

When Man Plays God

Acts 12:18-24 Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. ²² And the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!" ²³ 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. ²⁴ But the word of God increased and multiplied. ²⁵ And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.

❖ Introduction

➤ Verses that are overlooked when it comes to preaching

- Another reason expositional preaching is so important
- You learn to look for God in places you may not have looked
- **We always run to the well known verses in certain books**
 - And we overlook what seems to be a quick story about a King dying...
 - But, there is so much more than meets the eye...
 - Also, it will be interesting to see how the world around Herod viewed his death
 - And how God viewed it

➤ Again, Another set of scriptures about God

- Here we see much of this story devoted to Herod
- So, many may read this and walk away from it knowing some stuff about Herod

➤ But, the true focus of the story is on God

- God is the central focus of what is going on in these verses

➤ Always look for the Lord in the Word

- You should be able to find Him very easily
- And when you do, it opens your eyes up to so many things
- You learn about God's character, and His power
- You learn things that God hates, and things that God loves
- You learn how you are to respond to God, or not to respond
- You learn your worth in the eyes of God
- You learn how God ACTS in history
- You learn also how God Acts on behalf of His children...

➤ Look for God...

- Seek the Lord in His Word.

❖ Recap (Very Important)

➤ The Tale of two Men: Herod and Peter

▪ Peter was a man of God...

- And He is in a tight spot... If you were a betting man...
- **And the bet before you is...**

◆ Who dies first?

- King Herod, or the Apostle Peter...
- Herod has arrested Peter, has soldiers guarding him, has just killed his very close friend
- He has soldiers at his command... Who dies first?

- **Very quickly the tables begin to turn:**
 - God is WITH Peter and goes to great lengths to save him... although it isn't very difficult for God
 - God is Against Herod, and is about to bring about his demise
- **A Little More Info on Herod Agrippa**
 - He was actually very pious in his religion: He loved Judaism
 - And this is likely one of the main sources of his hatred for Christians
 - Along with his love for the praise of man...
 - And doing things to please the Jews
 - He offered sacrifices... was very devout in his public and private life
 - He was very much like a Pharisee
- **Herod Stood up for the Jews**
 - When they wanted to put up a statue to the emperor in Jerusalem
 - In the temple I believe
 - He stood against it, which was something that could have cost him his life
- **His Early Life**
 - As you remember... His father was essentially killed by his grandfather
 - So He was taught in Rome and became friends with the emperors Caligula and Claudius
 - He was able to use these friendships to eventually get him rule over most of Israel
 - He was truly a King of the Jews...
- **The Jewish People Loved him...**
 - I want you to know: He was known by them as a very good ruler... well thought of
 - They viewed him as one who looked out for them...
 - Even in his death they mourned him...
 - And I think they even blame his death on coming from *"a stroke of Roman politics"*
- **His Religious Piety and love by the Jewish People are extremely important to this story...**
 - And especially to applying these things to our own lives and in the life of our church
 - As we see that outward religious piety is not always an indicator of what is in the heart
- **So, here he has arrested a couple big names in the early church movement...**
 - Kills James... Peter escapes, but he escape by the hand of God
 - God has sent an angel to release Peter

❖ **Start With: What is Happening in this Story:**

- **1) Peter's Escape Was A Problem For All involved**
 - ¹⁸ Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. ¹⁹ And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death.
 - **When the day came...**
 - Right after Peter had escaped...
 - **There was no little disturbance among the soldier over what had become of Peter**
 - In the greek this means, *"They were running around like chickens with their heads cut off"*
 - It was nuts in there... you probably would have thought it was an insane asylum
 - People were running around like they were crazy
 - They are wondering what in the world had just happened...
 - **Soldiers are like: He was right here... (This is not a fairy tale)**
 - ◆ I went to sleep and he was chained to me... I woke up, and he is gone...
 - ◆ The guys at the gate have no idea what happened
 - **Herod searched and did not find him**
 - So it looks like Herod himself came down there...

