

Herod vs. Heaven

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Preacher: Gabriel Wong

[0:00] Thank you, Aaron. A round of applause to the Congo team. We welcome them up. Every exam and every big thing in life, we pray a lot beforehand.

But after, we don't actually pray and celebrate on Thanksgiving. So we want to take a moment just to thank God that, first of all, you guys came back safely. All glory to God. Thank God that you guys had an incredible time.

And we're going to have about 10 minutes. I want each of you to share. I haven't prepared them at all. So I'm going to have the CEO kick us off. One word. One word only.

Very tough to describe your trip. One word. We're going to go around really quickly. Go, Erica. One word. These two. Two words, maybe. Okay, I'm very gracious today.

One phrase. There we go. One phrase. One sentence. I think for my phrases, God walks with us.

[1:16] Should I elaborate or is it okay? Elaborate. Okay. We actually faced a lot of challenges throughout the trip.

And there were a lot of logistical nightmares and just random issues here and there. And safety issues as well. But we didn't really have a lot of backup plans either.

So I think, like, in the end, everything was fine and everything. Yeah. God answers prayers. And we just felt like he walked with us.

And, yeah. More examples to come from the other team members. God walks with us. I like that.

Aiden? Okay, for Aiden. My phrase would be, do what you can.

You know? And we really experienced this when we were in the Congo just because that place is just a very, it's a very rich area. But it's also a very poor area in various different ways.

[2:16] I think when you do what you can and you let God, you let God fill in that gap, that's when he's going to show up the most. Yeah. Yeah. My phrase would be, goodness of God.

That was one of the worship songs that we did when we were there. And also, I think it really reflects on how Joyce and Henri, who run New Sight, they just trusted and just went there and did it. And they just experienced the goodness of God. And they just made, God just made everything possible there. Yeah. Yeah. Just before you guys went off, I think I spoke to, I met with Aiden and God, and I was like, the main thing you can do is encourage, encourage Joyce and Henri for the work that they're doing.

And so, yeah, so glad that you could see that. Justina? The brains? Be humble and God will do the exaltation. Yeah. Be humble and God will do the exaltation. Because we were actually expecting to have, like, mid-50s men doctors to be appearing in our course that are, like, really high in the position.

And we were just, like, three langmuirs. Three little girls. Four little girls. And two young men. But, yeah, we forgot.

[3:36] Because we were told to probably promote ourselves and tell how good we are on paper, like, on CV. But the morning we did our spiritual devotion.

Yeah. I also have the verse. I think I found it. It says in Matthew chapter 23, verse 10 to 12, those who are humbled themselves will be exalted. And we actually forgot to promote ourselves that day on the first day of teaching.

We did not promote at all. And it turns out they didn't disrespect us at all. And it was a good exchange of experience as well with them. Wow. Humility on both sides. Yeah. It's amazing.

Godfrey, what was it like to watch everyone else serve? What were the sunsets like? Did you enjoy the sunsets and the starry nights? Basically all I did. My phrase is trust in God.

Because there's a lot of things that we've set out to do that didn't go as planned. But then God just made it better at the end. And, yeah, I think that's the attitude that you need when you're in Congo.

[4:41] And, you know, everything can go south. You can't really predict anything. And then, yeah. I think my phrase is I do not recommend monkey meat.

Okay, you've got to expand on that. You've got to expand on that. Actually, with that, maybe one moment. We're going to go around one more time. But one moment you really felt God speak to you or a moment that you want to bring back to Hong Kong.

You're like, I don't want to forget that. That moment, whether it's in a worship, whether it's monkey meat, that you bring back. And you're like, okay, that was, I felt something new that I wouldn't have felt if I didn't leave Hong Kong.

So just a moment that you felt God move. CEO, kick us off again. You're going to go longer. My moment was actually learning about, like, what Justina said about being a humble servant.

It was, it's not, like, very, like, shining moment as, like, you would really think about. But I think it hit me pretty hard when I saw it.

[5:44] So one of the things, the issues that we had was getting the mannequins to, like, mannequins for CPR practice and practicals into our hospital.

And they were just stuck in the port for weeks. And by prayer and, like, a lot of people and support, we finally got the mannequins to our hospital.

And one of the challenges was that, actually, we only had three days of teaching. But on the first two days, they weren't delivered. But we really wanted on the last day. And on the second last day, one of the drivers for the hospital actually offered to drive 24 hours to drive more than 1,000 miles to bring it back.

Because it just got released. And he did it out of his own volition without anybody asking him to.

Just because he saw how important it was and how, like, it could change, like, so much for us.

And then he just did that. He just didn't sleep. And then drove 24 hours. And I just think, like, wow.

