

Text: Acts 12.1-19  
St Stephen's

Dec 1/2, 2007  
Sat PM/Sun AM

## Jailbreak in Jerusalem

It is a very common thing to come to faith in Christ and think that you will not have to deal with evil again. That your marriage will never fail. That no son or daughter will die in a war. That your kids will grow up great! That accidents will never happen. That diseases will never strike.

When that happens, people often have a sharp crisis of faith, and sometimes even walk away..

"I didn't sign up for this..." "If God is so powerful, where was he when..."

A moment like that happened in our passage today. It is one of the most astounding chapters in Acts. AD 43,44

People and Personalities and Points to Note...

### **Herod & Family: The Reality of Evil**

*It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them.*

Acts 12:1 (NIV)

*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.*

Acts 12:21-24 (NIV)

**Several generations** of the Herod family are mentioned in the Bible. What is remarkable about them is that in each generation they were ambitious, murderous men. They ruled with an iron fist. Herod the Great **murdered Bethlehem's boys** at the birth of Jesus. **Herod Antipas**, one of Herod the Great's sons, was the

Herod who **beheaded John the Baptist** and questioned a silent Jesus at his trial. Jesus called him, 'that fox.' **Herod Agrippa I**, who appears only in Acts 12, **murdered the apostle James and was getting ready to murder Peter.**

When you look at the family of Herod, you **cannot miss the reality of evil.** The reality of evil in the world makes life tough. The church was **stunned** when James was martyred. Maybe they had hoped that Stephen's martyrdom would be the only one. Maybe they had hoped that Jesus would come back by then – or that he would protect them from that kind of suffering. But he didn't. Stephen was dead and now James was dead.

Soon enough, you discover that **God has not put an end** to evil in the world. **Not yet**, anyway. We live in a season when sometimes it seems like the Herod's are in all the places that count. The world is still broken. Our bodies still get sick and old. Tragedies still happen. Temptation can get the upper hand. **Evil is unavoidably real.**

People and Personalities and Points to Note...

### **Persecuted Apostles: The Defeat of Death**

*Herod 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... 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.*

Acts 12:2-3, 5-6

Let's **go over the story**... The **background** is that Herod notices that the Jews are now worried about these Christians. There have been thousands of conversions. There have been Gentile conversions! And the Jewish leaders are worried – and angry and jealous. And **Herod**, who has never been too popular, **sees a chance.** He has

James arrested and trumps up charges and has him beheaded. And Herod's **popularity spikes** among the Jewish leaders.

**Did you notice** something here? James is beheaded by Herod. And the brief sentence of vs 2 is all we hear of it. Just a quick, blunt summary. For political gain, Herod murdered James. No other details. What stands out to me is **how brief the sentence is**.

What I mean is that James is **a large figure in the Gospels**. He was the brother of John, and **one of the three** disciples who were the closest to Jesus. James and John and Peter were the **only three** with Jesus when he raised Jairus' daughter, when he went up the mountain of Transfiguration and met with Elijah and Moses, and when he was in the Garden of Gethsemani on his last night. That is James. And here, he is brutally murdered by Herod.

And we have **the report in a dozen words**. Period. Not a sentence about his trial. No last words. Not even a biographical paragraph about his ministry. Just **a single, brief sentence**.

**That brevity speaks**. What it says, I think, is that **death is not the last word**. Not any more, not ever again. Not since the resurrection of Jesus. And Luke knows it. Evil may still be real, but death has been taken down. Death has been defeated and dethroned. It won't be long before death would be treated by Christians as **Graduation Day!** Because that is what it is since Jesus' resurrection. That is the reason, I think, why the verse is so brief.

You see the **same theme with Peter**. It is the night before his execution. He knows that a sword awaits him within 24 hours. He is chained up, and surrounded by 4 guards. And what is he doing. Look at the underlined phrase...

*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.*

That phrase speaks. *'sleeping...'*!! You only sleep in a moment like that if you know that **death is not the last word**. And Peter knows it. Evil may be real, and Herod may be King, but Jesus is alive and He is Lord. He has taken death down, defeated and dethroned it.

(Stanway: If worse comes to worse, you go to heaven.)

People and Personalities and Points to Note... ..

## **The Praying Church: the God who is Greater than our Faith**

*So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.*

Acts 12:5 (NIV)

*When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"*

*"You're out of your mind," they told her.*

Acts 12:14-15 (NIV)

Let's **pick up the story**... People are praying and Peter is sleeping and the Lord sends an angel who has to wake him up! *"Get up. Get dressed... Follow me..."* Chains drop off and guards sleep and cells open and iron gates open and Peter is outside before he is fully awake.

After the angel gets Peter out of prison, he went to the house of John Mark and his mother where they were praying. It was late at night. He knocked on the door...

*"A servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"*

*"You're **out of your mind**," they told her.... But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were **astonished**."*

Acts 12:13-16

Did you catch that? She is **so stunned, she doesn't open the door!** They think it is so unbelievable that they **twice tell her she's nuts!**

Don't miss this... **They pray** for Peter's deliverance and **God answers** their prayer and **they don't believe** it!!! Won't open the door!!!

**God answered their prayer even though they didn't expect him to!** Don't miss that. They had enough faith to pray, but not enough to expect an answer – but God answered anyway. **God is better than our faith!**

There is one more Personality and Point to Note... ..

### **The Risen Jesus: Good News Everywhere**

*Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison.*

Acts 12:17 (NIV)

*Herod... was eaten by worms and died. But the word of God continued to increase and spread.*

Acts 12:23-24 (NIV)

When Peter got inside, he told them – look at the phrase - *how the Lord had brought him out of prison.*

By the end of the chapter, there is no doubt in Peter's mind – no doubt in Luke's mind – **who is in charge here.** It is not Herod. Not his sword, not his guards. Not the fear of death! It is the risen Jesus who is in charge, and Peter knows it.

Luke sums it all up with a phrase that he uses again and again in the Book of Acts. *the word of God continued to increase and spread.*

We **started out the chapter** and things looked bad.

- Herod was on a rampage.
- James had been murdered! James!
- Peter had been arrested. Tomorrow he was going to be executed.

- The believers in Jerusalem were huddled together behind locked doors and praying. Not with a lot of confidence. Not with a lot of faith. But they were praying.

By the time **the chapter ends**, we have been reminded that

- death is not to be feared – not any more, not ever again, not by any believer in Jesus.
- Herod has met his fate.
- Peter is free.
- The church is astounded!
- Everywhere Jesus' is being talked about. The Word of God is loose!
- There is good news everywhere..

Blessed be your name  
In the land that is plentiful  
Where the streams of abundance flow  
Blessed be your name

Blessed be your name  
When I'm found in the desert place  
Though I walk through the wilderness  
Blessed be your name

Blessed be your name  
When the sun's shining down on me  
When the world's all as it should be  
Blessed be your name

Blessed be your name  
On the road marked with suffering  
Though there's pain in the offering  
Blessed be your name

God is that great. His Gospel is that strong. You can trust him in every season life brings to you...