- And He is “as mad as a box of frogs” – can u imagine?
 - Or maybe like I always heard, “as mad as a wet hen”
 - And he is looked around all hot, wondering where Peter may have gone...
 - And Herod can not find him either...
 - **He examined the sentries**
 - So, he starts asking questions...
 - And this is like asking your kids who forgot to flush the toilet
 - Neither of them know... they just know it wasn't them...
 - They are like: Uhhhhh I don't know... Which I am sure made him even more upset...
 - **Ordered that they should be put to death**
 - So, these guards are killed because Herod was arrogant enough
 - To try to stop God, and to kill a man of God
 - These guards paid the price of death because Roman law said
 - If they allow a prisoner to escape, they suffer the fate the criminal would have faced...
 - **So Herod was going to kill Peter, but God saved Peter's life**
 - Hopefully, these guards believed on Jesus before their death...
 - Cause you know Peter witnessed to them while in prison...
 - And this just shows you how important every opportunity to share the gospel is so important
- **2) Herod Is Playing the Greedy and Pompous King**
- **Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there.** ²⁰ 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.
 - **Herod reigned over pretty much all of what we know of Israel then and now.**
 - There were some small differences...
 - **Here we see that he was in Judea, which is higher above sea level... so it says he went down**
 - He actually heads north to what is called caesarea...
 - **The people of Tyre and Sidon are from north of his kingdom...**
 - And they were dependent mainly on the area of Galilee if I understand correctly...
 - For their food..
 - **But, Herod was angry with them for some reason or another...**
 - So, he is withholding food from them...
 - Likely, he is not allowing the people of his country to trade/sell food to these northern cities...
 - **So they make friends with his treasurer Blastus**
 - And they are coming to ask for peace..
- **3) Herod Plays God and Pays for It**
- ²¹ On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. ²² And the people were shouting, “The voice of a god, and not of a man!” ²³ 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.
 - **Here We See Herod is getting a little too big for his britches...**
 - **On an appointed day**
 - We learn from Josephus that they were throwing a big celebration for the birthday of Caesar
 - ◆ Who at this time is Claudius
 - **And I think from what we read from Josephus...**
 - ◆ Josephus was a modern day historian that wrote a history of many things that run
 - ◆ Congruent with the times of the early church...

- **We read from Josephus that on the second day...**
 - ◆ Herod Agrippa seemed to put the focus on himself...
 - ◆ Josephus tells us that he dressed up in silver robes and garments
 - ◆ And stepped out in the early part of the day
 - ◆ Just at the time as the sun would shine from behind him
 - ◆ *Josephus writes: "On the second day of the spectacles he put on a garment made wholly of silver, of a truly wonderful texture, and came into the theater early in the morning. There the silver of his garment, being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays, shone out in a wonderful manner, and was so resplendent as to spread awe over those that looked intently upon him."*
- **After He gives this big oration... a speech...**
 - ◆ The people begin buttering him up...
 - ◆ Luke records them as saying... **"the voice of a god and not of a man"**
- **Josephus... an outside of the Bible source writes this:**
 - ◆ *Presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another, (though not for his good) that he was a god; and they added, "Be thou merciful to us; for although we have hitherto revered thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature." Upon this the king neither rebuked them nor rejected their impious flattery.*

▪ **Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down,**

- **Here we see the same word used that was used in regards to Peter...**
 - ◆ For Herod: An Angel of the Lord Struck him down... and he was eaten by worms
 - ◆ For Peter it was: An angel of the Lord struck him on the side and woke him
- **Again, we see the difference b/w the two men**
 - ◆ Both had angels come to them...
 - ◆ One for life, and the other for death...

▪ **because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.**

• **The Reason:**

- ◆ Herod had taken the glory from God...
 - He did not correct those that said this to him...
- ◆ Sadly he knew better, at least we think he did... if the historians are accurate
- ◆ **Josephus records that he realized He was about to die**
 - He knew it when he felt the pain in his stomach... (And an owl)
 - He realized his friends should not have called him immortal...
- ◆ Over the next five days... Herod would be eaten by worms and die
- **So, Herod Dies... Because God brought it to be...**
 - ◆ And He had no excuse... He could have glorified God that moment
 - ◆ He saw that Peter's escape was miraculous, but He was like Pharaoh with a hard heart

➤ **4) God's Plan Continues**

- **²⁴ But the word of God increased and multiplied. ²⁵ And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.**
- **Here we see God's Word Continue**
 - Herod had intended to bring harm to the church and the Word of God
 - The Word of God, being Jesus, can not be stopped...
- **It Increases and multiplies**
 - His followers continue their work... even under the threat of imminent arrest or death

❖ Observations From The Text We Can Learn From:

