

Series: Acts

Lesson: #40

Title: Grace in the Midst of Trial

Scripture: 12: 1-24

Date: 10-2-08

Place: Sovereign Grace Baptist Church of Princeton, New Jersey

Throughout the book of Acts, we have seen that the acts of the saints and the acts of those around them, whether friend or foe, have come to pass by the Acts of Christ our King. The Lord brings about everything that comes to pass and rules everything that comes to pass according to his providence. Providence is God's rule over all things.

Psalm 115: 3: But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.

Isaiah 46:10: Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:

Acts 12: 1: Now about that time...

About the same time that the believer's in Antioch sent relief to the believer's in Judea, Herod began persecuting the church. The time in which this occurred is important. About the time the believer performs an act of charity warfare usually begins to rage within him. The fleshly nature within us begins to commend us for our act of benevolence. While in the spirit we know that our Lord alone receives the glory for giving us the heart, the substance, and the brethren to provide for.

Faithfully, our Lord will not allow the believer to be brought under the dominion of sin. So about that time, when the Lord's people had provided so well for the folks in Jerusalem, a new adversary enters into their midst. Why would the Lord allow Herod to vent his wrath toward the Lord's people? Why would the Lord have his people suffer trials in their lives at all?

John 17: 12: While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. 13: And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. 14: I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15: I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. 16: They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

Theme: By keeping us from the evil while we journey through this world the Lord causes the believer to grow in his understanding of our utter inability if left to ourselves. At the same time, his keeping us from the evil grows the believer in an understanding of our dire need of his continual preserving grace. The Lord Jesus will not allow us to go the way of the prideful but keeps his people in submissive humility.

Divisions: I. In Herod the Lord declares the wisdom of man and the strength of his hand shall never prosper; II. Through the church the Lord shows where he draws his people and where he shall always keep them (at his feet); III. In Peter, and the church, we behold the peace and assurance the Lord gives through trials such as this.

Acts 12: 1: Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth *his* hands to vex certain of the church. 2: And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. 3: And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) 4: And when he had apprehended him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

I. THE LORD USES HEROD TO TEACH HIS PEOPLE THAT NO MAN CAN PROSPER BY HIS OWN HAND.

A. HEROD'S MOTIVE

As far as Herod's personal motives, he does not appear to have done this so much because he hated the Christ whom James trusted or because he loved the god of the Pharisees which James denied, but simply as a political move to garner more approval from the people. His motive was personal, ungodly, earthly gain.

B. HEROD'S MANNER: The way he worked is the way the conniving, carnal heart works.

1. First, he vexed certain of the church—he did not begin killing but vexing—putting them in prison, beating them, and those who he esteemed less important in the church.

- This is politics 101. Don't ask for the moon in the beginning, folks may not want you to have it.
- But make a small move and see how the person or people react, then move to bigger things from there.

2. As he began to see himself succeed in his little plan then he became a little more bold and killed James the brother of John with the sword. Then...

3. **V3: And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also.**

His motive was personal, ungodly, gain—the praise of men made him proceed more brazenly and with more intensity. Scripture declares this has been the motive AND means used by the majority in religion as well as in civil matters throughout every generation. This is man's wisdom and man's way. The poison of asps is under the natural man's tongue: poison, murder, adultery, theft, enmity toward God, these things proceed from the heart and these are the things which defile a man (Romans 3: 10-18; Mark 7: 20-23.)

So how do God's saints persevere in faith when surrounded with enemies like Herod? Here is the good news. The LORD God, Christ our Savior from his throne of grace, determined beforehand and brought to pass, everything that took place here. As we will see, he assures the hearts of his saints that he will be glorified even through the evil action of men like Herod. The King of heaven and earth will cause his dear saints to profit spiritually, which is the only area of profit that matters. And he is doing so right now in our day. **Psalm 76:10: Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.**

Isaiah said in chapter **40: 6: All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: 7: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: 8:...but the word of our God shall stand for ever.**

In King Herod we get a most practical example of Isaiah's word: After all his kingly endeavor in the flesh this is what scripture says concerning Herod.

Acts 12: 23: And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. 24: But the word of God grew and multiplied.

