEROD'S DEMISE – VV. 20-25

Luke completes his account of Herod’s terror by telling us of Herod’s death. In his vanity and pride, he received idolatrous praise from the people of Tyre & Sidon and he is struck down and dies. *“Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.”* In contrast to this pitiful fate, Luke emphasizes the growth of God’s Word—*“But the word of God increased and multiplied.”* John Stott captures Luke’s point perfectly: “The chapter opens with James dead, Peter in prison and Herod triumphing; it closes with Herod dead, Peter free, and the word of God triumphing. Such is the power of God to overthrow hostile human plans and to establish his own in their place. Tyrants may be permitted for a time to boast and bluster, oppressing the church and hindering the spread of the gospel, but they will not last. In the end, their empire will be broken and their pride abased.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from this Sunday?
2. Have you ever prayed for God to do something, yet doubted He would actually do it? Why do you doubt?
3. Why is it good news that God’s answer to our prayers is not merely determined by the quality of our asking?
4. On what would have been his last night on earth, while chained between two hostile guards, Peter is sound asleep—no trace of anxiety or fear. How does the gospel give us peace even in the worst of situations?