➤ 1) Herod's Outward Religious Piety Hid the Darkness of His Heart

- **To the Jews, Herod was probably much like the Pharisees**
 - Jesus described them as white washed tombs...
 - Clean on the outside, but on the inside filled with dead man's bones
- **Herod's Faults**
 - He Arrested the Men of God
 - He Was a Man Pleaser
 - He Punished Others for His Mistake
 - He Was Greedy
 - He Thought Much of Himself
 - He Did Not Give God Glory for His Position and Ability
- **The Darkness of his Heart caused him to be blind in his opposition to God**
 - **1 John 2:11¹¹ But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.**

➤ 2) When You Go Against God, You Will Always Lose

- **Herod Went Against God**
 - Even though He probably thought he was doing right
 - He thought himself to be a righteous man
 - He had made his sacrifices to who he thought was God – (Yet He went against God)
- **Illustration: The running of the bulls...**
 - **By the way... this is nuts...**
 - Even here in this country, people are paying to get chased by bulls with horns...
 - The saying: When you play with the bull, you get the horns...
 - It almost always turns out bad for someone...
 - **One time, my brother and I found this out the hard way...**
 - The cow got dean... My wife got me...
- **What did Herod do? Herod Killed God's Man**
 - Then Herod arrested another of God's men
 - In all of this, God was still in total control
- **The killing of James was a win for God**
 - The arrest of Peter was a win for God
 - The escape from prison, a win for God
- **Man Can Not Frustrate the plans of God...**
 - Rightly said in
 - ◆ **Job 5:12 He frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success.**
- **Satan's driving force is thinking he can win...**
 - I believe Satan thinks he can beat God... In the end an Anti Christ will come...
 - **And He will speak blasphemous things against God...**
 - ◆ He is called the beast in the book of Revelation
 - ◆ And He has a friend called the False Prophet who helps him...
 - ◆ And they go against God... It is crazy...
 - **Here is what the scriptures say about this fight against God**
 - **Revelation 19:19-21 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. ²⁰ And the beast**

was captured, and with it the false prophet... These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.

- **Again, Satan is going to try one more time... He is imprisoned for 1000 years and God lets him out**
 - Revelation 20:9⁹ And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them,
- **When We fight against God**
 - We are living like Satan,... We are following in His footsteps...
 - What I notice from those two battles is that God is not one to be messed with...
- **Herod Lost**
 - **I am not saying he thought he was fighting against God...**
 - ◆ And that is scary right?
 - ◆ To be fighting God and not even know it
 - ◆ Saul was doing this... when he was persecuting the church
 - ◆ Jesus appeared to him and said, why are you persecuting me?
- Herod Lost When God Freed Peter
- Herod Lost When He was Eaten By Worms
- A Very Sad End to the Life of an Earthly King...

➤ 3) We Ought To Give God the Glory in All Things

- **King Nebuchadnezzar's did something very similar to Herod**
 - He looked out on all of his kingdom (that God had given him)
 - ◆ And he said... look at this kingdom that I built by **my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty**
 - ◆ What is amazing about this story... God had warned him in a dream 12 months prior
 - ◆ **Daniel told him this would happened...**
 - And said to the king... break off your sins and practice righteousness
 - **King Nebuchadnezzar's main sin was:**
 - ◆ He didn't know: **that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.**
 - ◆ So He was warned he would be taught this... and so it was
 - After God humbled Daniel's earthly king, the king said
 - ◆ **Daniel 4:37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.**
- **Herod knew about God**
 - I also believe Herod had been told about Jesus...
 - He had been warned of the danger of not trusting in Jesus
 - He was instructed in the ways of the law...
 - It is not like we are talking about a man who had never heard God's Word
 - He was very well versed in the Old Testament...
- **When Herod fails to give God the Glory, It was exponentially bad**
 - Because he knew what God had to say about that
- **I believe there may be a little of Herod in all of us...**
 - Lead me to my next Observation

➤ 4) We May Be More Like Herod Than We Want to Admit

- **Oh, We must be so very careful.**
 - We have been given the Word of God without limit...
 - We have more access to the revelation of God than any people in any time period ever
- **Let us exalt no one on this earth for their talents**

