

Acts 12 v 20 - 25

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 August 2014

Preacher: David Woollin

[0 : 00] David has asked if we could read from Luke's account of the Acts of the Apostles and chapter 12.

Acts of the Apostles and chapter 12. And we're going to read the whole of the chapter together. So Acts chapter 12, reading from verse 1 through to the very end of this chapter.

Here is a faithful and true account of God's dealings with his people in the early church. It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them.

He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

[1 : 25] So Peter was kept in prison. But the church was earnestly praying to God for him. The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains.

And sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up.

Quick, get up, he said. And the chains fell off Peter's wrists. Then the angel said to him, put on your clothes and sandals. And Peter did so.

Wrap your cloak around you and follow me, the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison. But he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening.

He thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and the second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself. And they went through it.

[2 : 25] When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter came to himself and said, Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating.

When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Peter knocked at the outer entrance.

And a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so rejoined, she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, Peter is at the door.

You're out of your mind, they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, It must be his angel. But Peter kept on knocking. When they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.

Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. Tell James and the brothers about this, he said. And then he left for another place.

[3 : 35] In the morning there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had happened to Peter. After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.

Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there a while. He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon. They now joined together and sought an audience with him.

Having secured the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace because they depended on the king's country for their food supply. On the appointed day, Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people.

They shouted, This is the voice of a God, not of a man. Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down and he was eaten by worms and died.

But the word of God continued to increase and spread. When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.

[4 : 47] And we trust and believe that the Lord has something to say to us through his word. Well, please have Acts chapter 12, the passage that was read to us, open in front of you.

And we'll be focusing this evening on verses 20 to 25. Verses 20 to 25, as you're turning there. I just want to say what a joy and privilege it is to be with you, to be able to open up God's word again.

And maybe I'll say a bit more later, but we're so thankful to the church here for your prayerful support for us in Grand Rapids. Let's pray as we come to God's word.

Great God of heaven and of earth, we pray that you would speak to us now, that you would open your word, that you would open our hearts, and that you might work in each of us to salvation or sanctification, that we may grow closer to you.

And Lord, that any here who don't know you, or who are not sure of their position before you, Lord, that you would help them and work in them this evening too. We pray this in your son's precious and worthy name.

[5 : 59] Amen. I'm going to start with an American this evening. A very famous American. But what he says is relevant to everybody in this world.

It was spoken, these words were spoken in 1863, at the proclamation of a national day of humiliation, fasting and prayer. And President Abraham Lincoln spoke these sobering words to that nation, which as I say are relevant to us too.

He said this, We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven. We have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity.

We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us.

And we have vainly imagined in the deceitfulness of our hearts that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own.

[7 : 08] Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace.

Too proud to pray to the God that made us. Too proud to pray to the God that made us. Pride is a poison in our world today, as it was 150 years ago in the time of President Lincoln.

And seemingly it's not a modern phenomenon, as we've read in our verses tonight in Acts chapter 12. And what we find back then, 2,000 years ago, still remains the same today.

But it shouldn't be that way. We shouldn't be that way. You shouldn't be that way. I shouldn't be that way. And our passage this evening teaches us so much about the human heart in general, humanity in general.

But we don't ever want to lose the personal here. It teaches us about our hearts, about your heart, about my heart, our sinful and selfish and prideful hearts.

[8 : 13] And in a sense, like Herod that we read about, we are all by nature little kings of our own domains. And we, speaking of humanity in general, by nature are prideful creatures.

And we're in an increasingly secular society, which wants to think that, I'm in control of my own life. I'm self-sufficient. I don't need a God.

I'm the center of the universe. Because mankind doesn't want to be held responsible or accountable to a higher power. There's a prevailing, look at me attitude.

Look at what I've achieved. And that's not the way it should be for Christians who know God, who know that He's sovereign in all things and know that God is entitled to and should take all the glory for everything that happens in our lives.

We live in a world which denies the first question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism. What is the chief end of man? And the answer is, man's chief end is to glorify God.

[9 : 23] And to enjoy Him forever. And that's the clear answer we find in Scripture. But the answer in the unbeliever's mind has been molded to say, man's chief end is to glorify myself and to enjoy my life.

And that's exactly what we find as we dig into our verses this evening. The same prideful, sinful human heart in Herod.

And as we go through these verses, we'll see four things. Our first point will be a self-important king in verses 20 and 21.

And then a sweet-talking crowd in verse 22. Then in verse 23, we find a striking God. And then in verse 24, we'll see a spreading church.

And throughout, we're going to apply this to you and me. What does it mean to us today? What can we learn? How do we need to change? Are you a Christian where elements of this prideful, self-sufficient attitude remain in your heart and it needs to be dealt with urgently?

[10 : 33] Or are you an unbeliever, somebody who's not saved or unsure and you need to turn to God from your prideful sin in repentance and faith? So we'll look at some background first.

We need to look backwards for just a moment to see what's happening in this section of the book of Acts and see how this all fits together into the Bible in the whole of what we call redemption history.

And I've hinted already that we're going to spend part of our time bringing out some moral lessons and applications from this passage and that's an entirely legitimate thing to do.

But what we don't want to ignore is the big picture. Why is this passage here? What is God doing? And looking at Acts 1 verse 1, we see that the intention of the writer, Luke, is to show us through this book how Jesus Christ is working, how the gospel is moving forward and cannot be stopped.

You see, God has a plan of redemption that cannot be sidetracked or altered or slowed down by anyone, not even King Herod. This powerful, evil, prideful king.

[11 : 52] And this is a continuation of what we find way back in the Old Testament in Genesis chapter 3 with the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman.

The serpent's seed is represented in our passage here by Herod as a tool of Satan and he's fighting and continuing and trying everything he can to hinder the work of Christ, to hurt the church.

But this is the big message. There is no success for the serpent's seed at all. It's wasting its time.

And that's what we see demonstrated here. Don't stand in the way of God. Don't mess with God's church. And this is what we find. The good news of the gospel is now reaching Gentile ears and the Holy Spirit is working and he's saving many.

We've got active mission work going on here. The message of Christ and his atoning death on the cross for sinners is reaching more and more new places.

[13 : 00] And if you were to glance back into the previous chapter, chapter 11 verse 19, Stephen has been killed. And you see that persecution is causing believers to spread.

And then in chapter 11 verse 21, a great number believed. And then again in verse 24, chapter 11 verse 24, this is an exciting time of gospel growth, but it's not an easy time.

Being a Christian was and is a very serious business. It's no half-hearted affair. It puts you in trouble with authorities.

And we see that in our first point as we move into chapter 12, where we find a self-important king. A self-important king. And Herod here is a picture of man.

Well, one side of the coin at least, how we view ourselves. And we'll come to the other side in a moment, how we view others. And at the start of our chapter, we read of Herod, the king, a ruler who's central to what we're looking at this evening.

[14 : 09] And there are quite a few Herods in the Bible. And so we'd better be sure who we're talking about. This is Herod Agrippa I, commander-in-chief, king of all Palestine.

And his uncle was Herod Antipas. He was the one who had John the Baptist's head on a platter. His grandfather was Herod the Great, who tried to kill the infant Jesus.

And importantly, Herod Agrippa was of Jewish descent. He was half Jew, half Edomite. The Edomites in the Old Testament were constant enemies of God.

And this Herod was brought up in Rome. And the Jewish historian, Josephus, tells us that he enjoyed residing in Jerusalem and did so constantly.

This is interesting. And he scrupulously observed the traditions of the people. He neglected no right of purification, and no day passed without the prescribed sacrifice.

[15 : 11] He's religious and powerful and seemingly had everything the world can offer. And in the verses at the start of chapter 12, we can see that authority that he has and that his influence is substantial.

He's got power over life and death. Agrippa persecutes the church. He kills the apostle James and puts Peter in maximum security prison.

Quite powerful. And verse 1 tells us that he's a people pleaser. This persecution pleased the Jews in Judea. He sought public popularity by persecuting the apostles.

And the persecution of James and Peter was for the purpose of self-exaltation, to have favor in the eyes of the Jews. And the death of James, the brother of John, was a great loss to the early church.

And we see that Herod's intention is to bring Peter out of that maximum security prison and present him to the people after the Passover has finished. What will happen after that?

[16 : 18] We don't know but we've seen a pattern. We can only speculate but before that happens as we read, Peter is miraculously delivered from the hand of Herod. An amazing account showing the complete control of God.

So he's a great persecutor of the church but that's nothing new. They've always been enemies of God. There are many like that we could look at in scripture, look at Egypt, look at Babylon or Assyria.

Still goes on today. God has enemies who target his people and for a while they look oh so powerful. Herod here is persecuting God's people.

He's challenging the development of the church. He's standing in the way of something he cannot stop. A very silly and stupid place to stand.

He's messing with the apple of God's eye. Zechariah chapter 2 verse 8 tells us, For thus said the Lord of hosts, after his glory sent me to the nations who plundered you, for he who touches you touches the apple of his eye.

[17 : 34] Christian, you are God's child and God watches over you with an eternal unblinking gaze. that should be such a comfort to us as we face trials and difficulties in this world.

And here in our passage, Peter has escaped with God's help and clearly having a prisoner escaping from jail can't do much for Herod's pride or reputation and he shows his authority again in chapter 12 verse 19 and orders a search for Peter and when that's unsuccessful, the guards were held responsible and put to death.

I'm starting to see a picture of this self-important king. Look at this mighty king, a ruler on earth, exalted by men, so proud.

Never forget the words of Job in Job 24 verse 22. Yet God prolongs the life of the mighty by his power. They rise up when they despair of life.

He gives them security and they are supported and his eyes are upon their ways. They are exalted a little while and then are gone. They are brought low and gathered up like all others.

[18 : 52] They are cut off like the heads of grain. It's at this point that this persecuting king relocates from Judea to Caesarea and stayed a while there abode or spent time there in verse 19 and that's the setting for the astonishing events we've read together that continue this pattern of pride and defiance in the face of Christ building his church.

And this is what we find, look with me at verse 20. Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon and they came to him with one accord and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace because their country depended on the king's country for food.

He's unhappy with Tyre and Sidon. It seems that the people of these two cities or maybe their leaders at least have somehow offended him. They've made him angry.

We don't know exactly why but we do know that this is a real problem for those people in Tyre and Sidon who are struggling for food. They were from, these were the major cities in Phoenicia which is a, in modern day Lebanon, it's a thin strip of land which has no rich interior to grow crops and so they're dependent on these Galilean cornfields which are controlled by Herod.

So it's in their interest to keep in with him and you can imagine it wouldn't be unusual like today to persuade people with bribes to flatter them to feed his pride or to cool his passions.

[20 : 33] And we see then that the people of Tyre and Sidon want peace. They want reconciliation so they lobbied this man, Blastus, in order to get before Herod. He's called a chamberlain which is some kind of secretary or advisor who seemingly had authority to get people in front of the king.

It's wonderful to pause and reflect here on the access, the direct access we have from God. It's aside from the main point. We may not have anyone in this world to pull strings for us like Blastus but the truth is that as Christians we don't need to go through someone or twist anybody's arm to get a hearing if we have a concern.

We can go straight above anybody's head and pray to God himself to the highest court and not only that we're welcomed we're encouraged. He's our heavenly father who wants to listen to his children.

What a joy and privilege we have. So some say that the matter between the king and these two cities is settled right there and verse 21 moves on to an unrelated event but a lot of commentators link the two.

They look at the original language and it's using what is called the imperfect tense something is ongoing and the outcome might still be uncertain and therefore it's probable likely that it's the same group that are there still listening to and responding to King Herod in verses 21 and 22.

[22 : 08] They're part of the crowd and that fits what we find. They're still trying to butter him up and get what they need from him. Look at verse 21.

On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes took his seat upon the throne and delivered a narration to them. Let's set the scene here.

We know that non-biblical sources are fallible but we can get help from historians like Josephus who I mentioned earlier and he writes a lot about this event and he tells us that Herod organized this festival in honor of Claudius Caesar because he'd just returned from beating up the British and the history books tell us that Herod was wearing a dazzling silver robe and that caused the crowds to marvel and everybody who was important was there as well as it seems this delegation from Tyre and Sidon.

So out comes Herod in all his grandeur with his royal clothing his glorious robes to sit down on this judgment seat on this throne of authority and we're told elsewhere that this amphitheater was built by his grandfather Herod the Great and it faces west straight to the ocean and we're told in the history books that this happened at dawn and the light was rising and was shining straight on Herod just look at him up there speaking from his special seat in the theatre in his arrogance and pride maybe we can see some of this king's attitude in ourselves already we may not be royalty you might never desire to speak in a large crowd in front of a large crowd like him but we have the same sinful hearts we may not have the right opinion of ourselves maybe you'd quite like it if people said a lot more nice things about you and to you maybe you'd like a bit more honour maybe you'd like to be lifted up maybe you think you deserve more praise more recognition you see pride is venomous it's an area of tremendous temptation and we need to rid it from our hearts and we need to remember that Christ humbled himself he glorified not himself

Hebrews 5 5 even though he had every right to do so and we should be Christ like this is a self-important king but also a self-important prideful individual human being just like us it's relevant to all there's another major danger in our next verse where we switch our focus from the king to the crowd we can see some of ourselves here too we find a sweet talking crowd in verse 22 it says and the people were shouting the voice of a god and not of a man maybe we can see some of ourselves already in the king but sadly we can see ourselves and our hearts in the crowd too the word people there is not the usual word that you'd expect just for a general gathering of the public it's a group of people called together by authority these are chosen people in the presence of their leader with those from

[25 : 49] Tyre and Sidon we assume who remember their only concern is getting food in their stomachs what do we have to do to get this how do we close this deal and they turn to flattery it's the same today one of the best selling books in the last few decades is Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People we have a tendency to manipulate and using flattery is common it's how the world works not just in business but in our personal lives too it's the same back then with Herod what a great job you've done running this country what beautiful robes but this goes to a whole other level when they say it's the voice of a God and not of a man we need to be so careful of esteeming others of esteeming mere men both in character and appearance

Herod must have looked fine a dazzling spectacular sight but this response is just ridiculous it's foolish valuing outward appearance or certain talents and skills we know that but just look at our culture which is constantly trying to suck us into this mindset all the time and we must be different the apostle John in 1 John 2 15 says do not love the world or the things in the world why is it important if anyone loves the world the love of the father is not in him for all that is in the world the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life is not from the father but is of from the world and the world is passing away along with its desires but whoever does the will of

God abides forever next time you're in line to buy your groceries at Sainsbury's and your eyes caught by the rack of celebrity magazines there think of this it's all pride they're all lifting up the wrong people why are people interested in this kind of thing they're held up as inspirational models in society but Christians aren't immune from this either we can hold up celebrity pastors theologians anything like that forgive me for telling one personal story to illustrate this danger a few months ago now my family and I went to the local supermarket in Grand Rapids Sarah's job was to go get the food and I was to go elsewhere in the store and I took my 10 year old son with me and we tried to walk to the computer section and couldn't get there because of a crowd and we arrived in that section of the store to find a quiz ten people one boy eight girls and one grown woman and it was a quiz just about to start to win two tickets and a backstage pass to see young pop sensation

Justin Bieber and it was live on radio and all the families were around cheering them on they had to answer question after question write the answer down on a board and hold it up simultaneously on the minutiae of this young teenager's life it was incredible what they knew and what time was he born what's his favourite meal what did he buy for his mother last year for Christmas and nobody was dropping out and they had to find another book to get more questions to get the quiz completed but then one by one absolute devastation they got a question wrong and they were out and they were wailing and weeping they were uncontrollable in their grief because they got a question wrong all over a pop star they were worshipping him they were idolising him this seemed like the pinnacle of their life and because they got a question wrong it was just terrible and they didn't know what to do now we can do that with many other things anything that can become an idol in our life anything that we put in the place of God there should be nothing nothing remotely near God in importance in our life humanity has never been able to solve its pride problem kings of Egypt were viewed as divine and worshipped you can see similar instances in places like

North Korea where their leaders even the dead ones are now divine now those are extremes I'm not saying we do that but this is humanity still in the 21st century man is man only God is God only God deserves our worship and praise not a leader like Herod not a sportsman not a celebrity we need to keep this biblical perspective kings pass away their bodies rot they too will be judged only God remains Psalm 146 verse 3 shows us the futility of trusting in man it says put not your trust in princes in a son of man in whom there is no salvation when his breath departs he returns to the earth on that very day his plans perish back in verse 22 the people are there looking up and they're flattering do they mean it do they know what they're saying they're shouting they're calling they're crying loudly and seemingly they kept crying out the tense here suggest that this is ongoing it may well have been some kind of chant saying what could literally be translated as God's voice and not man's and here's the problem

[32:11] Herod didn't rebuke them this was his moment of glory but remember he's a Jew at least a nominal Jew and he must know that this is wrong he knew the scriptures and he sinned it's serious he's a usurper of God's praises he's a mere man and he accepted their accolades this is what the Jewish historian Josephus says he did not rebuke them nor did he repudiate their impious flattery Josephus is a Jew and he recognizes that this is wrong surely the other Jews must have known what saying that would mean and that's why it makes so much sense to assume that it was probably these Gentiles from Tyre and Sidon who were there shouting these things just imagine what was what went on in Herod's heart at that moment basking in glory pride look at me look at my power

I can suppress the Christian church however I want I can decide whether or not to answer your request for food or not look at the pride before destruction look at the haughty spirit before a fool Herod is full of self destructive arrogance and pride and God resists the proud James 4 6 and 1 Peter 5 tell us and like the Pharisees in John 12 43 he loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God just look at the results the wicked prosper for a while but in verse 23 we see the terrifying end result for him and for us if we're not at peace with the creator of the heavens and the earth who rightly deserves all praise and glory from sinful people like you and me are you that self important king do you recognize yourself in the sweet talking crowd it's a very very dangerous place to be why because of what we find next in verse 23 a striking

God a striking God 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 God allows no one to stand in his place exodus 20 verse 5 we know the third commandment you shall not bow down to them or serve them for I the Lord your God am a jealous God friends God is in control of every molecule of this universe and will not be mocked there will be consequences for sin in his holiness he demands justice Herod owed his position to God but didn't acknowledge it as Job says in Job 40 verse 12 look on everyone who is proud and bring him low and tread down the wicked where they stand are you proud you need to have a right view of yourself before a holy God you need to see your sin and pride and mortify it kill it why

Luke 14 11 tells us for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted you see pride is a slippery thing that can come in many ways preacher and missionary Paul Washer says this pride is a terrible and dangerous thing it can take so many forms it can even assume the appearance of humility pride can lead not only to self exaltation but also to self abasement it is a dangerous worm of many disguises so he's defined what it is how does he help us he says the key to battling pride is not found in struggling against thinking too highly of ourselves or in striving to think of ourselves as lowly the key is found in simply not thinking about ourselves at all but setting our minds on Christ and the needs of others you see this account reminds me of King

Nebuchadnezzar in the Old Testament Daniel chapter 4 verse 30 to 32 listen to his pride and see what happens to him the king answered and said is not this great Babylon which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence for the glory of my majesty while the words were still in the king's mouth there fell a voice from heaven oh king Nebuchadnezzar to you it is spoken the kingdom has departed from you and you shall be driven from among men and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field and you shall be made to eat grass like an ox and seven periods of time shall pass over you until you know that the most high rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will he too forgot God he was proud there's a pattern here you could look at Isaiah chapter 14 you could look at Ezekiel chapter 28 and see exactly the same things with different kings different people it's a continuing problem

[38 : 00] Herod is no unique case and God takes it seriously as we see he was struck down smote in return for not giving glory to God and I've read numerous commentaries suggesting illnesses that would fit the symptoms we find there from 16 inch round worms to tape worms caught from a dog whatever whatever it was it was a shameful death but we shouldn't be focusing we should be focusing on the cause of death not the means however nasty that was what was to follow in eternity was and is so much worse for him and again Josephus fills out some of the details for us he agrees that it was due to accepting what he called blasphemous praise and says that he had violent pains and was carried out and died five days later he was aged 54 and he had reigned for seven years do you realize what we just witnessed

God deals with our enemies in judgment maybe not immediately like this every time but without fail instead of Peter being killed by Herod Herod was killed by Peter's God it's interesting to see a little word play here from Luke he reuses the verb again here for Herod when he was struck down that he does for Peter just a few verses ago when he strikes Peter's side to wake him in verse seven Peter is smote or struck and it brings salvation and in verse 23 Herod is smote the same word but it brings destruction for Peter the blow of God's angel meant life and freedom for Herod that blow meant death God is on the throne to judge as well as to save and worms may have killed

Herod's physical body but his spiritual body his eternal soul suffered eternal death through the worms of his own sin and the same is true for every human being you and I are riddled with sin and if it's not placed on the one who can pay for it on our behalf and take our guilt away Jesus Christ then you will pay the price forever like Herod God is a God of justice and sin will not be overlooked we see a self important king we see a sweet talking crowd we see a striking God but then we see the remarkable the uplifting and encouraging result in a spreading church in verse 24 but the word of God increased and multiplied we know that Satan is intent on devouring that seed of the woman that we looked at a few moments ago attacking

Christians attacking the church he won't rest but he's already lost speaking of Peter's faith Christ says in Matthew 16 verse 18 and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it at the start of chapter 12 Herod seems to be in full control and the church is on the decline by the end of the chapter he's dead and the gospel is spreading even further God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think they were only a small group of believers but God is on their side and his purposes can never be frustrated just glance through the book of Acts where we find little little summary reports all the way through chapter 6 verse 7 and the word of God increased and the numbers of the disciples multiplied in

Jerusalem greatly three chapters later chapter 9 verse 31 the churches in all Judea and Galilee and Samaria were edified and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost were multiplied and we saw two of those examples in chapter 11 which I've already shown you in verse 21 and 24 then in chapter 16 verse 5 it says and so were the churches established in the faith and increased in number daily chapter 19 verse 20 so mightily grew the word of God and prevailed now after Herod's death official persecution stops at least for a while a new governor comes in and changes things and that's the way it's always been decade after decade century after century Christians are persecuted people rise up in opposition to God and his people but they always die every single time and yet

[43 : 22] Christianity and the church continues to grow and the imperfect tense here again in verse 24 tells us that it grows and grows and grows it's like scattering a seed in a field it multiplies what a miserable end for Herod quite the contrast with the growth and the health of the church which thrives under persecution and what a comfort again that is to the church and the people in times of trouble where we see even on the news this week Christians being persecuted in different parts of the world on a mass scale but individually and in our personal lives too we can see that and we can take encouragement and comfort from these verses take heart Christian if you are being persecuted you notice that it's the word of God that grows the word is central life giving this isn't this bible isn't man's ideas cleverly marketed this is the living and enduring and life giving word of God which grows in volume it grows in vehemence it grows in effect in God's providence

James is dead but the church's witness continues and we see the next stage in verse 25 with Paul and Barnabas advancing the Christian mission advancing the great commission there is no way to stop God well let's bring all our thoughts together the psalmist had it right psalm 115 verse 1 not to us oh lord not to us but to your name give glory for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness all glory belongs to God we can glorify ourselves and reveal our pride in innumerable ways we exalt ourselves we exalt others instead of the God who gives us everything and we need humility not pride we need to be like Paul and Barnabas just two chapters later when the people were lifting them up as gods in chapter 14 verse 14 and their reaction was to tear their clothes and they cried out and they rushed to stop it anything you see is not of me it's all of God they were saying

Christian don't be proud there's no place for it give all glory to God but also don't be discouraged like these early Christians expect persecution now and in the future and prayerfully wait and we will through Christ be victorious back in chapter 12 verse 12 it says many were gathered to pray just look at the results Peter is released Herod is dead Christian get down on your knees and pray God answers prayer Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees God gives us prayer and we have full access to him don't be afraid of those of Satan's army who have loud voices in this world today if they remain unrepentant then their day is coming this is a continuation of that hostility between those two seeds the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman but the church continues despite that opposition and here in our passage the church continues despite this great opponent and it still continues today and you

Christian simply need to faithfully continue living for Christ until he comes again rest in him trust him live a grateful and thankful life in service to him give him all the glory all the honor all the praise maybe you're not a Christian well tonight you've had two paths set out before you the temporary triumphs and pleasures of the wicked the pig food with the shallow and hollow adulations of men standing in the face of God in defiance against him leading to eternal death or the narrow way of repentance and faith and obedience in the Lord Jesus Christ leading to salvation and eternal life remember right now Peter and James are in eternal glory safe with their savior they are more than conquerors

God is holy his wrath is real and those without Christ one day will face it Herod in contrast to Peter and James right now is paying his eternal debt of sin and rebellion my friend you need to see your sin and you need to see the offense it is to God and you need to look to Christ he's the one who is in full control throughout this passage throughout this book throughout history it is only with him that we can truly say it is the voice of God not just of a man you need to listen to the voice of God today and let him take control of your life repent believe and follow fully Amen