

“Glory”

- Acts 12 -

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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ACTS 12 1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. 2 Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. 3 And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. 4 So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover. 5 Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. 6 And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. 7 Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off his hands. 8 Then the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and tie on your sandals"; and so he did. And he said to him, "Put on your garment and follow me." 9 So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. 10 When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. 11 And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people." 12 So, when he had considered this, 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 girl named Rhoda came to answer. 14 When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. 15 But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!" Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, "It is his angel." 16 Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. 17 But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren." And he departed and went to another place. 18 Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. 19 But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed there. 20 Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's country. 21 So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. 22 And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" 23 Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died. 24 But the word of God grew and multiplied. 25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.



Pastor John Piper once remarked "God's glory is the goal of all things." On another occasion he said, "God's glory is the source and sum of all full and lasting joy." 1 Corinthians 10:31 puts the period at the end of the sentence stating "...**whatever** you do, **do all to the glory of God.**" If one was to boil down the Christian life mission to its most basic element, what we would have is simply that we are to live in such a way that brings glory to God. But what exactly is this thing "glory?"

Certainly the explanation is hard to wrap our minds around. The dictionary defines such as "very great praise, honor, or distinction bestowed by common consent; renown. Something that is a source of honor, fame, or admiration; adoring praise or worshipful thanksgiving. To exult with triumph; rejoice proudly (usually followed

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by in).” But still we are left wanting on some level for practical action and application. We understand scripturally that God has infinite perfections, infinite greatness, and infinite worth. Thus what is being asked of us in the expression of God’s glory, is to live lives that literally manifest and exalt those attributes. Lives that express God in that light. This therefore reaches deep into our priorities, decisions, and daily living. It calls upon us to *reflect* that truth, being that He resides inside us. Just as my house speaks volumes as to who I am as a person, so does my living reflects who God is and His very personality as He lives in me as HIS house!

There are some words in our vocabulary that are actually best communicated non-verbally. It’s not what we speak concerning their meaning but rather what we *see* that best explains their essence. Words that are best defined by pointing: *by an example*. By pointing at such and saying, “That’s it!” A common example of this would be the word “beauty.” When we try to explain the word *beauty* in words, it is very, very difficult. But generally we know it when we see it, do we not?

There is a standing council for Pastors...*and by inference to all of us*, to “keep your hands off the women, the money, and the glory.” Good advice, for they all seem to have equally brought down the best of mankind over the ages. However, the “women” and the “money” is generally what is heard, and the nebulous aspect of keeping our hands off the glory is often lost in the hazy ambiguity of its application. But chapter 12 of Acts gives us some real life clips of how to do it *right* and how to do it *wrong*, as well as the very real cost and reward of both.

The Herod family are scripturally renowned for its generations of persecution of Christianity. They were the living embodiment of the line in William Shakespeare’s play “Hamlet,” *albeit morphed by use over the ages*: “Thou protests too much, me thinks.” Like the deeply persecuting countries around the world that over-the-top fight against the spread of Christianity...Egypt, Turkey, and others, such only emboldens me with the understanding that if Christ is not the path, then why spend so much time, energy and resources to stop what is held by them as merely a lie or a myth? The Herod family was obviously afraid of Christianity and utilized every resource at their disposal in attempt to squash it.

Acts chapter 12 stars one “Herod Agrippa the first,” who was the grandson of Herod the Great, who killed the young male children in the area of Bethlehem searching for the newborn Messiah. He was the nephew of Herod Antipas, who beheaded John the Baptist. In an attempt to put this Christ movement down and at the same time appease the Jews, Agrippa took the life of the first actual apostle to be martyred, James the brother of John, one of the “sons of thunder.” His death fulfilled the Lord’s promise that James would indeed “*drink of His cup, and be baptized with His baptism.*” (Mark 10:39)

The murder of James did more than stop one man, it effectively opened the floodgate of persecution. Suddenly, as if given some sort of broad unspoken permission, the world turned violently against this new way of Christianity. However, it is quite possible that James was more than just faithful to the end, for there is history which record James went out in style. “*In his Ecclesiastical History (ii. 9) (Jewish historian)Eusebius preserves a tradition, which was first found in Clement of Alexandria, that the officer who was attached to James and commissioned with guarding him, was so impressed with the apostle’s witness, that before James was martyred, this officer confessed Christ as Savior and was beheaded with the apostle.*” (KJV Commentary)

Herod was on a roll. Sensing his immediate popularity due to this action, he sets out to catch another disciple and wins the grand prize with Peter. Now please notice that the church in response didn’t break out the military gear and storm the prison! What did they do instead? *They prayed!* **Prayed?** That’s it? Just *prayed?* They didn’t take any action or anything?

Why do we always see prayer as the last resort instead of the first line of defense? Perhaps we need to understand that God is an army, a fleet of ships, an expert surgeon, a great mechanic, and not to mention a very rich uncle! Let's face it, our general knows the launch codes gang! Such does not mean we are to be apathetic or fatalistic. But seriously, what would we bring to the table in comparison to a God who "*owns the cattle on a thousand hills?*" (Ps 50:10) Jeremiah 32:17 says "*O Sovereign LORD! You made the heavens and earth by your strong hand and powerful arm. Nothing is too hard for you!*" Thus it should go without saying that the *first* and the *last* action we should take is to take *our all* to the *Lord of all*.