C. FOR YOU TO SEE THIS, I WANT TO TAKE A QUICK LOOK AT HOW HEROD VIEWED, THINGS AND THE REALITY OF THE THINGS--

1. From Herod's point of view he thought he was prospering greatly by the power of his own hand. **V1: Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands.** The reality was that Herod was doing as those did who crucified the Lord Jesus Christ...**Acts 4: 27: For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, 28: For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.**

2. Herod thought he was having his own way when he killed James. The reality was Herod was merely the instrument God determined to use when he appointed the hour of James' physical death (Hebrew 9: 27.)

3. Herod thought he actually killed James. The reality was, according as God had determined before hand, Herod merely walked James into eternity where he entered the eternal bliss of beholding Christ in glory forevermore.

4. Herod thought he brought great injury to the church of God, and so did all those who cheered him on. The reality is the Lord used Herod to give his church such a dire need that they remembered their inability and were drawn near to Christ by casting their care upon him.

Acts 12: 5: Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

5. Herod thought that once he had killed Peter then the people would behold how powerful he is and all--even those who were called Christians--would submit to him. The reality was that the Lord delivered Peter; the Lord increased Peter's understanding that nothing is impossible with the Lord; the Lord gave new assurance to Peter so that he could go forth preaching Christ our Deliverer even more boldly than before and through the preaching of the gospel the Lord's word increased in his people. **Acts 12: 11: And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. 12: And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. 16: But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and**

saw him, they were astonished....17: But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.

6. Still, not persuaded when he saw the Lord had delivered Peter, Herod killed his own guards. Now verse 20 may tell us what Herod's ultimate goal was in all this. **Acts 12: 20: And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon:...**he hated those of the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon, so in order to bring them to his feet in submission so that all could see...he brought about all this persecution on the church of God. And it may have appeared to the people that Herod succeeded because those from Tyre and Sidon did indeed come seeking peace. **Verse 20: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace;** But the reality was that they did not reverence king Herod but came to him **because their country was nourished by the king's country.**

7. Yet, through all his conniving Herod thought he had reached his goal, all eyes were on him on his throne and all praise went up to him just as he sought from the beginning. To all those present it appeared that Herod had indeed achieved his goal by the strength of his own hand.

Acts 12: 21: And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. 22: And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. But the reality is, as the Lord declared through Isaiah, the flesh shall wither away, but the word of the Lord endureth forever. So we come to the reality of what king Herod accomplished by all his fleshly wisdom and strength: **Acts 12: 23: And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. 24: But the word of God grew and multiplied.**

Here is the point: You see, the only thing Herod's fleshly strength brought about was death; death to all those around him and death to himself.

This shall be the end of all like king Herod--whether opposed to Gods' church or passing themselves off as one with the church--the man who attempts to force his hand, to achieve that which profits his flesh, to gain a position so that all will regard him as great, shall die by the direct hand of God.

What do we say to these things? Turn from your wisdom, your fleshly strength, to God Almighty

Proverbs 3: 5: Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. 6: In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

...BUT THE WORD OF GOD GREW AND MULTIPLIED.

II. THE LORD DECLARES THROUGH HIS CHURCH WHERE HE BRINGS US AND WHERE HE WILL CAUSE US TO REMAIN.

Acts 12: 5: Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him....12: And when he had considered *the thing*, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.

A. THE MEANS THE LORD USES TO DRAW HIS SAINTS TO HIMSELF.

1. The Lord often uses severe trials--his mighty hand--to bring his saints to his feet. Trials are painful. But the more painful the trial, the more the believer is made to behold our inability; the more the believer is brought to confess that only the caring, all-sufficient hand of our Lord and our Redeemer can provide our need.

- The Lord sent a famine in Justice upon those who rejected him at Jerusalem. Believers suffered in that famine as well as unbelievers. But through the famine the Lord drew the needy in Judea to behold his all-providing hand of grace as he provided for them through their brethren in Antioch.
- Now, this persecution by Herod brought death to both the Lord's saints and to those guards. But in the midst of this he blesses his church by causing them to cast their care upon him.
- The good as well as the evil that comes to pass in this world is all woe to the wicked but it is all well for the righteous.

Job 2: 10: But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.

