



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 12:1-25

Acts

"The Goodness and Severity of God"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are in Acts chapter 12 and we're going to take the chapter this morning, which is a rather large text, but I'm going to read all of it. I think we can do it in five minutes or less. But the context is the church in Antioch has been established. And prophets from Jerusalem have come down to Antioch - actually going north, but whenever anyone left Jerusalem, it said that they went down, because it was in the mountains, and whenever anyone went up to Jerusalem, it said to go up, whether they're coming from the north or the south.

They came down to Antioch and they announced that a famine was coming upon the world, the Roman world, and they knew that would affect Jerusalem and so they sent Paul and Barnabas with a gift from the church to meet the needs of the people in Jerusalem, and that's the time setting. That's the circumstance and we begin with verse in chapter 12.

"Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the day sort of Unleavened Bread. When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him." Each squad was made up of four soldiers, so there's 16 soldiers. I don't think that Luke means that they were guarding him at the same

time, but there were shifts so that all 24 hours of the days there would be guards on him, four guards, to look after Peter.

Verse 4, "Intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people. So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church of God.

"On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, 'Get up quickly.' And his chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, 'Gird yourself and put on your sandals.' And he did so. And he said to him, 'Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.' And he went out and continued to follow him, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was read, but thought he was seeing a vision. When he had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. When Peter came to himself, he said, 'Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting. And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate. They said to her, 'You're out of your mind!' But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, 'It is his angel.' But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them with his hands to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, 'report these things to James and the brethren.' Then he left and went to another place.

"Now when the day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers as to what could have become of Peter. When Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away to execution. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there.

"Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one accord they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king's country. On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them. The people kept crying out, 'The voice of a god and not of a man!' And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.

"But the word of the Lord continued to grow and be multiplied.

"And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word. Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness and Your grace. We thank You for the grace that we experience in simply possessing Your word. I say simply possessing it, it is the greatest privilege we have. We possess the greatest treasure in the world, which is Your word. Jeremiah called it fire and Your hammer. And it is those. It is powerful. It is powerful to change lives and it's changed our lives, and it changes our lives as we read it every day. And we thank You for the privilege we have of reading it now and for the added privilege of spending some time in study and examination of it and seeking to know it better. I pray, Lord, that as we do that You would teach us what this text has for us today and conform us to the image of Christ in doing that. It is through the ministry of Your word that this takes place, and so prepare each of us, young and old alike,

everyone here. May the Spirit of God open our hearts to receive the ministry of Your truth.

We can learn it, Father. We can know the meaning. We can live in light of it and have it applied to us, because we have a teacher who was well able to do that, and that's the Holy Spirit, whom You have placed in the heart of every believer in Jesus Christ. May His ministry go forward unhindered today. May we submit to it. May our hearts be open to it.

Bless us spiritually. Bless us physically as well, Father. We pray for our material needs and pray that You would bless us with them. We pray for the sick, pray for the grieving. Bless them, encourage them, and give healing where it be Your will.

Bless us again this evening as we return to this place. We pray that You would bless all who participate. May it be an edifying meeting. We pray that for ourselves in this hour. We look to You to bless. We thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ and for His death for us and it's in His name we pray. Amen.

[Message] Throughout the history of the church there has been a pendulum that has swung between the expansion of the church and opposition to it. We have seen it swing both ways in the early chapters of the book of Acts. The church began on the day of Pentecost and it expanded throughout Jerusalem and Judea. But that expansion was interrupted by persecution by the religious leaders, first from the priests and then from the Pharisees with Saul of Tarsus. But that resulted in further expansion, as Christians fled Jerusalem, giving the gospel along the way. Samaritans were converted, and Gentiles with a large church established in Antioch.

But with chapter 12, the pendulum swings back again, this time with opposition from the king, who targeted the apostles and once again blood was shed. But as is so often the case, what occurred was an occasion for God to show His glory, for God to show His mighty hand. And God cannot be frustrated, and as Isaiah says, His hand cannot be turned back. We see that in Acts 12.