Herod, because of the showman that he was, was perceptive to how important timing was for these things. He was careful to wait until *after* the holiday when the people would be more attentive to his big publicity stunt, a.k.a. the "execution of Peter the apostle." However, not to be outdone, it was the night before Herod's big show and God was going to show Herod and the world how to put on a show!

Now one cannot fail to notice what Peter was doing the night before he was scheduled to be beheaded. He wasn't lying awake all distraught about what was coming. In fact, *he was asleep!* I guess one could call that quintessential faith! Perhaps he learned something from Jesus that night in the boat amidst the storm after all. But for sure this was a living example of the "grace and peace" that he later wrote of as he opened his letters that we know as First and Second Peter. Dawning the cape of fatalism, one could easily view this situation as hopeless! Chained between two soldiers and guards at the door! Obviously there was no escape. Or was there?

Again we cannot help but be a bit amused by the scene before us. Like a dark comedy we see the angel come to rescue him and again, the angel actually had to wake him up! Our text says he "*struck Peter in the side.*" I have visions of the angel giving Peter a swift kick, "*Hey, Pete ...dude, wake up! Let's get outta here.*"

Now it would be easy to wonder at this point why God sent an angel to rescue Peter, but had just let James die. It is the same kind of question that we ask when we see such humanly apparent disparity. However we must know that God never promised that we would understand everything that He does. In fact, He promised just the opposite. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, "*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,*" says the *LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.*" The fact was that apparently God just wanted James to come home, but He still had work for Peter to do. I have no other explanation.

But let us not underestimate the power and influence of prayer in this situation. Not that such gives complete clarity, for I do not understand what happens out there because of prayer. I just know God wants us to pray and James 5:16 tells us that "*The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.*" A Puritan preacher once said, "An angel fetched Peter out of prison, but it was prayer that fetched the angel."

So the angel tells Peter "*Pull yourself together...we're outta here.*" The angel carries on a calm conversation with Peter as he packs up to move out. The whole time, Peter thinks he is just dreaming. It has been my experience that such is often the case with the miraculous. Most of us that have walked with Christ have stood in the murky fog of a miraculous experience. We look back at the journey that we all have passed through and it can seem to be just a blur, a dream where we were rescued from an imprisonment of our own making. It is quite clear that God is still writing the book of Acts!

The angel proceeds to lead Peter out past the guards, none of which see a thing, and through the city gate, which opened by itself! Once they were out of danger, the angel leaves Peter standing in bewilderment. Yes indeed...I *have* experienced that! Suddenly, Peter realized what happened and his "eyes were opened." Like the blind man

healed who declared, "Why, *this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes.*" (John 9:30) We can only but share in Peter's joy as we too exclaim, "*now I know for certain.*" For assuredly at that point, ***there is no return.*** Once we "know for certain," there is nowhere else for us to go but to Jesus. Like Peter said in John 6 when he was posed that scenario... "*Lord, where else would we go?*"

Once Peter came to, he apparently figured he would just mosey on home and look for the "boys." Coming to John's house, he knocks on the door and a girl named Rhoda (forever immortalized in scripture for her subsequent actions...her "ten minutes of fame, *if you will*), recognizes his voice. Instead of opening the door, she runs inside to tell everyone that their prayers were answered! Yes indeed...*praying* for something and then *believing* in God's answer are two different things!

We can laugh at Rhoda, but haven't we all experienced similar responses of disbelief when we have told others of God's miraculous hand in *our* lives? The apostles (and maybe *your* friends and family) responded with "you're crazy!" Ah, but it made no difference! The proof was standing outside the door, even if, in our giddy kneejerk, we forget what we were doing! It's good to know that there isn't a prerequisite of knowing just *what* God will do prior to prayer! John and the boys were expecting a ghost but received instead the actual one-and-only Peter himself.

Once the gang had gathered, Peter "testified" to the blessed events that had transpired. This is the stuff of redemption! This is the stuff of God's glory! They were there! They were living the story, in the very manifest of God's glory and miraculous. And God got all the credit. That's the way it is to be done. Then, there is the other way...

When the soldiers woke up the next day they were surprised to say the least, to find themselves chained to nothing but each other! In those days, the penalty for losing a prisoner under your care was execution, so the soldiers were put to death. All the way to their own execution, no doubt, they were still in stupefied wonder about what in the world happened!

God was now going to take care of the other issue at hand in this situation, ***which was Herod.*** In the midst of one of his many tantrums, he previously tangled with the residents of Tyre and Sidon over some issue. Peace was eventually found, but not for Herod. His reckoning day had come. For Herod would now bring his sin to its sure and ultimate crescendo: *he would now commit the ultimate error.* One that plays into what we know as the "unpardonable sin." A sin that is being replayed millions of times over every day. Herod would now do what is the sure and eventual result of self-ism and individualism...*he would now take the glory of God unto himself.*

The text tells us that worms killed Herod, but ultimately, it was his sin that consumed him; and like sin, the worms consumed him from the inside out. It was a vivid physical manifest of a spiritual reality. This is the end result of trying to steal the glory from God!

God was the one shining throughout this chapter. He brings James home, rescues Peter, kills Herod, and blesses the church; and He did it all without breaking a sweat! If we take a step back, we find ourselves in awe of that glory. **His glory:** *we may not be able to define it in words, but we know it when we see it!*

Despite the difficulties, the trials, and the persecution, verse 24 rings out with the word "*but...*" All the attempts to stop its spread, "*but*" the Word of God grew! The only reason such things would hinder the spreading of the gospel is when WE let them occur. God is still in control even today, and is it not glorious?