

# A Prayer Meeting & A Jail Break

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[ 0 : 00 ] Take your Bibles and turn to Acts chapter 12.! Acts chapter 12, we'll be reading the entire chapter.! It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them.

He had James, the brother of John, put to death with a sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also.

This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each.

Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and centurions stood guard at the entrance.

Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. Quick, get up, he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

[ 1 : 17 ] Then the angel said to him, put on your clothes and sandals, and Peter did so. Wrap your cloak around you and follow me, the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening.

He thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it.

When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter came to himself and said, Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating.

When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door.

When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed, she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, Peter is at the door. You're out of your mind, they told her.

[ 2 : 28 ] When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, it must be his angel. But Peter kept on knocking. And when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.

Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. Tell James and the brothers about this, he said. And then he left for another place.

In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.

Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there a while. He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon. They now joined together and sought an audience with him.

Having secured the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace because they depended on the king's country for their food supply. On the appointed day, Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people.

[ 3 : 41 ] They shouted, This is the voice of a god, not of a man. And immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

But the word of God continued to increase and spread. When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.

Jesus Christ is determined to build his church. I will build my church, he says. And all the forces of evil are united to stop him.

And Acts chapter 12 gives us the next battle in this holy war of the ages. This is what is going on in the world. This is why the world has not come to an end yet.

This is why Christ has not yet returned and brought all men to a final judgment and brought in the eternal age. Why not? Because Jesus is building his church.

[ 4 : 49 ] One disciple at a time, as they're taken out of the kingdom of darkness, by saving them through faith in Jesus Christ, and putting them into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

Jesus is building his church. All opposition rages against him. And yet, the gates of hell could not, and cannot, and are not, able to prevail against him.

Now this passage, this chapter in the battle, holds important lessons for this local church. And I trust for every soldier of Jesus Christ.

Now we begin then with the first point. The battle lines are drawn. Just who's involved in this squirmish, this battle here. Well, chapter 12 shows us the persecution of the church.

And it takes on a new twist. It's not the first persecution, but there's this twist to it. So far, the persecution has come from Jewish religious leaders, hasn't it?

[ 5 : 58 ] They persecuted Christ's church. They said Jesus is a false Messiah, and any followers of him ought to be persecuted and even killed. But now, persecution arises from the civil government of Rome.

Namely, King Herod, who ruled Palestine. This area of the Roman Empire, he had been appointed by Caesar to rule over Palestine.

Now, this King Herod is the Herod whose grandfather, Herod the Great, tried to kill the baby Jesus when he was born, if you remember that.

And he had an uncle who actually did behead John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. And now, this Herod lives up to the bloody family name.

He's a shrewd politician. He's a man pleaser. And he's out to gain the favor of the Jews, the people over whom he's ruling.

[ 7 : 00 ] He knows timing is everything, so he waits to the most fitting time. Well, the time of Passover in Jerusalem was the time when the population of Jerusalem would swell to ten times its usual population.

And so, it's then that he decides to do something to please the Jews. When all this fervor, religious fervor of the Jews, was at its peak, and many were here in the capital city of Jerusalem.

It was then that Herod arrested some of the followers of Jesus in order to persecute them. And he also beheaded one of their leaders, one of Jesus' apostles, one of the inner band of his apostles, James, the brother of John.

Well, Herod couldn't help but see that when he did this, the Jews were pleased. They liked Herod for what he did. And wanting to please them more, he proceeded to take the apostle Peter as well, another key figure in the church at Jerusalem.

Intending to do to him what he did to James once the Passover festival was over. But until then, he held him in his prison. He held Peter in his prison with four teams of four soldiers who took turns guarding him.

[ 8 : 29 ] This would be like a maximum security prison. Peter is bound with chains around his wrist. And on one end of the chain is one soldier.

And on the other end of the chain, this chain is another soldier. And then two soldiers out at the gate. It's as if he were a terrorist or a serial killer or some menace to society.

Such is the seriousness with which Herod persecuted the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. And all to please the Jews, you see. Well, before we pass on, let me just remind you that it's not just politicians who tend to be man pleasers.

Who of you? Who are you pleasing? God or man? You see, this question searches us. Am I a man pleaser or am I a God pleaser?

Whose smiles am I seeking? Whose frowns am I avoiding? King Herod was willing to murder God's dear people to gain the smiles of men.