- Without giving praise to God for His gifts...
- No celebrity, or athlete, or singer, or politician, or fighter
 - Has gifts on their own... They have been given by a creative and gracious God
- **We ought not think to highly of our own selves**
 - We are instructed to think more highly of others...
 - This is something that comes through much prayer, bible study and reflection
- **We must not accept the praise of people for what we have done**
 - Rather we should give praise to God for what He has done through us...
- **There is room to praise other people... And to be thankful to others**
 - We are called by God to encourage one another
 - And build one another up...
 - But, we must do it in the Lord
- **I think we often want to please those around us more than God**
 - Very often pleasing men and pleasing God are opposite things...
 - We must be wise to consider the counsel of wise godly people and listen to them
 - While at the same time discerning God's ways
- **When we wait for others to serve us**
 - It is a form of self exaltation
 - As if we deserve to be served by others in God's creation
 - Rather we are instructed to serve others rather than be served
- **When we are careful to praise God for what He is doing in each other**
 - We can put an end to competition in the church
 - We can be happy and joyful for others successes and talents...
- **One Final Thing: I think Herod was very concerned with building his own kingdom**
 - He had this plan of having people subject to him...
 - He did this through power
 - He did this through trying to please men...
- **We must be careful not to spend time building our kingdom**
 - But the kingdom of God... not the kingdom of Hope church... The kingdom of God
- **5) When the World Sees the Natural Way of Life, or Man Made Plans, God is always at Work**
 - Josephus records the event
 - Those surrounding him mourned his death
 - Jewish people think highly of him, and that his death was way to early and due to Roman politics
 - **Yet, behind it all, we see that God was the cause of his death**
 - God had seen enough from Herod.... Had given Herod his last chance
 - Herod did not take it
 - So, God made him die an untimely and horrible death
 - **Listen: Be very careful when you live as if God will not bring about justice**
 - Be very careful when you think you can carry on in life with no mind to God's Word
 - **God sees all things and knows all things...**
 - ◆ Psalm 33:13 The LORD looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man;
 - ◆ Hebrews 4:13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.
 - **God is the Maker and sustainer of all things...**
 - ◆ Hebrews 1 teaches Jesus is the maker and sustainer of all things
 - ◆ Acts 3:15 Jesus is called the Author of Life
 - ◆ In Genesis 2 the Bible teaches us that God breath the breath of Life into man

- ◆ As the author of life... He is also the one that takes life
- **He gives and He takes Away**
 - ◆ In Genesis 3 God passed down the death sentence to all men because of sin
 - ◆ Job 1:21 And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."
- **If Herod thought he could take the praise of God**
 - Without God noticing it, he was deceived
- **If the World Around thought this to be a natural way of Life and Death...**
 - Or some crazy coincidence... Maybe Herod ate the wrong thing
 - Maybe they thought it was a conniving Roman government...
 - In Reality, God was very involved in his death
 - He sent an angel to strike him so that he died, being eaten by worms...
- **6) We Learn A lot About God's Character in These Verses**
 - God watches over His Children
 - At the heart of God, He is jealous for His name and for his glory...
 - He will not put up with weak men stealing what belongs to Him
 - **How did God respond to these kinds of things previously**
 - When men rose against God's anointed one Moses
 - God opened the ground to swallow them
 - **When a mob of young men came out to make fun of God's prophet Elisha**
 - Two female bears came out and killed 42 of them
 - God was not going to allow these young men to scorn the prophet of the living God
 - An attack on God's people is an attack on Him
 - **We all want to have this romantic view of a God that is so loving...**
 - And let me tell you, He is that, and much more loving than you could imagine
 - But He will also break out on those of us that think too highly of ourselves
 - Or those of us that think too lowly of Him...
 - **We must be careful to acknowledge God for who He is...**
 - Before it is too late for us...
- **7) Nothing Can Hinder the Plans of God**
 - Praise God! ²⁴ But the word of God increased and multiplied.
 - **The Word of God**
 - What God wanted said...
 - Or, the story of Jesus... Jesus himself is called the Word of God...
 - **Increased and Multiplied:**
 - Meaning it grew, then from the growth it multiplied...
 - **I think, the sense of what was happening was this:**
 - It grew in the hearts and mind of the individual believers...
 - They loved the word of God, and they grew in their love and knowledge of it...
 - Then, they multiplied it... by taking what had grown in them
 - ◆ And giving it to others... then to more and more who gave it to more and more...
 - Meaning: Exponential growth
 - **The Beginning of the chapter was bleak:**
 - James is dead, Peter is in jail and waiting on his death
 - Then: The WORD OF GOD GREW AND MULTIPLIED
 - Only God can do this people... And God can do it even today