It illustrates Paul's words in Romans 11:22, "Behold the goodness and severity of God." Severity for those who oppose Him, but goodness for those who love Him. And the goodness of God was experienced by His people when they turned to Him in prayer. Psalm 50 gives a great promise from the Lord when He says, "Call on me in the day of trouble/I will deliver thee, and thou shall glorify Me."

All of us will have a day of trouble. Acts 12 teaches us how to respond in that day. We are to call on Him. We are to pray. We are to seek His help, and we will see His mighty hand. The church in Jerusalem did that and the people witnessed a great deliverance as the Lord showed His power and His mercy.

It happened when Herod Agrippa was king. He was the agent of this new wave of persecution. Herod was the grandson of Herod the Great, who was notorious for his cruelty. The older Herod was the one who slaughtered the children in Bethlehem, attempting to kill the infant Lord Jesus, who is the true king of the Jews. Before that he had killed three of his own sons, because he considered them to be rivals to his throne.

One of them was Agrippa's father, and so upon his death, his mother sent Agrippa to Rome at the age of four, where he found some safety and where he mixed with the imperial family and became a close friend of the future emperors Gaius Caligula and Claudius. Herod profited from his friendship with both of them, and he also seems to have learned their ways. Caligula gave him the title of king and a realm to rule in Palestine. Later Claudius enlarged his kingdom.

He was only partly Jewish, and because of that, because of his Roman upbringing, because of his Edomite ancestry, he worked very diligently to allay any Jewish suspicions of him and to win their goodwill and their favor, and one way he found to do that was by persecuting the church.

And so he arrested some Christians, verse 1 says, in order to mistreat them. Members of the church whom he attacked in particular were the apostles. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with

a sword. So as Luke makes very clear, this was the apostle James. This was not the Lord's half-brother, who is mentioned in verse 17 and whom we know as the author of the epistle of James.

This James was one of the three in the Lord's inner circle during His earthly ministry. We know them as Peter, James, and John. They were with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration. They saw Him glorified on that mountain. James and John were the sons of Zebedee, who once asked the Lord to give them thrones, one on His right side, the other on His left side, in His coming kingdom. The Lord couldn't grant that, but He did ask them if they were able to drink His cup and undergo His baptism, speaking of His death. But said that they were able. For James, the cup and the baptism were the sword of Herod. And by God's grace he was able. He became the first apostle to be martyred.

Stephen was killed out of religious zeal. James was killed out of political opportunism. And when Herod saw that it worked, that his execution pleased the Jews, he went on to the next apostle and proceeded to arrest Peter. He did it during the week of Passover and put him under tight security. We read in verse 4 that he was assigned four squads of soldiers to guard him. Someone might have remembered that incident that took place earlier that's recorded in chapter 5 when Peter and the apostles were arrested and put in jail and were able to mysteriously escape.

What they didn't know was that an angel had come, opened the prison door, and led them out, and they went back in to the temple and they began again to preach. So perhaps they remembered that incident, and to ensure that it wouldn't happen again, Herod posted a heavy guard, four squads of four soldiers at each watch. Two soldiers were chained to Peter and two soldiers were posted at the door.

His intention, evidently in all of this, was to make a spectacle of Peter, to have a show trial, and Passover week was a very good time to do that. It was an opportunity to make a great display before the Jewish people, because the city of Jerusalem during that week filled

with pilgrims. After the festival he no doubt planned to put him on trial and execute him before the people and then proceed to systematically eliminate the leadership of the church.

Well, that was his plan, but other things were happening while Herod was plotting the death of another apostle; the church was prayer earnestly. Verse 5, "Prayer for him was being made fervently by the church of God." And while they prayed, we read that Peter slept. Verse 6, the very night before Herod was going to bring Peter out and kill him, we read "Peter was sleeping between two soldiers."

That was Peter's response to his impending death. Someone said it was the calm sleep that springs from a good conscience and quiet confidence in God. He certainly had that, and he had learned that from the Lord, when he saw Jesus sleeping soundly in the boat during a terrible storm on the Sea of Galilee. You'll remember how the disciples appealed to Him, or woke Him up, "Lord, do you not care that we are perishing?" And the Lord aroused from His sleep, addressed them, and said, "Why are you worried? Why are you afraid? How is it that you have no faith?"

Well, Peter learned faith from that incident and Peter was now in his own storm and he was about to perish, it would seem. But facing death now just as calmly, just as peacefully as the Lord had in that boat. Years later Peter would write in 1 Peter 5:7, "Casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you."

When Peter wrote that line, he knew what it meant. He had done just that. He had cast his anxiety on the Lord. He had prayed, he had committed to the Lord, and he was not resting in God's care, knowing that He's fully able to take care of every situation, knowing that whatever followed would be best. And so he took his rest.

But God did not. "He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep," the **psalmist** said. And while Peter slept between two guards, the Lord answered the prayers of the saints and sent His angel into the dungeon. It filled with his light. The guards there were not awakened by it. He kept them asleep. But the light was not able to awaken Peter.

In fact, Peter was sleeping so soundly that the angel had to strike him on the side, give him a kick, in order to arouse him. And even then, he was so groggy that we're told that he didn't know whether or not he was dreaming, whether this was reality or a vision. He was completely at peace. I think that's the significance of that detail. In the midst of this, it's even difficult to arouse him. He was so calm and at such peace.

But the angel did arouse him, and then he told him to get up quickly. The chains which had bound him to the soldiers fell away from his hands, and at the angel's direction, he got dressed and followed. They passed through the gates with guards and then to the iron gate that led into the city. It opened by itself. They went out into the street and then the angel disappeared. It was only then that Peter realized what had happened, that he wasn't dreaming. Verse 11, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

A few things in this incident stand out. At first, the timing of the deliverance. It wasn't immediate. It happened in the last hour. Peter had been in prison for some time. It's during the week of Passover. It may have been that he had been in prison the whole week. But it was the last night, just before daybreak, when Herod was about to bring him out for execution that the Lord rescued him.

Sometimes God's deliverance comes in just that way - not immediately, but passed through a long period of time before we finally see the hand of God and experience the deliverance that He has for us. And it takes time, because it is in that way that He tests our patience. And as He tests our patience, He forces us to trust in Him to the fullest. And in trusting in Him to the fullest, we are made strong in our faith. It is in that process that we are built up in the faith.

The Lord's timing certainly tested the saints who were praying for Peter. They had gathered in the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, and they were holding a prayer vigil. The last-minute

deliverance must have made the Lord's faithfulness more apparent to them than it might otherwise have been. It certainly would have been apparent to them if they had begun praying and immediately Peter had been released, but I think it was made all the more apparent, all the more dramatic, all the more forceful to their mind to have prayed so long and so hard, wondering what would happen, all the more aware of the difficulty and the danger and the outcome that it was approaching, and then suddenly at the last moment he is delivered and they see the hand of God. It strengthened their faith.

God's deliverance sometimes comes at the last minute and so we must be patient. We must understand that that in many ways is the way the Lord works and we must trust Him for whatever happens. And one reason that the Lord lets us wait may be to lead us to the point where we are willing to trust Him for whatever happens. Sometimes what happens isn't the deliverance that we hoped for.

James wasn't delivered, not physically. And we naturally wonder why not? Why was Peter saved from the sword and not James? Why weren't both of them delivered? Those aren't questions that are easily answered. We would be correct in assuming that the ministry of James had reached its end. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:10 that God has prepared for us beforehand good works that we walk in them. And no doubt, James had come to that point where he had walked in all of the good works that God had given to him and prepared him. He had one left to do and that was to die well. And according to tradition, he did just that. He died as a great testimony to the Lord. And Peter continued on, because Peter's works were not finished. God had more ministry for Peter to do, and that certainly is correct. But why the one and not the other? Well, ultimately the answer is hidden in the mystery of God's providence. This is the way it is. God does what He wills to do and we must rest in that. That in large part is the life of faith. It is yielding to the will of God and yielding to it gladly, knowing that it is always good.

The writer to the Hebrew speaks to this issue in chapter 11, which is the chapter on faith. He says that by faith some escaped the edge of the sword. And then later he says by faith others were killed with the sword. God's will is perfect and we must enter into every circumstance by faith, trusting Him in all things.

Something else to notice is the picture that Peter's deliverance gives us of spiritual deliverance. Charles Wesley saw this. It seems that this was the passage that he had in mind when he wrote that hymn that we sang earlier, "And Can It Be," because he wrote the lines - and you'll remember what you just sang - "Long my imprisoned spirit lay/Fast bound in sin and nature's night/Thine eye diffused a quickening ray/I woke, the dungeon flamed with light/My chains fell off, my heart was free/I rose, went forth, and followed thee."

That's what happens in salvation. God gives us light. He illuminates our minds. He drives away the spiritual darkness. He gives us understanding. He breaks the chains of sin and ignorance and leads us out of death into life and spiritual freedom so that we might follow Jesus Christ the rest of our lives.

Lord promised to do that, promised to that back in the Old Testament, in Isaiah 42:7. It's a prophecy about Jesus Christ, and there we read that it would be His mission "To open blind eyes/To bring out prisoners from the dungeon/And those who dwell in darkness from the prison." He's done that for every one of you who have believed in Jesus Christ. You have been led out of the prison house of sin. You have been given freedom. We have that illustrated there, because that is what He did literally for Peter. He brought him out of the prison. He brought him out of the darkness. He brought him in to the street, and out on the street, free. Peter decided to go into hiding.

But first he wanted to inform the church of his deliverance and his safety, and so he went to the home of Mark's mother, Mary, which seems to have been one of the main meeting places for the church in Jerusalem. The church had grown very large. In fact, on the day of Pentecost, it began large with over 3,000 souls that were saved, and

then the Lord was adding daily to that number and there are other periods when large numbers were saved. And so it was quite a large church in the city. And evidently to be better managed, the church divided into smaller fellowship for study and for worship, and this was one of the house churches, perhaps the one where Peter often ministered.

A number of people had gathered there and what follows has an authentic and rather humorous touch to it, because it's so often the way we are. Peter arrived at the house and he knocked on the door of the gate. A slave-girl named Rhoda came to answer. She asked who was there, and when she heard Peter's voice she recognized it and got so excited that she forgot to open the door and ran back in. And she ran back into the house, interrupting the prayer meeting with the good news that Peter was at the gate. But they didn't believe her. "You're out of your mind," they said. And, "That couldn't be Peter. He's in jail. He's about to be executed. That's why we're here. We're here to pray for him." Well, she kept insisting that it was him and they kept insisting, no, it's not, it's his angel. They couldn't believe the news. It was too good to be true. They could not believe, in other words, that God had actually answered their prayers.

Back in verse 5, Luke wrote that they were praying for him fervently. And so earnest prayers of faith were being offered, but as is so often the case, their faith, which was genuine, was mixed with unbelief. They asked for deliverance but it was hard to believe that God would actually do that. That's why I say that this has an authentic, even humorous, touch to it, because it is so much the way we are. We see ourselves in that. We ask God to bless and we're surprised when He does it. We shouldn't be.

Paul wrote in Ephesians 3:20 that God is able to do exceeding "abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us." That is an interesting phrase at the end. The whole statement is interesting - able to do exceeding "abundantly beyond that we ask or think." And they've asked for the deliverance of

Peter. He can do more than that and they can't even believe, and that's true with us. But He's able to do that, able to do everything, because He is doing "according to the power that works within us." Now, what kind of power is that?" That's infinite power. And Paul doesn't say He's able to do out of His power. He could do anything - something small, almost insignificant, and it would be out of His power, but this is according to His power. In the measure of His power and His power is infinite, unlimited. That's the kind of power that works within us, that's the kind of power that works for us. God can overcome any circumstance that you're in, any situation. He's able to answer every prayer that we make, and He does. He answers them according to His will and according to His wisdom.

He did that for the believers in Jerusalem, but it took them a while before they believed it. Meanwhile, Peter continued to stand outside and knock. I suppose that they're trying to pray and they're telling Rhoda to be quiet and they keep hearing this knocking out there and they say, "Well, there is somebody's out there." So they decided to see for themselves and, who knows, maybe we'll see an angel. So they went to the door to look and, no, it wasn't an angel, it was Peter himself, and Luke says they were amazed. And what God does is often amazing. He's able to do exceeding "abundantly beyond all that we ask or think," and so we shouldn't be surprised when He does.

Well, Peter entered the house and he motioned for everyone to be silent. Then he told them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. He told them to report everything to James, then he left and went to another place. He went into hiding temporarily until things calmed down.

What the church learned from all of this, and one of the main lessons of this passage, is the power of prayer. The church joined in fervent prayer and God delivered Peter. Sometimes there is confusion about prayer and divine sovereignty, and people ask questions like, "Why should we pray if God is sovereign and if He's working

everything to His plan. He says that He's doing that, or Paul does in Ephesians 1:11. 'He's working all things according to the counsel of His will.' If that's the case, what's the point of praying? If God has chosen someone for salvation, if divine election is true, why pray for their salvation? God's going to save them anyway, whether I pray or not."

Or they ask, "God's omniscient. He knows everything. He certainly does. He knows our needs before we ask them, about them in prayer. And He certainly knows how to answer our prayers and answer our needs, meet every need, far better than we can imagine. Why bother to pray about it? Why don't we just simply leave it to Him and not pray at all?"

Well, when one asks that question in light of God's sovereignty, really, the answer is not "Don't pray because God is sovereign." Sovereignty is the very reason that we pray. If God were not sovereign, if God were not omniscient, if God were not all powerful, then there would be no purpose in praying. He would not be able to answer our prayers. We'd be on our own. We would be living by our wits. It's because God is sovereign. It's because God is omniscient, because He is all-wise, all-knowing, all-powerful. He is God Almighty that we can pray to Him with confidence and expect an answer. In fact, know that He will answer our every prayer in the right way, better than we know, better than we ask.

Well, we know that theologically. We also know that we are to pray, because God commands us to pray, to pray without ceasing. James, to whom Peter's deliverance was reported, had much to say about prayer in chapter 4 of his epistle. He wrote, "You do not have, because you do not ask." It's a chronic problem with the church and with Christians. We don't pray as we ought. Who of us doesn't feel guilty on that score? The church has always been that way. It's always been negligent in its prayer life. And so James says, "You do not have, because you do not ask." In other words, we are to be a praying people. We are to be an asking people. That's to characterize us.

We might think, "Well, I need to do more than ask," and that's true. Sometimes we feel guilty about asking all the time. But we're to have prayers that are filled with praise, and we're to have prayers that are filled with thanksgiving. But our prayers ought to be filled with requests. We're to go to the throne of grace and ask God to give help. We can't ask enough of God. We cannot ask too much of God and we are urged to come to Him and ask. That's one of the great exhortations that the author of Hebrews gives, to draw near with confidence to the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Confidently, boldly approach that throne daily, continually.

And the reason we are to do that is because prayer is the means that God has given for us to secure His blessings. God who has ordained the end has ordained the means to that end, and prayer is the means to an end, just as evangelism is a means to an end. God has His elect. We don't know who they are, but He's told us to call them to Him by preaching the gospel. That's how they come.

God wants us to study. That is a means to an end. You may say, "Well, God wants me to be a Biblical scholar, I'll be a Biblical scholar. I'm going to keep watching the baseball game." Well, if you don't study, you don't pick up your Bible and study it diligently and read good Christian literature, you won't advance in your knowledge and you will not know the word of God and you will not store it up in your mind and you will not have the wisdom of God and you'll live a foolish life. Study is the means to that end, just as eating and sleeping are God's means to God health and vibrant activity. Prayer is a means to an end. It is the way God has ordained that we obtain His blessings.

James Boice, in his commentary on Acts, explained God's deliverance of Peter in that way. He wrote, "God had determined to save Peter, but the way in which God had determined to save Peter was in response to the prayers of the Christians who were praying. Without their prayers, Peter would not have been saved. But he was saved through their prayers, because that was the way God had

determined to save him." Prayer is the means of bringing about God's will, and we're to be earnest in it, diligent in it. A lesson here in chapter 12 is on the importance of prayer and the goodness of God. He blesses His people, and the instrument He has given to us to obtain blessing is prayer.

But the chapter is not only about the goodness of God. It's also about His severity, which is vividly described in the remaining verses. When the sun came up and Peter's absence was discovered, the prison was thrown into a state of confusion and panic. The guards couldn't find Peter. They couldn't explain his absence, and that was bad news for them, because when Herod learned that his prisoner was gone and his show trial was off, he ordered the guards to be led away to execution.

Then he went down to Caesarea, where he spent some time and where he came to a gruesome end. Luke described it in verses 20-23. He first sets the stage by giving the background of the event. For some reason Herod had become very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, which were cities just up the Mediterranean coast in what is today modern Lebanon.

They were seaport cities and they were dependent on the region of Galilee for their food supply, for the grain that they had. And since Herod governed Galilee, the people of Tyre and Sidon realized very quickly that it was not good policy to have Herod angry with them. And so they sent a delegation to Caesarea to ask for peace by seeking the help of a man named Blastus, who was Herod's chamberlain, the official who was in charge of Herod's affairs. They got his help, and they probably did it by means of a bribe, and by that way, in that way, they were able to secure an audience with the king and the king then spoke to them. We read in verse 21, "On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them."

Now, Josephus, in his history of the Jewish people, gives us some details that Luke does not give us, but they're details that fit

very well with what Luke does record. And Luke tells us that "having put on his royal apparel, he took his seat on the rostrum and began" to speak to the people and Josephus describes that royal apparel. He describes it as being made of silver throughout and quite wonderfully woven.

Well, he entered the theater, according to Josephus, at daybreak, and as the sun's rays struck that garment, that robe, he writes that the silver shone and glittered wonderfully. Impressed by the sight, the people cried out, "The voice of a god and not a man!" The flattery was empty and it was calculated to win his favor, but it appealed to Herod's vanity. Having grown up in the imperial palace in Rome, where the emperors thought themselves gods, the idea that he was a god appealed to him. Josephus wrote that he did neither rebuke them nor reject their impious flattery. And we have something of a common fact in that, as well, don't we, because people do the same? Maybe we're all a little guilty of this. We accept people's flattery, maybe with a show of humility. We say, "Oh, no, that's not true," and yet in our hearts we're thinking, "You know, I like that."

And maybe it is true, and so we refuse to deny it and we refuse to give the glory to God. Fact is, everything that we have is a gift from God and we should never forget that. Your health and energy, that's a gift from God. Why are you a healthy person? Why are you a whole person? So on a plain Friday evening and family was sitting in front of me and midway through the flight the little girl got up. She didn't have any arms. Why do I have arms? Why do you have arms? Why are you able to play sports or able to work at your computer so easily, so freely? Because God's made you whole. God's given you what you have.

You have a nice position in the office. You have the ability to advance because God's given that to you. Your possessions, you may have many. Your family, it's all a gift of God. Everything that we have is a gift from God and we need to give Him the glory and not neglect to do that. That's what we need to learn to do, and if there's a lesson

to be gained from Herod's impiety, it's that. We need to avoid that. We need to give glory to God. He is jealous for His glory. He said, "I will not give my glory to another."

But Herod liked the praise and he took it. He didn't quiet the crowds. The idea of being a god appealed to him. Verse 23, "And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died." Been a number of different attempts to give a medical diagnosis to Herod's condition. Whatever it was, Luke, the physician, reports that it was the judgment of God.

In the last verse of the book of Isaiah, the Lord speaks of the corpses of men who have transgressed against Him. Of them, He says, "Their worm shall not die." It's a picture of eternal torment, endless punishment. And Herod gives a grotesque image of that. God had been very patient with him, very patient with this wicked king, but finally He had had enough of Herod and He struck him with a death that was fitting for such a vain and cruel man.

The God who delivers His people punishes His enemies. We're not left unattended. We're not left unprotected. He deals justly with men. Doesn't always do it so quickly. He doesn't always do it so publicly and obviously as He did with Herod, but sometimes He does and sometimes judgments occur just this way. I'm sure that when Henry II died, many in Europe saw God's judgment in him. He was the king of France and a vicious persecutor of the Protestant church, which had become a large minority in that time and in that country.

Two days after Henry had condemned two men to be burned at the stake for their faith, he was jousting in a tournament. A lance splintered, struck him in the eye, and a few days later he was dead. God deals with the wicked. That Psalm 37:35-36, "I have seen a wicked, violent man/Spreading himself like a luxuriant tree in its native soil/Then he passed away, and lo, he was not more." That's the judgment of God. That's the justice of God. Behold the goodness and

severity of God. It's a dangerous thing to oppose God and touch His saints. He deals with our enemies far more effectively than we can.

And so Herod died, and once again the pendulum swung from opposition to expansion. Verses 24, 25, "But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.

"And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark." What a complete turnaround that is. John Stott observed that in his commentary on the epistle and observed how the chapter began with Herod on a rampage, persecuting the church. "It opens," he writes, "with James dead, Peter in prison, and Herod triumphing. It closes with Herod dead, Peter free, and the word of God triumphing."

God's word cannot be bound. It cannot be restrained. It is the fire and hammer of God. That's how Jeremiah describes it. It is a fire that no man can control, that no man can put out. Neither Henry nor Herod could stop the gospel in their countries. No man can do that. It is a hammer. It breaks the hardest hearts. It shatters all man's self-righteousness and self-confidence before God. The word of God is living; it is active; it is powerful.

It's God's means of converting sinners. And so He sends out His people with the gospel to fill the world with it. And Luke tells us that the church was doing that. It was again expanding. Soon missionaries would leave Antioch and carry the gospel west to Asia, then to Europe and Rome, and beyond.

So the pattern in the book of Acts of the outward expanding church continued. That's the goodness of God. He has let loose in this world the fire of His word. It brings light, it brings life as it awakens people to their need of the Savior, and quickens them by the work of the Holy Spirit with faith.

That's the goodness of God. But in the word of God, also we have revealed the severity of God. He judges sinners. Make no mistake about it, God is love. John tells us that. But the author of Hebrews also tells us that He is a consuming fire.

So if you recognize that you are a sinner, don't delay. Come to Christ. God has promised that all who call on Him in the day of trouble will be delivered. If you are here without Jesus Christ, if you've not believed in Him, this is the day of trouble, because every sinner lives. Every moment of his or her life under the wrath of God, under the condemnation of God, and that wrath can fall at any moment, just as it did on Herod. So don't delay. Come to the Lord Jesus Christ.

God saves sinners. God has promised to do that. Only He can do that, and He delights to do that. That is His glorious work. It's saving sinners, and He calls sinners to come. So come to Him. Trust in Him. He receives all who do, and all who come receive the complete forgiveness of sin and life everlasting. Look to Him, call upon Him. He is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. Call on Him to save you and He will do that, and He'll do exceedingly more than that. He not only saves lost souls, but He makes them His children. He makes them His sons, His heirs, fellow heirs with Jesus Christ. Not mere servants in the household, but children and sons in the household. That's the goodness of God. Come to Him and receive it. And may all of us who have received it rejoice in it. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness. We see it in contrast to Your severity. You judge sinners. Day is coming when men will stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ and give an account of their lives, be judged for their works, and everyone of them, everyone of them, will be found wanting and cast into the Lake of Fire. What a just but terrible end.

But those in Christ, clothed in His righteousness, will enter into life everlasting. We thank You for that. It's no work of our own, Father. That garment of righteousness was woven in heaven. It cannot be purchased with silver or gold. It is a free gift, received through faith alone. Father, if there are any attending who don't know Christ, convict them of that. Bring them to saving knowledge of Him and

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cause us all to rejoice in the life we have in Jesus Christ. It's in His
name we pray. Amen.