[ 9 : 46 ] He was willing to break the commandment of God if only it would win him the favor of men. I wonder if there's any commandments of God that you are willing to break just in order to please people.

To have them think well of you. Well, the battle lines are drawn, you see. And on the one side is this powerful King Herod with the sword to kill.

With soldiers and the whole mighty Roman Empire behind him. And on the other side is the church. Some very ordinary people.

Not many wise, not many rich, not many influential after this world sort. Humble followers of Jesus. So it's Herod versus the church of Jesus Christ.

Now to the natural eye, the contest looks lopsided, doesn't it? Herod. Wow. What chance does the church have against the mighty government of Rome?

[ 10 : 54 ] And we might wonder the same today. What chance does the church have against the powers that be? Armed with might and money. With their educational system that just factors God right out of his universe.

And replaces him with time and chance and man. With their courts redefining marriage and morality and murder of the unborn.

What chance does the church have against the mighty governments of this world? When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?

When truth is forever on the scaffold and wrong forever on the throne. Well, things are not always as they appear to be.

I said to the natural eye, it looks like what a lopsided contest. Herod's got this hands down. But verse 5 is very critical to the whole chapter.

[ 12 : 01 ] Notice it says, So Peter was kept in prison, as Herod has his way. But, but, and this makes all the difference.

But the church was earnestly praying to God for him. Now here is our second point. The secret weapon of the church. Earnest prayer.

And it did make all the difference in this chapter, in this battle. That is being fought. Because it lays hold. Prayer lays hold of the almighty. And it brings him down into the field of battle to fight for his church.

But notice it's a secret weapon. Its power is hidden. It's seen by faith to be the powerful thing that it is. And because it's secret, it's discounted.

It's dismissed. It's belittled. It's belittled. As if it's nothing before the governments and soldiers and powers that be. Can I ask you what looks more insignificant and unimpressive than a church prayer meeting?

[ 13 : 15 ] Can you think of anything that looks more insignificant? A group of believers in Jesus gathered to call on his name in prayer.

To the eyes of the natural man, there's not much to look at here, is there? Nothing flashy. Nothing to entertain the flesh. Not lots of people.

And the ones there are not powerful people by the world's standards. In fact, as you listen to them, they even confess just how weak they are.

You know, prayer is a confession of weakness, isn't it? Prayer is the acknowledgement that we don't have what it takes. We don't have what it takes to live.

We don't have what it takes to do battle in this world for Jesus Christ, for holiness, for the gospel, for his truth and righteousness. The self-sufficient don't pray.

[ 14 : 15 ] They don't see their need to pray, do they? But the church, if she knows anything, knows how badly she needs the Lord. Think with me for a moment.

The very things that we want to see done as a church, think how far they exceed our powers.

What is it that we want to see happen in the church of Jesus Christ today? Well, we want to see hearts of stone begin to beat with love for Christ and his word.

You got power to achieve that? No. We are. We're helpless to change one heart. We want to see sinners with no interest in Christ whatsoever seeking first his kingdom and righteousness.

We want to see disciples, young and old alike, trained to obey every commandment that Jesus has given.

[ 15 : 18 ] Matthew 28, 19 and 20. We want to see people living holy and pure lives. We want to see Christ formed in us and in new disciples.

We want to see ourselves and them to hate sin and to love our Savior and to love others as we love ourselves.

You got the power to pull that off? We can't do it for ourselves, much less for the rest. We want to see churches planted in places of darkness where Christ is not known.

We want to see strongholds of Satan pulled down at home and abroad and Jesus lifted up and served as the great King of glory that he is.

We want our faith strengthened, don't we? We want our worship deepened as we just heard this morning. We want our witness empowered. Lord, we want to see churches revived and reformed according to the pattern of the New Testament.

[ 16 : 24 ] And we could sooner create a son than to do any one of these things. And so the church prays, you see, acknowledging our weakness, our inability, but asking our almighty King to come and act on our behalf.

That's what we see happening here in Acts chapter 12. Apart from him, we can do nothing. But with him, we can do all things.

With him, mountains move. Dry bones live. Sinners are saved. The church is built. His enemies defeated. What a weapon.

The weapon of prayer. Are we making use of it as we ought? Throughout this book of Acts, I'm going to remind you every time we see it.