B. Two of the greatest reasons that believer's suffer are given in this passage:

1. James and Peter suffered for preaching Christ and him crucified.

- Sovereign power of God to save
- Election in Christ
- Redemption by Christ
- Regeneration by the Holy Spirit
- Effectual grace of Christ in us which produces fruits of righteousness
 - **Galatians 5: 22:...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23: Meekness, temperance:**
- Preservation by God the Father and our Lord Jesus in this present evil world

When the triune God receives all the glory in salvation, in our believing, in our sanctified walk and in our perseverance then men will surely rebel against that message.

2. The brethren suffered when they beheld the mistreatment, suffering and even death of the Lord's sanctified ones, the second thing which causes the believer much sorrow in this world is beholding brethren suffer.

But the Lord told us this would come to pass and why? Matthew 10: 21: And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against *their* parents, and cause them to be put to death. 22: And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my

name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. 25: It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?

The Lord declared to us that this world is full of suffering and he told us what he would produce in his people through this suffering? **John 16: 33: These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.**

C. WE BEHOLD SOMETHING OF THE TRUE PRAYER WHICH THE LORD PRODUCES IN HIS PEOPLE.

1. True prayer is humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God, waiting upon him to exalt us in due time, casting all our care upon him, persuaded that he, alone, careth for us. It is settling down at his feet, confessing that his will is what we desire to be performed. When we desire his will concerning the grace and mercy of all spiritual blessings sealed up in Christ, when we pray his will be done according to the promises the Lord has promised his people--such as grace sufficient to bear any outcome, grace to know how the Lord brings to pass his will is the right way, grace to be patient to wait upon the Lord to work in his time and not ours--if we ask these things we ask according to his will, and simply knowing he hears us who ask according to his will is our confidence in knowing that we shall have what we desire of him.

I John 5: 14: And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: 15: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

- He promises the Holy Spirit shall be our comforter--we have a good indication they asked the Lord to comfort Peter in this trial according to his promise--we have this indication because that is exactly what the Lord did. We find Peter on the same night he was to be executed sleeping like a baby (v6)
- He promises to deliver his people from every trial--we have a good indication they asked this according to his will--for he delivered Peter from his trial and he delivered them from this trial and be sure you get this--likewise, he delivered, James from his trial. (The way he delivers is according to his will and this is what we ask.)
- He promises to perform his will to exalt his glory and to edify his people--we have an indication they prayed for this--for he spared Peter, revealed his power even more in Peter, and Peter came declaring the mighty hand of God to his people (v17.)
- He promises to destroy all our enemies--we have an indication they prayed for this--we have these indications because these things are what the Lord did--verse 18: **Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. 19: And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode.--and shortly after the angel of the Lord smote him and he died.**
- The essence of all true prayer is the same as all other aspects of the believers worship—we sing songs which declare our need of him and our desire for his glory to be magnified according to his will. We read this same thing when we read his scriptures. This is the same word we preach. And this is our prayer. This is worshipping God in spirit and in truth because it is the heart of worship he creates and brings forth in his people.

III. THEN THIRDLY, IN PETER, AND THE LORD'S SAINTS, WE BEHOLD THE RESULT OF PEACE WHICH GOD GIVES IN THE HEARTS OF HIS SAINTS WHEN HE WORKS SUCH GRACE IN THE MIDST OF TRIALS AS HE DID HERE.

A. He works peace and assurance in our hearts toward him when he causes us to behold that he alone is mighty to save.

Acts 12: 6: And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.

B. He works this peace by discovering to us that not we ourselves, but that he is our Deliverer. (Notice how the Lord delivered and Peter merely followed)

Acts 12: 7: And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon *him*, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from *his* hands. 8: And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. 9: And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. 10: When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. 11: And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and *from* all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

C. He works this peace in our hearts when he discovers to us that he is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to Christ the Power that worketh in us. (I love Rhoda's reaction of joy and the people's astonishment)

Acts 12: 12: And when he had considered *the thing*, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. 13: And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. 14: And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. 15: And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. 16: But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened *the door*, and saw him, they were astonished.

APPLICATION

- When the heart begins to swell with pride turn from this world, from your deeds, to Christ.
- In times of ease and in times when the enemies of Christ turn against you, camp at the feet of Christ the Lord.
- When you see your brethren in harms way turn to the Lord knowing that he bought them, he knows what is best for them and for you, and pray his name be glorified and his saints be saved.
- Do this brethren, by pouring out your heart in thanksgiving and supplication, without ceasing.

Ephesians 3: 20: Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, 21: Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