Without him, I don't think it could have happened. And, like, we don't think about how this is serving God as well.

[7:01] Because for us, we're like, oh, yeah, we're standing here teaching. We come here from Hong Kong. And it's all about, sometimes it's, like, about yourself, you know. And it's easy to make it about yourself.

But for him, it's really not. And I think, like, it's a lot to learn from. Yeah. Thank you, Erica. Stay there. I think on this trip, we experienced, like, quite a number of just supernatural things.

Like, there were many moments when, and I'm going to talk about one of them. But essentially, when I came to do this project, you might have seen a little few, like, some screenshots of the inventory management system that I made.

I was, I was so, I brought, like, all the equipment and everything, and everything was going just fine. And then I had a thought when I was, like, making this program.

And I was thinking, like, okay, this could actually be so much better and so much more longer lasting if I had one crucial component that I didn't bring from Hong Kong.

[8:07] And I was sharing this with, like, the team. And I was telling them that I would be extremely disappointed if God had brought me all the way here, only to build something that wouldn't last, like, potentially the lifetime of the organization.

And that day after, Godfrey comes into my room with the exact component that I needed. And I had gone into, I had gone into, uh, I had gone into Wesso, which is the city that we were in, in order to find this thing.

And then the guy was just like, oh, you want to buy SSD? You have to go to Brazzaville. And I'm like, dude, no way, man. Which is 12 hours away. It's 12 hours away. So obviously we're not going to do that.

But then the next day, like, Godfrey comes in and he's like, look at this package that came in from Hong Kong that no one knows who sent it. And no one knows what the reason it was sent for.

And it was exactly, like, the SSD that I needed in order to make sure that this project would, like, last the lifetime of the organization. So, dude, it was crazy.

[9:17] It was crazy. Yeah. That's really, I feel like my story, my phrase is do what you can.

Because, like, when gaps appear, you just have to trust that the Lord's going to fill those gaps.

And, and that you going to this far away place where gaps might even occur is already a step of faith. So, yeah. Gaps.

Gabs? Gaps. Gaps. Gaps. Gaps. Gaps. I think for me, just kind of to follow up on the mannequin story, I think for me, one lesson was that just God has a timing for everything and we have to trust in God's timing.

because the mannequins didn't come for the first two days of our course, which we were devastated about because the mannequins were for teaching chest compressions and rescue breaths.

And back in Hong Kong when we learned how to do it, these were readily available. We learned how to do it with the mannequins. And so we thought it was something that was necessary for the course.

[10:31] But in place of the mannequins, what we had, we just used pillows that were available in the hospital. And we just drew the bones on the plastic bags on top of the pillowcases.

And we taught the first two days with that. And I think they were a good replacement tool to teach. And I think God probably also didn't want us to have the mannequins the first two days because it just made the participants know that they could teach back where they were from just with the pillows because they wouldn't have the mannequins.

And what we wanted to do was that we wanted to teach them these skills that they could then replicate and teach it to their colleagues back where they were working. So I think that was also just trusting that God has his timing.

And if the mannequins came the first day, they might have just thought as well, like, oh, we don't have the mannequins. We can't teach back where we work. So, yeah. Joyce said that when she told the other doctors that the mannequins might be delayed, all the doctors said, we're not going to come if there are no mannequins.

So Joyce, like, she was like, okay, just kidding. I'm sure that the mannequins will come during these three days. I'm just going to schedule these three days and just trust that the mannequins are going to come.

[11:53] And they actually did end up coming. Thanks to that one driver who did 24 hours nonstop driving. God is faithful. Justina? And God really loves us and protects us.

Because, so Lusanda and I actually had to come back earlier than the rest of the team because we couldn't get annual leaves. Yeah.

So it was just the two girls that had to take the coach bus, which is, like, full of locals. And we had to take the 12-hour ride down from the most north of Congo down to the most south of Congo.

And it was just the two of us, no guys with us. So, and we prayed and that there would be angels coming with us. And God answered our prayer.

So, actually, we left on Monday. So, on Sunday, we attended a church where a pastor was preaching in the church. And the moment we arrived at the bus stop, the pastor that actually preached at the church that we went to yesterday also had to go to Brazzaville, the same bus as we did.

[12:56] And also, there were three other people that replaced the number of people that were supposed to, like, travel with us. So there was a policeman that Henri helped to liaise with at the coach station just to look after us.

And there was a nun and there was a soldier. And they were right around us. So we were fully protected and we made it really safely down.

Yeah. Praise God. All right, final two. We've got one minute each. Okay. Go for it. Okay. I'm just going to sprinkle my two cents here and there. So, for the SSD that Aiden talked about, so Joyce, which is the organizer of NewsSight, she is very vigilant and diligent with what she buys.

So there's actually a list that we saw of all the cargo that came in. And that was the one item that wasn't on the list. So it was quite miraculous, I think. And another thing about the mannequins is that Joyce had to, like, to make sure the mannequins get here, she, like, kind of used a favor, asked the director of health in Congo to see whether he can do something about it.

And she usually doesn't reach out to him because it's kind of, like, all the way high up. But then it alerted him that there was this CPR course. So, in fact, right after the course, the director reached out to Joyce and said, oh, can you host this for all of Congo?

[14:20] So it was another silver lining, like, another blessing in disguise, I guess. Yeah, I guess in summary, too, I think that I realized that, I mean, I knew it, but, like, when you have faith and you live with faith, it's almost like a cheat in life.

Like, you get access to a random SSD or you have, like, just favors just appear. And even when those things don't happen, like, this really supernatural peace just comes over you.

It's like you're always winning when you live with faith. And I think, especially in Congo and with the witness of Henri and Joyce, we saw that lived out. And I think for me and maybe for our team, we'll come back to Hong Kong just applying faith more.

Like, just why not? Like, it's almost like you don't get the potential of your life without it. So, yeah, if I have a cheat to get through this hard life, then sweet, I'm going to use it.

Thank you, God. Thank you, Ellen. And that was a perfect wrap-up. My last question was actually, you know, what's the one thing you want to bring back to Hong Kong? And I think that's it, to increase your faith, to live out your faith.

[15 : 25] As a word that, I want to pray for you guys. We're going to pray for that very thing, that you continue to live out in faith. So, God, we pray you. We praise. We praise you. We thank you. We thank you. You are the God that walks with us.

We thank you that we do what we can and you do the rest. We thank you for the goodness of God that you continue to provide for Newside Congo all these years through the calling of Joyce and Henri.

We thank you, Lord, that as we humble ourselves, you do the exaltation. We thank you that we can trust in you. And also that we don't need to eat monkey meat. We thank you, Lord, that you've given us many other meats and vegetables and things to eat.

But God, more than anything, Lord, I thank you for this group. I thank you for their heart. I thank you for their obedience. Even those who came back today to serve in the worship team. And Lord, may they know that it's the same God that we serve, maybe in different countries, but it's the same God. We might be in different cities, but it's the same church. And Lord, I pray that as they go back into the noise of Hong Kong, into their busy lives and busy works, may they remember those moments that they had in Congo.

[16 : 26] May they remember the closest of you, that you are with them and that you love them. And Lord, that they continue to be missionaries now that they're in Hong Kong. They have to carry those stories, to carry those things that they learned and saw with them and the places that they work and go to.

And Lord, I thank you for this group. I praise you. I give you all the glory for all that they did. And I pray for many, many seeds that were planted, Lord, that long after they've gone, years later, they'll continue to use the systems that Aidan had built.

We continue to share those stories of how the mannequins arrived. We continue to pray, especially for that driver who drove 24 hours to pick them up. And Lord, we thank you for that endurance, that perseverance of love that modeled you, God, who came after us all the way from heaven to reach us.

And so, Lord, we praise you. We give you all the glory. We pray this in Jesus' mighty, precious, and beautiful name. Amen. Amen. One more thing for Maiden. They also have a fundraiser going on. Their donations this year are down 60%, but their patient intake has increased 20%. And everyone here can tell you that this organization is a hardcore Hong Kong organization running in just not great conditions in the Congo.

[17 : 39] Like, these people are serious, like, really hardworking, extremely organized, diligent. And I just know this because when the last message that Joyce sends every night is at 1 a.m.

And by 5, she's already responding to the next thing. She's, like, so on it, you know. And I feel so impressed with how this organization is run.

And the date of the fundraiser is, what, the 23rd of October? November. Oh, November. It'll be a concert with the Hong Kong Philharmonic after City Hall.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Next week on slide. Tickets are donation-based. So, yeah, save your calendar. 23rd of November. Concert. City Hall. City Hall.

Block your calendars. And they'll be dressed with their chatenges. It's beautiful, guys. Really good. A round of applause again for the Congo team. And we're going to invite Pastor Gabe to come up as he shares the word.

[18 : 35] One more prayer for Gabe. Have fun linking that to your sermon today. So, Father, we pray. We stretch our hands. God, we thank you for Gabe. We thank you that whatever he's going to share, we know the letter is from you.

Because we know his heart is aligned to you. We know his heart is hungry for your word. And he is devoted to you and to your word. And so I pray, Lord, that just as the Congo team serves out in Wesa, Lord, as we read about Acts, about the early church, we're just one big movement that has continued to happen since that first day of Pentecost.

So, Lord, I pray that as we hear these words, that we join in this mission. It's not just watching and observers of the team going out to Congo. But no, Lord, we are one body. We're one family. And when one goes out, we all go out.

And so, Lord, I pray that as we feel called, we are called on this mission in Hong Kong, may you speak to us through Acts today. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. All right.

Thanks, Joe. And thanks, Congo team. So, good morning, everyone. We're going through the book of Acts, which is about the early days of the church. And it was really refreshing to hear the Congo team talk because, yeah, we're actually in Acts 12 going to be looking at the same thing, where this, as Ellen said, there's this cheat code of faith that God does things beyond what we could even imagine.

[19 : 53] He works when we ask him. So, today in Acts, we'll be reading from Acts chapter 12. It's a chapter of contrast, contrast and conflict between two men.

The first is a guy, Mr. King Herod Agrippa I. And he's a king with everything at his disposal. He has a throne to sit on, an army at his command, the approval of his people.

That's King Herod. And the second man we're going to look at is a guy named Peter. Peter was a humble fisherman, uneducated. One thing led to another.

And now in this chapter, he's in prison, guarded by soldiers and awaiting execution. That's where we are in Acts. Herod versus Peter. And it looks like a totally one-sided battle.

A powerful king against this humble fisherman. But this fight ends up in a total upset. The king with all the power ends up dead. Meanwhile, Peter, the prisoner, is miraculously set free.

[20 : 52] And not only that, but the message that Peter carries multiplied and increased. The gospel spread and spread such that today, 2,000 years later, in Hong Kong, we're worshipping the Lord Jesus.

And we can hear about how God is still working miracles in the Congo. Acts 12 contrasts Herod and Peter. And as we do that, let's not just look at them, but let's look at ourselves.

We have a choice to make in our lives as well. Whose power do we trust? Whose glory do we seek? Will we use that cheat code of faith, as Alan said? Will we look for our power, for our glory, or God's power for his glory?

That's the question in Acts 12. Now let's stand together as we read. I'm going to invite Kenneth to come up and read for us. Let's stand in a small gesture of reverence for God's word. Wow.

It's quite dark. James killed and Peter imprisoned. About that time, Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.

[21 : 55] He killed James, the brother of John, with the sword. And when he saw that it would please the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of unleavened bread.

And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.

So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. Now when Herod was about to bring him out on the very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with chains, and centuries before the door were guarding the prison.

And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, Get up quickly.

And the chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, Dress yourself and put on your sandals. He said to him, Wrap your cloak around you and follow me. And he went out and followed him.

[22 : 58] He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city.

It opened for them on its own accord. And they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. When Peter came to himself, he said, Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod, and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.

When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. And when he knocked at the door at the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer, recognizing Peter's voice.

In her joy, she did not open the gate, but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. They said to her, You are out of your mind. But she kept insisting that it was so.

And they kept saying, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them that his hands to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of prison.

[24 : 17] And he said, Tell these things to James and to the brothers. Then he departed and went to another place. Now when the day came, there was a little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter.

And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there.

Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. And they came to him with one accord. And having persuaded Blastus, the king's Chamberlain, they asked for peace.

Because their country depended on the king's country for food. On appointed day, Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them.

And the people were shouting, the voice of God and not of man. Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory.

[25 : 23] And he was eaten by worms and breathed his last. But the word of God increased and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service.

Bring with them John, whose other name was Mark. This is the word of the Lord. Please take a seat. Thanks, Kenneth. So again, whose power and whose glory?

That's our question to keep in mind in Acts 12. And to recap, last week we read the last half of Acts chapter 11. We heard about the church in a city called Antioch.

Antioch left quite a legacy. For one, we get our name from Antioch. We're called Christians. You're here at the Christian church. The church was first called, the people were first called Christians in Antioch.

But also at Antioch, there was a second legacy. Many people turned to Christ. We heard last week that the hand of the Lord was with them. And a great number of people in Antioch believed.

[26 : 22] And now in Acts chapter 12, while the gospel was spreading in Antioch, things seemed to be going, well, we have a problem. And the problem was a man named King Herod Agrippa I.

Verse 1 says, Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. And now just to clarify, there's a few King Herods in the Bible. So to avoid getting mixed up, there's the Herod who tried to kill baby Jesus.

That was King Herod the Great. Different Herod. Herod Antipas successfully killed John the Baptist. Also a different Herod. Today we're talking about King Herod Agrippa.

He came in power 10 or so years after Jesus' death and resurrection. So that's the rough timing of where we are in Acts 12. The gospel has been spreading for 10 to 15 years after Jesus ascended to heaven.

Okay? So now back to the story. King Herod was persecuting the church violently. To the point that Herod was killing leaders in the church. Verse 2 says, Herod killed James.