Throughout this book of Acts, God is calling Grace Fellowship Church to prayer. To pray. May we one and all heed his call.

[ 17 : 29 ] It was earnest prayer. And someone said, we will get desperate. Or when we get desperate, our prayers will get earnest.

So are we desperate? Do we recognize we cannot save our children? Do we recognize we cannot see any of our neighbors one to Christ?

We cannot see our missionaries triumphing on the mission field. We can't see anything happening unless God shows up.

Unless the word goes out with the spirit sent from heaven. We're desperate. Like that woman who would not let go of her savior. Have mercy on me, Lord.

My daughter is possessed of a demon. I'm not dealing with you. You're a Gentile. You're not a Jew. She would not let him go. Jacob, wrestling with the Lord to bless me, Lord.

[ 18 : 32 ] Bless me. I will not let you go. Just clinging to the Lord. They were desperate. Therefore, their prayers became earnest. Well, you see, with the church's secret weapon, it indeed is a lopsided contest, isn't it?

With King Herod. With King Herod, it's really Herod versus King Jesus, isn't it? King Jesus coming to the aid of his church in answer to their prayers.

Poor, poor Herod. He doesn't have a chance. He doesn't have a prayer. He doesn't have a chance at this contest. It really is lopsided. But against Herod, exactly like it doesn't look.

It seems lopsided in his favor, but it is lopsided against him. God is within his church. She will not fall. God will help her at break of day.

Psalms 46, 5. So the early church made use of her secret weapon, earnestly praying to God for Peter. That leads us to the third point in our sermon.

[ 19 : 42 ] The Lord's answer from heaven. The Lord's answer. Well, here we are on earth, and all is well in Herod's prison.

His prisoner, Peter, was held secure. But more impressively, his prisoner was asleep. Kids, think of that.

Peter is asleep. Now, he's got a chain around his wrist that's attached to another soldier. And the same chain, another chain here attached to another soldier.

So as he's lying there and his nose itches, it's clank, clank, clank with the chain, you see. All night long, whenever he moves, these chains are clanking and lagging and bouncing into his ribs.

And how is he sleeping? Well, more amazing than that, when you think it's on the night before his execution, he's sleeping.

[ 20 : 47 ] What would you be doing if you knew that in the morning your head would be rolling? Peter's sleeping like a baby. We've seen a new interpretation of what that phrase means with little Gia, and how she can sleep through all kinds of noises.

And Peter was sleeping through all kinds of noises there in the prison. On the night before he was to be executed. He's not wringing his hands in fear.

He's not biting his nail. He's just quietly trusting in his king. You see, his sins were forgiven. Now I lay me down to sleep.

I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. And Peter knew that if when he woke it was to be executed, that the Lord would be the one to receive him.

His sins were forgiven through the blood of Jesus. His conscience was clean. Do you go to bed at night with a clear conscience, knowing that if you don't wake up, you will be with the Lord forever?

[ 22 : 00 ] That's Peter. He's got a conscience clean before God and clean before man, washed in the blood of Jesus. He's ready to live. He's ready to die.

It's nighttime. He sleeps on the pillow of Christ, his blood and righteousness. Well, that's the picture on earth.

But in another place in Jerusalem, there's a prayer meeting and the church is gathered to pray. A good group of them are gathered in the home to pray. And their prayers are rising up and they enter into the ears of the Lord Almighty.

And in response, King Jesus sends one of his angels on a jailbreaking mission to earth. Somehow, I imagine that the angels get excited when they're sent on jailbreaking assignments.

And suddenly, there in Peter's cell, there is a light shining.

[ 23 : 07 ] Now, I sleep lightly. Now, I sleep lightly. And so, if a bright light shines, I probably wake up. But not Peter. He's still sleeping. In fact, he's sleeping so soundly that the angel has to strike him.

He has to hit him on the side and wake him up. Quick, get up, he says. And the chains fell off his wrist. They just fell off. They had held him before.

But now, they fall off. He dresses and follows the angel right out of the prison. Past the first guard. Past the second guard. And now, all that there is between him and freedom is the last gate of this prison that leads on into the city of Jerusalem.

And long before automatic door openers were invented, this gate opened by itself.

I know you don't know Greek, but let me give you the Greek there for open by itself. Automatai. You hear automatic? Automatai. Yes. It was an automatic door opener.

[ 24 : 15 ] As God swung the gate open for Peter to pass through. Without human hands. Knock and the door will be opened.

The church had knocked. And the door was literally opened. And Peter escaped. God wants us to know.

Luke, the author of this book, wants us to know the connection between the church's prayer and the jailbreak. This happened because of the church reaching by prayer to the Lord Almighty who then acted on their behalf.

That's the important lesson in chapter 12. The earnest prayers of the church really are powerful and effective for they engage the arm of the Almighty.

Now, there are other doors that need to be opened in our congregation and in our world. And there are other chains that need to fall off.

[ 25 : 27 ] Oh, then church, pray. Pray to the Almighty. Who swings open doors that no man can shut. And who brings freedom that no devil can bind.

Now, before we go on to the next point, we need to deal with the reality that though Peter escaped, James did not. I think sometimes we run to the rescues and we forget the execution.

So, baby Jesus escapes, doesn't he, from grandfather Herod. But there were a whole lot of children who died at the sword of Roman soldiers.

And yes, Moses escaped in the bulrushes, in the little basket. But there were a lot of Hebrew children that did not escape. And yes, Peter was rescued, but James was not.

How do you deal with that? What do you do with that? We need to face this reality and not back away from it. Sometimes people think the difference was because of the differences in James and Peter.

- [ 26 : 36 ] But not so. Both were believers. Both were apostles closest to Jesus. Both were faithful servants of Christ. Yet one was slaughtered and the other was spared. And that same reality has been repeated countless times in history.

Not all Christians are spared. That's reality. We must hold on to it. We must not put our head in the sand and think it's otherwise. Christians are being beheaded today.

Christians are dying for their faith today. Even while others are being rescued supernaturally. How do we make sense of this?

It's not that one is more holy than the other. It's not that one had more faith than the other. Or one had more people praying than the other. No, the answer ultimately is to be found in God himself.

He's king. He is sovereign. And it's his sovereign will that determines Peter will live and James will die. So we need to remember that when we read the countless promises of the Lord protecting and keeping his saints.

- [ 27 : 44 ] That the Lord surrounds his people. He protects them. He keeps them. From danger. From harm. There are probably over a hundred texts that promise protection.

Now you need those promises. You need to hold on to them. But you don't want to stretch them beyond their meaning. We need to realize that the promises of the Lord's protection and keeping us safe are not absolute promises that we will never die.

Rather, they are promises that we are invincible until it's God's time for us to die. We're invincible. We're indestructible.

We cannot die. No matter how many Herods and soldiers and swords are raised against us until it's God's time. That's God's business to decide.

It's our business to seek with Paul that Christ might be magnified in our bodies. Whether by life or by death. And when we have glorified Christ in our life, it will then be our privilege to glorify him in our death as we saw on the Sunday school hour.

- [ 28 : 53 ] To glorify him whether by death of disease, old age, or martyrdom. By trusting him. By bowing to his will. By praising him to the end. By clinging to him to our last breath.

God was glorified by Peter's deliverance. And he was glorified by James' execution. Well, we see how God was glorified by Peter's deliverance.

What a powerful God. Just to set this man free in this supernatural way. Wow. Wow. That honors God. Well, how did James glorify him in death?

Well, he showed that Jesus Christ is not only worth living for. He's of such value that he's worth dying for. Oh, that glorifies Jesus Christ, you see, in James' death.

So there's a way to glorify God by living and a way to glorify God by dying. And that's God's choice, which it will be for us today. Whether we will do it by the one or the other.

- [ 29 : 58 ] John Calvin says of James glorifying, of the death of the saints. And that not all are protected, but some die. He says, Jesus Christ builds his church in a way that illustrates that death is the way to life and the cross is the way to victory.

And what do we see in church history? But that the blood of the martyrs becomes the seed of the church. And the more you strike them, the more they grow. Like your herbs, ladies.

And the more you strike the herbs, the more their fragrance spreads. And so the more the Christian is struck, the more the glory of Christ fills the earth and more sinners are drawn to the Savior.

So here, the Lord spared Peter while allowing James to be slaughtered. Well, this is the Lord's answer from heaven to rescue Peter.

In answer to the prayers of the saints. We come, fourthly, to the dawning of what happened. It was not readily perceived, this miraculous rescue operation.

[ 31 : 03 ] And the truth dawned. And it dawned on three different groups or people at different stages. Now, this truth of what happened dawned first to Peter, then to the praying church, and then to King Herod at last.

As Peter was following the angel out of the prison, he had no idea that this was really happening. It was so abnormal that Peter thought he was seeing a vision.

I'm dreaming. It seems real, but I must be sleeping. That's how he looked at it. But when they got out and the angel had walked a ways with him, they suddenly left him as fast as he had appeared to him.

And then, verse 11, then Peter came to himself and said, Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating.

I've been awake all this time. I've not been dreaming or seeing visions. I'm no longer in my cell. I'm right here in the middle of Jerusalem. Jerusalem. And when this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.

[ 32 : 17 ] And so now it's time for the church, the praying church, to learn what had happened. Now this mother of Mark, John Mark, is the author of our second gospel.

And his mother, Mary's house, was one of the chief meeting places of the church in Jerusalem. And so while most of the city is sleeping, they are earnestly praying late into the night.

And Peter knocks at the outer entrance and Rhoda, a servant girl, comes to answer it. And Peter's saying, Let me in. Let me in. And she recognizes his voice.

And she's so excited. She just turns and runs back to the house. And there's this outer door. And then she runs back into the house to tell everybody, Peter's at the door.

Peter's at the door. And she leaves him out there in the dark of night to go on knocking. We can't help but smile when we read this passage, can we?

[ 33 : 17 ] There's a sense of humor in all of this. Peter had an easier time getting out of prison than he did getting into the prayer meeting of the church, didn't he?

Doors opened in front of him getting out of prison. He can't get the one door open by knocking and asking. And so he's left knocking. And inside, Rhoda interrupts the prayer meeting.

And Peter's at the door. And they at once broke into the doxology and sang, Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Our prayers have been answered. Well, that's not what my Bible says.

It says, No way. No, that can't be. You're out of your mind. Now, that's the language of unbelief.

It's like when the women came back from the empty tomb of Jesus and they told the apostles that Jesus was risen. They did not believe the women because their words seemed like nonsense.

[ 34 : 18 ] And so here, the church would rather conclude that dear sister Rhoda is out of her mind than to conclude that God had answered their prayer and had actually done what they had been praying long into the night for.



Well, when she kept insisting that it was Peter, they changed their reply. Okay, well, it must not be sister Rhoda's problem. Then it must just be an angel that looks like Peter.

But one thing is sure. It isn't Peter. We know where Peter is. He's in that maximum security prison of Herod. Well, Peter kept knocking until they finally opened the door and saw that it was him.

And they were astonished. In the Greek, that means flabbergasted. They were amazed. They were shocked out of their minds.

And I asked, should we be astonished when God answers our prayers? When he does what we've asked him to do. And it teaches us, doesn't it, that our prayers are often like theirs.

[ 35 : 26 ] Though earnest, shot through with much unbelief. And if we would look at our prayers, we find ourselves often in their shoes, their response to the answer.

Now, in their defense, they certainly did not know what God's will was for Peter. Just days earlier, they had learned that it was God's will for James' head to roll. Could it be that God has now chosen that Peter would follow suit with James?

The other thing in their defense is that this really was an astonishing miracle. They didn't see this sort of thing every day. It was supernatural intrusion into space-time history in ways that men didn't ordinarily see.

Even Peter had a hard time believing this was happening, pinching himself, until finally he saw it happen. No wonder, then, if they had a hard time believing it. But all those things considered, their unbelief seems too apparent to be hidden or to be excused away.

And have we not done the same? We pray and pray. And then we're somewhat startled and surprised that God actually does what we asked him to do. And we have reason to say with that man, Lord, I believe.

[ 36 : 49 ] Help my unbelief. Help my unbelief. Our prayers don't put God in our debt. There's sin of unbelief even mixed in our praying.

Oh, but the blood of Jesus cleanses all that's amiss in our praying. Presents it to the Father. And the hand of the Almighty is engaged on behalf of his church.

Brethren, our prayers don't put God in our debt. We come to a throne of grace. And that means everything we take away from that throne is grace. Undeserved favor of God.

The church was praying earnestly to the King of grace. And he shows that he's able and willing to do immeasurably more than all we could ask or imagine.

According to the power that is at work within us. Our astonishment at his answers often reveals our unbelief. We need more of that simple childlike faith.

[ 37 : 48 ] There was a time when there was drought in the Midwest. In a community held a special community-wide prayer meeting. Just to come together and to pray.

The crops were at a critical point where if they didn't get rain, it could mean a total loss for the year. And as one family was heading out the door, a little girl stopped at the door to take the umbrella with her.

She obviously would be needing it on the way home. For after all, they were going to ask God for rain. I say we need something more of an expectation of answers to our prayer.

We don't always know how God is going to answer. But oh, there ought not to be that wretched unbelief at the bottom of our hearts. Well, if we ask, he probably won't answer.

We keep praying for the same people and nothing's happening. We have cause to think that after 20-some years of prayers, some of our prayers have been answered in this last month.

[ 38 : 53 ] We've shared that. You see, prayer reaches the arm of the Lord who acts on our behalf. Before they call, I will answer.

While they are still speaking, I will hear. They're still praying and the answer is at the door. Such is our God. Now, the last one to find out about what happened is King Herod.

And in the morning, no small commotion among the soldiers as to what became of Peter. Herod makes a thorough search, but did not find him. He cross-examined the guards and then he acted in line with the Roman law that if a guard allowed a prisoner to escape, he was to be given the punishment that the prisoner, the escapee, was to receive.

Now, in this point, at this case, Peter was to be executed. So, therefore, the guards got what Peter had coming and they were executed. That's our fourth point.

The dawning of what happened to Peter, to the praying church, and to Herod. Last, we come to the end of the matter. The end of the matter. I've seen races and contests, I'm sure you have as well, where the eventual winner starts out behind.

[ 40 : 05 ] He may be trailing for eight innings. He may be trailing for three quarters. He may be trailing for seven-eighths of the race.

But to him goes the crown. What does that teach us? It teaches us that we must wait until the end to make any determinations of the winner.

This chapter begins with King Herod flexing his political muscles, killing and persecuting those in the church and threatening to do worse. And it ends with Herod eating with worms and Christ's church continuing to increase and spread.

It seems to us, as we see Herod swaying his mighty power, that he's getting away with murder. He got away with the blood of one of Christ's dear sheep, James.

Though the wheels of justice grind slowly, they grind exceedingly fine, someone has written. And our Lord is bringing justice to victory, and all wrongs will be put right, if not now, then later, and for all eternity.

[ 41 : 12 ] And it happened in this way. The people of Tyre and Sidon were a people to the west and kind of north from King Herod's kingdom. And they had done something to tick off Herod.

And the trouble was they couldn't afford to have Herod mad at them, because they depended on Herod's country for their food supply. So while he was staying in Caesarea, a city nearby, they sought an audience with him to do whatever needed to be done to pacify him, to secure peace.

And, by the way, they're not too proud to flatter him. So the appointed day came with great pomp and circumstance. The people are gathered. There's the dignities. And in comes King Herod himself, dressed in his royal robes.

Josephus said it was woven with silver, such that when the sun shone on it, it sparkled. And there, from his throne, he delivered a speech.

And the frenzied crowd shouted, This is the voice of a God, not of a man. Of course, it was insincere flattery, appealing to his vanity, designed to win his favor.

[ 42 : 19 ] Nothing more. No matter, King Herod inhaled all the praise, as if he were deserving of it.

And immediately the King of Heaven dispatched an angel who struck him down. He was eaten by worms and died. Notice it was not for something he did. He was struck dead for something he didn't do.

It was a great sin of omission. He did not give glory to God. And that's searching me. Folks, you don't have to do something to sin against God.

You can sin grievously against God by not doing things like giving him the praise. Well, God is jealous of his glory.

He says, I will not share my glory with another. Whose glory are you seeking? Your own or God's? Just as gold is tested by a furnace, so man is tested by the praise he receives.

- [ 43 : 29 ] What happens when you're praised? Do you give glory to God? Or do you just suck it all into yourself as if it really was you? Like Herod did. Now there's some irony here even to God's ways as one commentator points out.

A people depending on the King for their food supply flattered him with praise due to God alone. And because he does not give glory to God, he becomes the food supply of worms.

The poet has written all's well that ends well. And that's right, isn't it? And the end of this chapter is quite different from its beginning.

The threatening Herod is now eaten of worms. But, and there's the second great but of the chapter. Verse 24, but the word of God continued to increase and spread despite all that its enemies did to stop it.

You see, they can imprison and kill God's servants, but God's word is not chained. So what have we seen this morning? We've seen that Jesus Christ is building his church.

- [ 44 : 36 ] And notice his church increases and spreads as God's word increases and spreads. Indeed, Edmund Clowney says the growth of the church is the growth of the word. The word of God.

You see, this is the other secret weapon of the church. Prayer, earnest prayer. And the word of God, which is the sword of the spirit. God's word about his son, Jesus Christ.

About his law, about his gospel. About his love and grace. His justice and righteousness. And as the word of God spreads and increases.

The church of Christ increases and spreads. Oh, so do not prematurely judge things. Wait till the end of the matter. Don't despair.

However dark the day becomes for the church of Jesus Christ. Are we entering a new period in the United States of America where government seems to be more and more siding against the church?

- [ 45 : 37 ] Where for over 200 years she has stood with the church? Here's our vision. Here's what we need to see. That King Jesus reigns upon his throne. He's got a plan.

He's determined to build his church and he will get it done. Doesn't matter who opposes him. Even here we see this king too big for his britches. He will not stop the kingdom of Christ from advancing.

Whatever earthly powers he has. Our king reigns. He has weapons and resources to use that we've not even thought about.

Do you know he has worms that are obedient to his voice that accomplish his will. He has angels that act at his beck and call.

He has a people, the saints, who follow him. The faithful, the called, the chosen. Wait for him.

- [ 46 : 36 ] Wait for him. Trust him. We wait and hope for the Lord. He is our help and our shield. In Christians, the will of Christ for all of his soldiers is that they be joined to one of his churches.

That they belong to one of his regiments. He doesn't want us all out doing our own thing for Jesus. He wants to join us into regiments of local churches. Where together we labor, we witness, we spread the word of God.

And we pray earnestly for God to bless it. And we see God acting on behalf of his church. To build that church. To sanctify and bless her.

What are you doing with this church? What are you doing with these two mighty weapons? Though we wage war, we don't wage war like the world wages war. But our enemies are our weapons.

Have divine power. Mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. The scriptures. Give yourself to the word of God. And to earnest prayer.

[ 47 : 49 ] But I must ask you, there's two kingdoms in conflict. And you're either a part of one or the other. Which kingdom are you in this morning? The kingdom of Christ will triumph.

It will spread and its enemies will be destroyed. Which side are you on? There's no neutrality in this war. Jesus says, whoever does not gather with me scatters.

Have you been gathered to the Lord Jesus? Are you one of his disciples? Are you gathering with him? Gathering others to the Lord Jesus? And to his church?

If not, you are scattering. He who is not for me is against me. Which side are you on? Are you on the Lord's side? Oh, he welcomes one and all.

Sinner, rebel, however long you have deserted him. Come home to Jesus this morning. He delights in mercy. He's happy to forgive sinners.

[ 48 : 52 ] This is how gracious our King of grace is. Come to him. We're going to sing as our closing hymn. Number 22 in our grace hymns.

And I like the way it begins with a question. In your grace hymns, number 22, it says, Oh, where are kings and empires now?

Of old that went and came. But Lord, thy church is praying yet. A thousand years the same. So where are those mighty empires and kings now?

Where's the Roman Empire now? Where would King Herod be now? And all his henchmen and all the kingdoms of this earth that came and went.

And what about that poor beleaguered little church of weaklings? Where are they? Oh, they're still praying yet. Two thousand years the same.

[ 49 : 59 ] Let's stand and sing it to God's praise. Number 22. Let's pray. Our Father, we have worshipped you today for your mercy.

And when we think about the church of Jesus Christ, it reminds us that it's built and it's comprised of those who, before, were deserters. And we turned our back on you and went our own way.

Thank you for your wonderful mercy to us to not send us to eternal punishments, but rather to save us by the giving of your Son, to bear our punishment in our stead, to make us right with you.

Oh, what a privilege to be on the Lord's side, to be his soldiers, to be on the winning side, that regardless of who stands against the church, and how many battles are lost, and how many soldiers are lost, and how great the persecution gets, that King Jesus reigns, and his saints will reign with him forever, and even his slaughtered saints will one day be vindicated, and every knee and every tongue will bow, and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to your glory, our Father.

So thank you. Thank you for putting us on the winning side. Bring others this day to Christ, we ask in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen.