

Acts 12 (#19) 8.30.20 (20067)

The Gospel Wins

I. John 16:1-4. Jesus told his Twelve that Judaism would violently reject them.

- A. Christ's message of the kingdom is a threat to religion across the boards.
- B. God's message of peace and light (10:36) is a threat to the darkness, a truly spiritual warfare. Eph.6:10ff.

II. Acts 12 is a case in point. Five things happen.

A. Herod strikes. 1-2. (9:5)

- 1. Agrippa I: Herod the Great's Grandson. (10 BC—44 AD) (EBC Vol.10)
 - a) Son of Aristobulus (whom Herod the Great had executed in 7 BC)
 - b) Nephew of Herod Antipas (who was there at Jesus' trials)
 - c) Ruled Herod the Great's kingdom from 41-44
 - d) A wily, effective, politically savvy and well-liked generally by the Jewish populace.
- 2. Had James, John's brother beheaded. (arrest, trial, public execution as a dangerous heretic).
 - a) His brother John was the last apostle to die, late in 1st cent.
- 3. The church was considered a heretical cult (that's what Saul thought before his conversion)
- 4. First Apostle martyred. Indicator of the volatile situation around the church in Jerusalem.
- 5. Jewish leaders were pleased by James' execution. Tensions were high.
 - a) *Pleased with the execution of a good and innocent man? This is perversity in the highest degree. Exactly like Christ's death.*

B. The church prays. 3-5

- 1. Herod has a show-trial in mind, followed by beheading.
- 2. Four squads (16 men total). Taking no chances. (5:19-20)

C. Peter walks. 6-17.

- 1. Rare angelic intervention. 6-11
- 2. Shocked reunion. 12-17
- 3. Providential ministry guidance. Elsewhere. 17b
 - a) Luke didn't say where Peter was. On purpose no doubt.
- 4. The leadership in Jerusalem shifts from Peter to James. 17b
 - a) Peter goes on in ministry, including Antioch.
 - b) But from now on James and the Jerusalem church function without Peter as the Apostolic leader.
- 5. The focus of Acts shifts from Jerusalem to the Gentiles, from Peter to Paul. Ch.13.
 - a) Chapter 13. God sovereignly initiates the Gentile mission.

D. God judges. 18-23

- 1. Peter's guards are executed. 18-19
- 2. Herod shines for a moment, then dies. 20-23.
- 3. Josephus corroborates this story. Herod dies suddenly of intestinal something-or-other.

E. The Gospel spreads. 24-25

- 1. The Gospel is the point all along. 4:31; 6:7.

III. Four pieces of advice for walking with God in troubled times.

A. Expect opposition, but press on with the mission. 17

1. The gospel is not well-received by the world in general. (1 Cor.1:23)
2. Things change around us, but God's mission continues. Ps 46
 - a) Peter leaves Jerusalem?

B. Realize that life is supernatural, but don't be superstitious.

1. We live in a world that includes the invisible realm. Angels are real.
2. There is no way of living in the knowledge of God (faith) without grasping that the spirit realm is real.
3. The two errors are: denying it and being obsessed with it.

C. Pray hard, but wait on the Lord. Note 5 things about genuine Christian prayer.

1. It was prompted by a crisis, but ended with the progress of the Word.
 - a) Of course, they prayed regularly, set times of prayer daily.
 - b) But the most intense prayer is usually prompted by crisis.
 - c) The answer is at the end of the chapter: The Word increased.
 - d) It wasn't just that Peter was dramatically released.
2. It was intense, but not certain of the outcome.
 - a) This miracle was not the result of people generating faith for a miracle, but of people totally trusting God and praying hard. No name-it-and-claim-it theology here.
 - b) *These people prayed like us – fervently, but not knowing how it would turn out.*
3. It was effective, but the result was a surprise.
 - a) A real surprise to Peter, who was asleep and so groggy that he didn't figure it out for a while.
 - b) *The answer might come in a way we hadn't expected.*
 - c) *There is always more than one way for the Lord to answer a prayer.*
4. It was answered, but at the last minute.
 - a) The "very night" before Peter was to be tried.
 - b) Luke 18:1-8. Faith = Persistence in the face of discouragement. Trust while struggling with despair.
5. It brought joy, but left a nagging question.
 - a) Why was not James delivered in this way?
 - b) Why doesn't the Lord answer all prayers the same?
 - c) Why does this mysterious cooperation with the Lord sometimes leave us with such questions?
 - d) We need to leave this in God's hands, as they did.

D. Live normally, but trust the power of the gospel. 12:24. Matt. 24:35

1. The gospel is the invisible power in the world, bringing human history forward according to God's plan. Rom.1:16-17
2. Note the flow of this chapter.
 - a) It opens with Herod on a rampage, Peter in prison, the gospel under siege.
 - b) It closes with Herod dead, Peter free, and the gospel on the rampage.
 - c) *Resisting the truth about Jesus Christ is such foolishness, in light of our own impending death.*
3. The progress of the gospel in the world. Our mission.
4. The progress of the gospel in our own lives. Spiritual growth.
 - a) Christ formed in and among us. Gal.5; Phil.2; Eph.3-6; Col.2-4; Rom.8-16; Hebrews; All the NT.

IV. Psalm 46:10-11. Be Still and know that I am God—I will be exalted in the nations...