[27 : 24] And it's not James the brother of Joe, but James the brother of John. Herod killed him with the sword. Now James the brother of John was special. James was one of the 12 apostles. The 12 disciples of Jesus.

Followers of Jesus that he commissioned to go build his church. And James was the first of the 12 to be martyred. Now not only did Herod kill James, he also went for the apostle Peter.

Verse 3 says, He proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now, why did Herod do all of this? Why did Herod kill James and plan to arrest Peter? Verse 3 also tells us, It's because Herod saw that it pleased the Jews.

He saw that killing James the first time made the Jews happy. And he thought, Let's try that again. Let's arrest another and kill Peter. And I'll make them happy. Because there's one thing that Herod craved.

And that's popularity. Herod craved popularity. And so he wanted to please the Jews. There was a first century Jewish historian. Not a Christian. But he was named Josephus.

[28:25] Josephus said that Herod was very careful to be liked by the Jews. He would observe Jewish laws and customs. He offered sacrifices at the temple. He was known for giving gifts to gain political favor with people.

Herod loved power and popularity. And he was even willing to kill people to gain it. And that's why he arrested Peter. The Jews were happy when he killed James.

So he thought, Let's rinse and repeat that and get Peter also. So verse 4 says, Herod put Peter in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.

And that was very likely intending to kill Peter also. He planned to bring Peter out after the Passover and kill him publicly as a show to make the Jews happy. And this is a big deal for the church.

On top of one of the leaders, James, was killed. But not only that, there's another thrown in jail and they don't know what's going to happen to him. There's this threat. There's a crisis. And how does the church respond to this crisis?

[29:29] To this threat? They don't stage a protest. They don't start a riot. They don't try to break in and bust Peter out of jail. Instead, their first instinct, their first response is to pray.

They pray. They simply stop and pray. That's what verse 5 says. Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

In the middle of this crisis, before doing anything, they first stop and pray. And I said earlier that this chapter is a chapter of contrast.

So let's compare Herod with the church. Whose power are they relying on? On one hand, there's King Herod. He will do whatever he can by his own strength and power in order to be popular and honored, even if it means killing two innocent people.

He's King and he will use his power to do whatever he wants. On the other hand, there's the church. They knew that they can't fight Herod themselves. They simply don't have the strength.

[30:34] Their only hope was to ask God to act by his strength and his power. And because the church relied on God, their instinct was to stop and pray. Now let's ask ourselves, who do we look like more, Herod or the church?

When problems come, what's our first instinct? Is it to trust ourselves and try to work it out ourselves or to look to God and pray? A few years ago, some of us went to Bali together to go surfing.

That was a fun trip. It was also my first time surfing. And we were on the beach and I think it was Jay who was teaching me the basics because I'd never done it before. He said things like, oh, you have to lie down.

When the wave comes, you paddle really hard, then stand up. And then he asked me a question. Are you regular or goofy? Well, I've never surfed before, so I thought it'd be kind of goofy that day. But apparently, goofy means you have your right foot forward. That's how you like standing up on the board. Regular means that you have your left foot forward. I had no clue, so I shrugged. I don't know.

[31:36] I've never done it before. And before I knew it, he just pushed me. And I took a step forward. And I was about to square up all offended at Jay. But he was like, sorry, sorry, sorry.

That's just how you check. That's how you check. Right? Apparently, what you do, someone gives you a push from behind and then, out of reflex, one foot comes forward to balance.

That's all reflex. That's all instinct. What you do instinctively tells you your natural stance. That's what you're most comfortable with. And so I'd like us also to reflect. What's our heart's instinct?

What's our reflex? When push comes to shove, which foot do we put forward first? Our strength and our abilities or God's strength? That tells us the posture, the stance of our hearts.

That's what our heart is most comfortable with. Think about it. When problems come, what's your first response? Do you panic, rush to solve the problem, do it yourself? Or do we pause, pray, ask God for his strength and his guidance?

[32:40] When we turn on the news, there's another political flashpoint. What do we do? What's our natural reaction? Is outrage a public statement? Or is it to follow our knees and beg God to make this right and show us his will?

When friends' families are having problems, do we rush to solve it? If I call them right now, they'll fix it. Or I'll send my kid to another school, they'll take care of it. Is that our first instinct? Or to entrust them to prayer?

When deadlines pile up, is our instinct to work harder and faster, to do it ourselves? I just gotta lock in. Or do we feel the need to seek God in prayer? Martin Luther once said, I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.

Sometimes when we're busy, we neglect to pray. I don't have time to do it. Work is tiring. I don't have time to pray. It's too busy. Well, Martin Luther was so busy that he needed to pray. He was too busy not to pray.

He had so much on his plate, he couldn't do it without God's strength. So where's our heart? If we trust our strength, our abilities, we won't pray.

[33:46] We don't need to. I can just do it. But if we truly believe that we need God, then we can't help but pray. And that's why the church earnestly prayed for Peter. Herod didn't pray.

He didn't need to. He just reacted because he had all the power and he could seize it for himself.

The question for us is which foot do we put forward first? That'll tell us where our heart is.

So Herod relied on his strength while the church trusted in God's strength. And next we'll see that the church put their faith in the right place. Let's read on. It's Herod versus Peter. Peter's in jail.

He's on death row awaiting execution. And Herod wanted to make a public show of him to please the Jews. But verse 6 says, Now when Herod was about to bring him out on that very night, so at the last moment when Herod was close to killing him, that's when God acted.

Verse 7, Behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him and the light shone in his cell. So situation is Peter was chained up and the chains just fell off his hands.

[34:51] Peter was guarded in between two soldiers, a soldier on each side. But they don't notice a thing at all when this light shone, this angel came into the room. And Peter didn't have to sneak out or run out of prison.

Verse 8 says, The angel said to him, Dress yourself and put on your sandals. This was a relaxed prison break. He had time to put on shoes and change out of his PJs.

And verse 10, He followed the angels. They walked by two sets of guards who were as oblivious as the others. And just as they came to the exit of the prison, the iron gates leading out to the city, the gate just opened on its own.

It just opened for them, just like the sliding doors at the mall. That's how effortless it was for Peter.

Is he escaping from jail or just walking out the Four Seasons with that door opening for him?

I can't tell. Herod thought he had all the power, soldiers, chains, prison, but God just rolled the red carpet out for Peter to walk out. And now there's another detail here that I love.

[35:53] Verse 9 says, Peter did not know what was being done by the angel was real, but thought that it was a dream. So as all this is going on, he's escaping from jail, Peter is just totally half asleep.

He thought he was dreaming. He's in his own world. And as he's following the angel, he's thinking, this can't be happening. He's pinching himself. It's too easy. This has got to be a dream. And Peter's out of the jail now.

They're on the street. He follows the angel another block. The angel's done his job and then suddenly the angel's gone. He's just gone. Only then does Peter realize that it's not a dream.

This is all real. He's really standing in the middle of the street. God really took him out of jail. And that's when he realizes, wow, God really did rescue me. Now why include this detail?

Why does Luke include this? That Peter had no idea what's going on. The point is to show beyond doubt that it wasn't Peter's efforts. That brought him out of jail.

[36:50] It wasn't Peter trying hard to do it. It was all God, not Peter. The guy thought he was dreaming. He thought he was still sleeping. God is greater than our own efforts.

God is greater than Herod's efforts to kill Peter, to capture Peter. And God is greater than anything Peter could have done to rescue himself. And that's why Peter gives God all the credit in verse 11.

The Lord has sent his angel and rescued me. It was all God and Peter knew it. He gave God the glory. Peter is simply sleepwalking. Now, let's read on in verse 12.

As soon as Peter realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, who was called Mark, where many had assembled and were praying. Remember, at this point, Peter was all alone in the middle of the street, in the middle of the night, so he thought to himself, okay, let me just go

find my friends.

Okay? And now, I've been enjoying reading the book of Acts. One reason is that the more I read Acts, the more I appreciate how funny it is sometimes. And today, we have on our hands another silly, goofy, Looney Tunes moment.

[37:56] And I think God's not just trying to crack a few jokes in Acts. It's to prove a point. And we'll see that later. Remember, the church was praying for Peter in the middle of, they were in the middle of their emergency prayer meeting.

And Peter arrives and knocks on his door. And one of the servants, Rhoda, goes out to check who it is. And she's like, oh my goodness, it's the guy we've been praying for. It's Peter.

She's so filled with joy. She's so excited that she forgets even to let him into the house. If she'd just turned the door handle, we wouldn't be talking about this right now. But instead, she turns around. She's bouncing off the walls. She's going, it's Peter, it's Peter, it's Peter. You won't believe it, guys. It's Peter. He's here. And meanwhile, the church was praying. Lord, please save Peter.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And Rhoda runs in yelling, it's Peter, guys. And they're like, no, stop it. Can't you see that we're praying? Rhoda's like, I know Peter is here.

[38:57] Stop it, Rhoda. You're out of your mind. Peter's locked up. There's no way he's here. It's his angel. It's not Peter. It's his angel. Anyways, Father, you are sovereign God. You alone can save him.

And Rhoda's like, yeah, he did. How many times do I have to tell you? It's Peter at the door. What are you talking about, Rhoda? That's not possible. Peter's in jail. It must be his angel. And all the while, Peter's just still at the door knocking.

Hey guys, can anyone let me in? It's kind of cold and dark outside. And finally, they open the door. Oh wow, it really is Peter. Why didn't you say so earlier, Rhoda?

They saw him, and they were shocked. They were amazed. And what's Luke trying to say in this? The point is this. That God is not only greater than our efforts. He's greater than our imagination.

The church prayed earnestly for Peter. But what God did was so far beyond what they could even fathom and understand. It was so far beyond their imagination that when they saw, when Rhoda told them the good news, they said, Rhoda, you're out of your mind.

[40:04] Even as Peter was at the door, even as she's yelling, it's Peter. They couldn't believe it. It's not simply possible. So while the church did well to pray, they did well to earnestly pray.

We see that it's not the diligence of their prayers that saved Peter. It wasn't the strength of their faith. They couldn't even believe that God would answer their prayers in that way.

They didn't know how to pray. They didn't even know how to ask. What got Peter out of jail was the power of God. It was God through and through completely. The church only had faith teeny tiny as mustard seed.

They asked, and they saw God work. He's a God who does far more abundantly than all that we ask or think for his glory. God is greater than our imagination.

And you might be wondering, though, what's the use in praying then? Like, why pray if God's just going to work? And by no means do I want to minimize prayer. Because God heard their prayers. They prayed for Peter.

[41:05] They prayed earnestly to God for Peter. God heard, and he answered. In fact, he answered in a way far better than anything they were expecting. And it's the same when we pray.

God hears us, and he acts. Let's remember that we worship a God that does far more than what we can even ask or imagine. He is God in heaven.

And so when we pray, we know that he hears us. But also, let's hold on to our plans loosely in faith. And also, praying is a privilege. It's amazing when, it's amazing to see when God answers.

Right? There's joy in that. Imagine if the church didn't pray. If they were just on the couch playing video games, and then Peter showed up at their house. Like, that'd still be kind of cool. But it's much more amazing and personal when we're on our knees in prayer.

We're in the middle of that, and Peter just appears at the door. Like, wow, God really answered. He really heard me. It's so much better to have that. I can ask my father, and he works, than to just watch him as a spectator.

[42:10] Jesus said in John chapter 16, ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full. God gave us prayer, not to earn anything from him, but to enjoy him, that our joy may be full.

So let's ask. Let's ask the God who is greater than our imagination. And back to the story. For the rest of the chapter, focus is back on Herod.

Verse 18 says, Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death.

Now death was a common punishment for letting prisoners escape. But we can also see here that Herod personally cared about this escape. Herod searched for Peter and examined the guards. And I think it's because he was embarrassed. He wanted to make a show out of killing Peter. But instead, Herod became the clown. And so he killed the guards, took it out on him, on them, but also as is custom.

[43:12] They would kill the guards. Now sometime later, after several months or up to a few years later, we see Herod again puffing his chest and flexing his muscles. And if you have your Bibles out, too bad there's spoilers right above verse 20.

The section's titled, The Death of Herod. Situation is, Herod is at the negotiating table with Tyre and Sidon. These were two neighboring regions around the kingdom that Herod had.

And Tyre and Sidon depended on Herod for food. So Herod was in the driver's seat here. He had all the negotiating power. Food was his bargaining chip.

And he set out to make a deal with them. And verse 21 says, On an appointed day, Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them.

And here on this appointed day, they were probably announcing the deal that they had made, the terms that they had agreed to. And Herod thought, he's so important. I am king.

[44:16] I am powerful. Tyre and Sidon had to beg me, bow down to me for food. And so Herod put on his royal robes, sat on his royal throne, and gave his royal speech.

And it's at this moment we see the price of pride. This is the price of pride. Verse 22 says, The people were shouting, the voice of a god and not of a man.

And immediately, an angel of the Lord struck him down because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last. Just like that, God struck Herod down.

Herod the king, in his robes, on his throne, died because of his pride. Herod considered himself a god. I am big. I am him. He didn't give God the glory.

And in front of everybody that he was flexing on, in front of everyone he was desperately trying to impress, God put him to death. Now, how does that sit with you? That God put Herod to death?

[45:21] That God judged Herod? Does that punishment seem shocking? Vengeful? Unfair? Harsh? What did Herod do that was so terrible?

Because, yeah, he was prideful, but why does that deserve death? That seems a little extreme.

Maybe some of you are thinking that. Now, to see why that's such a big deal, imagine this. We're contrasting Herod and Peter.

Imagine if after God brought Peter out of jail, imagine if Peter took the credit. Imagine if Peter said, I did this. Oh, you won't believe what I had to do to get out of there. I had chains wrapped around my arms.

I just ripped them apart, bare hands, punched one guard in the face, flying knee to the other. I fought my way out of there. I'm a survivor. Imagine if the chained up, half awake, am I still dreaming, Peter?

Just trampled upon all that God did for him and instead took credit for it. How ungrateful is that? How terrible, how twisted? And that's what Herod did.

[46:21] He said, I am a God. He didn't recognize that God was the one who put him there, who gave him everything, who gave him the breath in his lungs. And it's not just Herod, but that's what we all do when we boast, when we think we don't need God and we can live and do it ourselves.

I've got money. I'm successful. I go to a good school. I got top marks in IB. I've made it in my career. I worked hard.

I earned it. I'm popular. I play sports. I play guitar. I sing. I raise my kids well. I give to charity. I pray. I read the Bible. I've memorized it. Look what I can do. Look what I deserve.

I, I, I. That's pride. Don't you know that God holds your life in his hands when you were nothing? You didn't exist.

He knit you together in your mother's womb. He gave you your skills, your abilities, everything that you have. God made it. He led you the whole way.

[47:21] Do we remember that time when we were praying for that job? We were so stressed about the interview for that exam and God provided. Do we remember feeling overwhelmed at our lowest lows and God answered?

Are we quick to forget what God did for us? What he has, how he's already answered us and that the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it and yet we take credit.

And according to Romans 1, pride and idolatry, that is the essence of sin when we trample over the glory of God and worship, glorify, exalt ourselves instead, saying, I am a God.

When we don't want God, just the things that he gives us. And the Bible says that all of us have done this. We've all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And here God shows us what sin deserves.

This time swiftly and dramatically. Verse 23 says, because Herod did not give God the glory, he was eaten by worms and breathed his last. That is the punishment for sin.

[48:25] And we've all sinned. We all deserve death. And if it's shocking to us that God put Herod to death on the spot, if we find that offensive, that is actually a display of how merciful God is to us.

Every moment when we don't give God the glory today, that's what we deserve. We deserve what happened to Herod. That should be us. Every moment we live, that is a gift from him.

Even the breath that we have, the breath in our lungs that we use sometimes to complain about God, that's from him and he can take it away. And if we're shocked, it goes to show how patient God is with us.

He's so patient that on the occasion when he doesn't hold back, it surprises us. His mercy is so constant to the point that his judgment seems unnatural.

We're so used to swimming in his grace that we don't recognize that we're in deep water. It shouldn't shock us that Herod was struck down. It should shock us that we're still alive.

[49:28] That every day we wake up and we use the life that we have to rob him of his glory and yet he still holds back. And the good news is that God is not only patient.

God actually loves us. He loves even sinners like us. And he sent his son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. Like Herod, Jesus was struck down.

But unlike Herod, not for his sins, Jesus didn't put on his royal robes. He laid them aside. Jesus didn't climb up on the throne. He stepped down from his. He didn't flex his power.

Jesus was mocked and nailed to a cross to give God all the glory in saving sinners who don't deserve it. And God raised him from the dead and exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name.

We can't save ourselves by our own effort. God gives us new life, breaks our chains, frees us from sin just like he did for Peter. If only we would turn and believe in him.

[50:28] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing. This is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast. Don't think that we can work or earn or do anything to earn our way to God.

God is the one who saves us from beginning to end and we simply rely, we trust by faith that cheat code on what God, what Jesus did for us on the cross so that God gets all the glory.

And so I ask you today, what will you choose? King Herod lived by his strength for his glory and in the end he was eaten by worms and he died.

On the other hand, verse 24 says, the word of God increased and multiplied. God wins. Herod died while the gospel multiplied.

Are you living like Herod today? Ignorant of God, defiant against him, going your own way. I invite you, turn to Jesus and say, I can do nothing, I deserve nothing, my only hope is what you did on the cross.

[51:35] I need you. And if that's our heart, if that's the posture of our heart when we look at God, that will drive us to our knees in prayer. If God is our strength, we will have to pray.

We can't help but pray. So let's reflect. Do we have that instinct and what does that say about our heart? Is there anything we need to repent of today? Of that pride?

And let us also pray, knowing that when we pray, God listens. He's able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think. We saw that today with the Congo team.

God sent them something. They didn't even know, I don't even know if they asked for it. But God answered. He's a God who's able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think for his glory.

So let's pray. Lord, we admit we can't do anything, but you've given us everything in Jesus and we look to you.

[52 : 37] And I just pray, for this reason, I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. According to the riches of his glory, he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being.

That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge and be filled with all the fullness of God.

And now to him who's able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think according to the power at work within us. To him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen.