

The Stupidity of Fighting God

Scripture: Acts 12:1-25

Code: 1740

In your Bibles we'd like to ask you to turn to the 12th Chapter of Acts. We are studying the book of Acts together on Lord's Day mornings, finding ourselves thrilled and enriched, as we are learning the history of the expansion of the early church. And what a blessed blessed record it is.

This morning we come to the 12th Chapter and like so many chapters in the Scripture and so many verses, for the preacher there is always the dilemma of how do you approach the passage. I sat down with this passage and I thought, "Well I could preach on prayer from this passage and really just emphasize prayer throughout the passage because prayer is such an important feature. Or I could talk on persecution because persecution is what the chapter is all about and how the early church responded again to another persecution. Really the fifth persecution the early church had known is in Chapter 12. Or we could talk about the power of God and how God operates in the lives of men.

But you know I wasn't satisfied with any of those things and I trust how the Spirit of God leads. I believe in my heart that He leads men in the things that I finally come around to talking about. And I thought to myself, you know the greatest lesson of this chapter, the lesson that kept hitting me, as I read it over and over again, was the stupidity of fighting God. God has made a universe that reflects His nature and is built on His law, and a man is a fool to live against the grain of that nature and that law. For a man to live in war against his creator is stupidity. For a man to live in violation of all the laws of a universe infinitely more vast than that man just doesn't make sense, and yet most men live their whole life long fighting God, God's law, God's plans. And it doesn't make any sense at all.

For centuries men have clenched their fists and gritted their teeth in the face of God, and they do it today. They pit their own will against the will of God. Solomon stated how futile it was in Proverbs 21:30. These are the words that he said: "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord." And what he meant by that was anybody who goes against God is a fool. There's no wisdom in that. That shows you don't understand and there's no wise counsel in that. Nothing can stand against God and yet men foolishly slam their own wills against the will of God like shattering eggs against granite and all you have is the strewn refuse of lives broken against a God that cannot be violated.

Men have always tried to fight God. That isn't anything new. It's not just common to our age, although it is common to our age. For example you can go back to the very beginning and you can find out that God had a standard and Eve decided to fight it and Adam decided to join the fight and all

of us are cursed. God had a standard for sacrifice. Abel obeyed it and Cain fought it and wound up cursed. God had a standard for morality Noah kept it. The rest of the world fought it and drowned. God had a standard for separation from the world and sexual purity. Abraham kept it. Lot fought it, lost his wife and his seed was cursed. God had a standard for spiritual priority. Jacob bought it; Esau fought it and lost the blessing.

You can't fight God. It does not work. You can't find one man in history, one man in the revelation of God that ever fought against God and won. It can't be done. That's only in Genesis that shows us the hopeless stupidity of fighting God. You can go from there on into Exodus and you'll find another that tried to fight God and he's the first of a long line of a certain type of people who tried. Pharaoh, the first of many kings, who tried to fight God and I think the Scripture over and over and over and over talks about kings and rulers fighting God as opposed to individuals. And the reason for that is this: the most powerful of men are unable to fight God and win. It's one thing when a man like myself or like one of us fights God, but when a monarch of the world fights God that means he's amassing all of human power against God and yet he is defeated as well.

And so God has a long history in the Old Testament of all the kings who tried to fight him and what happened to them, and the whole Old Testament is strewn with the wreckage of kings who tried to fight God. Pharaoh tried to fight God. You remember the story. It cost him his honor, his people, his slaves, his army, his son, and his own life. King Arad, the Canaanite fought God and God destroyed his people and destroyed his armies. Sihon King of the Ammorites, Og, Bashan all tried to fight God. They were every one slaughtered and their land possessed by Israel. Balak, King of Moab tried to fight God, plotted against God and lost. The Midianites fought God. God slew all the Midianite males and took the five Midian kings and slew them. The King of Ai fought God was hanged. All the kings in Joshua 9 fought God, they plotted all kinds of clever little devices against God and all five of them were taken and hanged on five trees in a row.

The northern kings in Palestine fought God. Joshua hamstringed all their horses and burned all their chariots and slaughtered them all with a sword. The Bible tells us in Joshua Chapter 12 there were 31 kings who tried to fight God that were slain by Moses and Joshua alone. The greatest men of the world, the monarchs of the world who could amass tried to fight God and they couldn't do it and come out on top.

You go on to the Book of Judges and you find there that the people tried to fight God. You go into I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, I and II Chronicles and you'll find king after king after king who tried to fight God and ends in disaster. In fact if you go and study the northern kingdom every king of the northern kingdom, after it split, every one without an exception tried to fight God. You start with Jeroboam and you go right down, Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, right on down through the whole line ends up with Menahem and every one of them tried to fight God and every one of them ended in a disaster.

The sad tragic story of Jeroboam in I Kings 14 and what happened to him? The promise that because he tried to fight God, not only would he die, but he stepped his foot in the threshold and the minute his foot hit the threshold his son would die on the spot and that's exactly what happened. You can't fight God. It doesn't matter how powerful you are.

In II Kings there's a most important text to relate to this. In II Kings 19 I'm just going to read it to you. You don't need to turn to it, but if you want to jot it down you might. In II Kings 19:35, "It came to pass that night the angel of the Lord went out and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred fourscore and five thousand," 185,000 slaughtered in the night by an angel. "And when they arose early in the morning behold these were all dead bodies. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt in Nineveh. And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword." All of, 185,000 of his people died, and he himself died, Sennacherib, why? Back to verse 22, a very important statement. God says, "Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? And against whom hast thou exalted thy voice and lifted up thine eyes on high even against the Holy God of Israel." Sennacherib fought God and lost. Can't be done.

Ahab tried to fight God. Remember him? The dogs licked up his blood. You can't fight God. In the Southern kingdom as well as the Northern kingdom most of the kings fought God. Rehoboam, Jehoram, Ahaziah, Athaliah, right on down and finally the tragic last one Zedekiah, remember the terrible story of how his eyes were burned out and he was chained and taken off the Babylon. You can't fight God. The greatest in the world have tried it. There have been Napoleons and Hitlers and Stalins and Genghis Khans and everybody else. They have tried to fight God. They have amassed the fortunes and the armies of the world and they cannot fight God and win.

And what makes a man think just a little insignificant puny man on the face of the globe that he is going to stand in defiance of God? That is the most foolish a man can ever conceive of. You who can't even figure out the simplest facts of human existence are going to fight the God who authored the universe. It doesn't make a lot of sense. And since Scripture has been complete men have continued to do it. But you know what they are all dead, withered, decayed and gone and God's alive.

One of the most famous families of kings that ever fought God were the Herods and with that we come to the 12th Chapter of Acts, and we are introduced to the main character Herod. Now about that time Herod, the king, stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church." This is about the time of the famine predicted by Agabus the prophet in verses 27 to 30 in the chapter just preceding. Remember the church in Antioch had sent an offering down to Jerusalem because the famine was going to hit during the time of Claudius Caesar and about the time the famine was coming Herod stretched forth hands to vex, that means to injure, certain of the church. He decided to persecute the

church.

Now who is Herod? Well the first of the Herods, and there a group of them, was Herod the Great. As we shall see modesty ran in their family. Herod the Great was the first one who ruled about 41 B. C. until about the time of the birth of Christ. And he's the one who put out the decree that of the all male children be slaughtered to try to get rid of this would be king who would be a threat to his throne. He was married ten times and he had a lot of children, and his children in and out of the New Testament Scriptures dominate the scene. Herod Agrippa the First, that's the Herod here in Chapter 12, Herod Agrippa the Second, Phillip the Tetrarch, Phillip, there's several characters who came out of the Herodian family who dominate ruler ship in the history of the New Testament in the early years.

Now Herod the Great was a Jew and he had all of the Jewish tradition and background. And, of course, his children were Jews, in fact the female side of the family came from the Macabees. You may not know much about the Macabees because they're not in the Scripture. They appeared really during the 400 years between the Old Testament and the New Testament and they were the great family of patriots that fought against Greek rule in Israel. When Antipas Epiphanies who was a ruler of the Greeks in Israel, and he was Antipas Epiphanie. Epiphanies means great one. He called himself Antipas the great one. People called him Antipas Epiphanies, which meant mad man because he was bazaar and he went into the chapel one day and stuck pork down the throats of the priests and sacrificed a pig on the altar and he did terrible things like that and irritated the Jews. The Macabees, to put it mildly.

The Macabbes came out of the hills against him and they led great revolutions during those 400 years. You'll see the apocrypha sometime in the Catholic Bible. You'll notice there are three books of the Macabees that tell about their history. Well anyway it was a great Jewish family. Well Herod came out of that kind of stock, but he'd been educated in Rome and had been bought off by Rome. He was a Jew only for the sake of expediency. He was anything only for the sake of expediency come to think of it. He was so self-directed and self-styled and self-motivated that all he ever cared about was self-prospering. He had no concept of justice or law or what was right. He only did what was expedient to get himself promoted. And it's an interesting thing as he begins his persecution he doesn't really care about the Christians. He only cares about winning the favor of the Jews because he knows a lot of people have had a lot of trouble trying to rule in Israel for the Romans. It's a tough thing to do that, and if he can keep the tumult down and revolt down he's on his way up the ladder in the Roman society. And he sees this as a stepping-stone and so he wants to gain the favor of the Jews.

So he begins a persecution. He's a despicable character. We see him beginning something in the beginning of Chapter 12; we see him ending everything at the end of the chapter and we'll get to that in a minute. He is the picture that I want you to get of the fool who fights God. If you never get anything else out of this message this morning, I want you to remember Herod, and I think you will by

the time we're done.

Now as we come to Chapter 12 will you notice that this is the last part of the first section of the book of Acts. One man dominates the first twelve chapters of Acts, dear beloved Peter. This is the last chapter of Peter's ministry. We say good-bye to an old friend. He only has a brief appearance in the 15th Chapter. He has to get out of town after the 12th. We don't know where he went. I don't know what he did when he got there, but he ended up dying for the Lord, so he must have been stirring up stuff everywhere he went just like he did in Jerusalem. But Peter fades out and we start with verse 25 of Chapter 12 on the ministry of Paul. And from now on through Chapter 28 Paul dominates the picture.

Now as we come to this also we have another thing. The gospel has spread to Jerusalem, right? Where did it go from there? Judea and Samaria. Where's it supposed to go next? The uttermost part of the earth and that's going to start in Chapter 13. The groundwork has been laid with the salvation of Cornelius, right, the Gentile and with the church at Antioch, the first Gentile Church. Now they're ready for a full scale world wide explosion. What is it that God used before to scatter the church in missions? Persecution. That's exactly what He uses this time. The persecuted church moves out and so Herod starts a persecution, which he thinks is a real great idea to get rid of Christians and all it does is result in the evangelism of the world. But that's always how God works.

So, as we come to verse 1 we find Herod beginning his plot. From here on as we get to Chapter 13 it's Paul and the world. Now let's consider the second, third, and fourth verses as a setting for what we're going to see. Verse 2. He starts to vex the church. The first thing he does he killed James, the brother of John with the sword. And you can imagine what a sad experience that was for that early church. Beloved James and believe me Jesus loved him, didn't He, one of the inner three of James, John, and Peter. They killed him with the sword. He was the son of Zebedee, the brother of John the apostle.

And the sword is interesting because you see to kill somebody with a sword, according to the Talmud, people died of the sword when they had led people after false gods. They had accused then perhaps James of leading the people after false gods, a false god in Christianity, not the true God, and therefore they executed him. And the interesting thing about it, the irony is that it's all political by Herod. That Herod is not anti church or anti Christian in the pure sense, he is just pro Herod and so it's a political thing. He was a typical Roman playboy adventurer. Between his wily nature and his good contacts and his in with Collegial and other mucky mucks in Rome, he was moving up the ladder of society. And he knew if he could pull it off in Judea and do well he'd really be in for a promotion. And he knew the best way to do well in Judea was to succumb to the Jews and the Jews more than anything else were antagonized by the Christians. And so he started in on a slaughter of the Christians. And one writer said that Jerusalem Church was under the gun, so much so they were like a cornered rat waiting to be clubbed. They were trapped by Herod.

James had been slaughtered with the sword. But you know something even in that, just a footnote, one time James and John sent their mother to Jesus. Remember that little deal? They were talking about, they were always arguing about who's going to sit next to Jesus in the kingdom, which was a stupid thing to argue about because it wasn't humble at all. They were always debating about that. So James and John said, "Mom, would you go ask Jesus if we can sit on the right and left?" See, and so his mother, mother's love sons, so mother goes and says, "My boys would like to sit next to you in the kingdom." See. What a terrible embarrassing thing for their poor mother. But anyway Jesus says, "Can you undergo what I'm going to undergo? Can you be baptized with the baptism with which I will be baptized?" Oh why sure, they said. They had no idea. Jesus said, Matthew 20:23, "You will be baptized with the baptism, which I will undergo." And what was it? It's a baptism of persecution and suffering and blood. Here it is. James fulfilled the prophecy. John suffered in a different way. He didn't die. He had to live in exile and punishment. Both of them went through lives of pain for the cause of Christ.

And so it fulfilled the prophecy. Isn't it interesting of all the apostles he picked out to kill he picked the one that Jesus said would suffer. Men think they're so smart. All they're doing is just carrying out the plans of God.

All right verse three. So he killed James, "and because he saw it pleased the Jews," boy he knew he had struck gold. Whee those Jews got excited about that. So he said, I'm going right to the top. "He proceeded further to take Peter also." And of course Peter was the one they would hate the most because he was the one that was the most vocal. He was out shouting the gospel on every corner in town. They tried to put him in jail, but he was like the proverbial bounding ball. They no sooner got the door locked and he was out preaching again. Angels and so forth were always letting him out. He'd been in jail twice before and every time he got near the Sanhedrin they had to listen to his sermon, so they were reluctant to even arrest the guy.

But when Herod saw that it was very pleasing to the Jews to kill one of them, he figured I'll kill the leader and they'll really love me and I'll secure my popularity. See. He could be bought. Isn't that a sick thing. That's the lowest kind of humanity, the man who can be bought for popularity, money, prestige.

"Well then were the days of unleavened bread." It was Passover time. Oh Herod had this thing laid out so beautifully. Passover meant everybody was in town, right? Jews from everywhere, everybody will be here. I'll put this thing on display before the whole Jewish world and they're going to love me. Man will this secure me. But he was smart. He wanted maximum coverage by the populace and he knew they were very busy during the time of the Passover, right? So he didn't want to try to run parallel to the Passover. He figured I'll wait until it's over when everybody's still hanging around, but the deals over with that they've been involved in, I'll move in and the big moment will be mine.

Verse 4. "When he had apprehended him, he arrested Peter. That must have been a terrible trauma for the church, as they came and captured Peter. And he put him in prison. Now that's pretty secure. I mean we assume if you're going to have a prison you have one that can be locked, right? So that's fairly secure. But he was afraid of it and so just to make sure he delivered to him four quaternions of soldiers. A quaternion, as the indication would be, is four. Four times four is sixteen, sixteen guys to watch Peter. The Romans had divided the watches into four watches of three hours each. And so each of these four would take a three-hour period. Two of them were chained to Peter. Two of them were outside the cell. That is maximum security believe me. And he was going to hold him intending after, and your Bible might say Easter, which is an impossible hopeless translation of the word *Pascha*, which means Passover and was stuck in there by some confused Anglo-Saxons in 16 whatever who translated the King James Bible and wanted to use the word Easter because it was an Anglo word. The word Easter comes from the Eostrey, the goddess of love that the pagans worshipped. Unfortunately the pagans worshipped Eostrey at the same season that the Passover was and at the same season the Christians exalted Christ and His resurrection. All those three things happened in the same period of time. And when Christianity got meshed with paganism Easter became the umbrella term for all of it. And so they put the word Easter in here, which is not even there. It's not even a Hebrew word. It's an Anglo-Saxon word. So you can just put in there Passover.

Anyway, so they were going to wait until the Passover was over and then he was really going to pull this big thing off. Peter was a key man, powerful, dynamic, strong, leader of the church. If they could just get the leader they could probably decimate the ranks. And so he had all of his soldiers stationed and everybody was connected to Peter and he was put in a prison. There was no way to be released. He thought he was secure. His plan, notice the end of verse four, "to bring him forth." Those terms have the idea of leading him up, literally. The idea was to bring him up to the tribunal for public trial and public judgment. He was going to put him on display just like Jesus had been put on display by Pilate.

So for the third time Peter was put in prison. And you know something, Herod is just another in a long line of self-deceived power hungry fools who think you can fight God. You can't do it. You know there were some Jews who weren't Christians who had the sense not to fight God overtly. You remember a man by the name of Gamaliel? Gamaliel was a smart man. Gamaliel was brought into counsel about what to do with these Christians who were wreaking havoc in Jerusalem. This is what Gamaliel's advice was Acts 5:38. "And now I say unto you, refrain from these men," leave them alone, "and let them alone," he says, why? "For if this counsel or this work be of men it will come to nothing," right? "If it's of men," he says, "it won't come to anything. But if it be of God you can't overthrow it," listen to this: "lest perhaps you be found even to fight against God." Gamaliel was a smart man. Don't fight God.

You know there were some scribes of the Pharisees party who knew the same thing. Chapter 23:9, listen to this. "There arose a great cry and the scribes who were of the Pharisees party arose." They were really out after Paul. "And they said to them, 'We find no evil in this man, but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God.'" I wouldn't mess with that Paul. You're libel to be fighting God. They're smart.

Remember Eliphaz, the would be friend of Job? He was describing the man who fights God. What a stupid man. Listen to this description. "And he stretches out his hand against God." Does he see the man? See. "And strengthens himself against the almighty." Works out with weights so he can get strong to defeat God. Then he gives this fantastic description. "He runs at God even upon his neck, upon his heavily embossed shield." He points to this man and says here's a man attacking God. He works out, gets real strong, and then he runs and jumps on God's neck and starts beating on his heavily embossed shield. Oh stupid. That is foolish. You know it's foolish to fight God for one classic reason. Are you ready for this? God fights back.

In Jeremiah 21:5 the Bible says this: "I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand, with a strong arm, even in anger and in fury and in great wrath. You know in the Pergamos Church Chapter 2:16 there were some people who were fighting God and God said, "You'd better change and repent or I will come and fight against you with the sword out of my mouth." God fights back. But the fools of the ages go on fighting God. They go on smashing against the granite of God. Foolish!

You say well John, what does that have to do with this chapter? I'm going to show you three reasons in this chapter why a man's a fool to fight God. Three reasons: number one, here we go, because God's power cannot be contested. God's power cannot be contested. You can pit all your strength against the power of God and you aren't even beginning to touch His nature, His person, or to alter His plans. His power cannot be contested.

Here's ol' Herod. He says, "I will take care of those Christians. I'll put them in my jail." He gave it everything he had. Strong walls, big bars, iron gates, soldiers, chains, prison cell, authority, everything. Put him in there. But Herod trying to capture Peter was like trying to capture a rainbow in a net. Couldn't be done. It couldn't be done.

Let's look at the scene, verse 5. This is most exciting. "Peter, therefore, was kept in prison. Well how long is he going to be kept? Until the Passover is over. Well a church, this was tough on them, but prayer was made without ceasing by the church unto God for him. They all started praying. Oh Lord Peter's in prison, they started to pray. I like that, don't you? The first thing anybody ought to do when something comes along is to begin to pray. They didn't organize a prison relief committee. They started praying. They knew that the source of power was prayer and so they began to pray. And I mean they really prayed. I love what it says, "But prayer was made without ceasing." That

word just doesn't mean without ceasing nearly as much as it means intensely. It's the word *ektenoce*. It comes in the form of *ektenace* and so forth and what it means it's a medical term and it has to do with stretching a muscle to its limit. It means total effort. They were totally lost in prayer.

Here's a good illustration. The word is used of Jesus when He prayed in the garden in anguish and great drops, as it were, great drops of blood fell from Him. That's the same term. They prayed literally in total anguish of soul. They put out a total maximum effort in prayer. That's what they did. Totally absorbed, lost in prayer. And it continued day in and night and day in and night. And I'll tell you something this is a glorious truth for us to remember. James said, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscles of omnipotence and that's true. So they prayed. That total effort word, sometime I'll do a little word study on that with you, but it's used three, three things in the Bible. They're so important in the New Testament. *Ektenes* love, I Peter 4:8. We're to stretch our love and love people totally. In other words we're to reach as far as we can to the capacity of the limits of our ability and love people. Then it's used in Acts 26:7 to speak of *ektenes* service. We're not supposed to serve Christ half-baked or half-hearted. We're supposed to serve Him with total effort. Literally agonizingly we're to serve Him. We're to serve Him until we work up a spiritual sweat.

The third way that it's used is here in prayer. The Christian is to serve intensely in love, intensely in service and intensely in prayer. So they stretched out. They were on the rack. They were really praying. Well after the Bible says, "You have not because you," what? "Ask not." And God responds to your much asking. They didn't say God you know Peter's problem. See you in a couple of days and see what you do about it. They agonized in prayer.

Verse 6. I like this. Old' Herod thinks he's got everything secure. And they're just praying. A bunch of little old' Christians in there haven't got any government power, can't do anything, don't have the key to the jail, can't do anything but prayer. "And when Herod would have brought him forth," Herod says, "Time to go get him." Go get Peter. Hmm, that's good. The same night now Herod's getting ready to execute Peter in the morning, big public deal, dramatics, kill Peter. "So, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers bound with two chains and the keepers before the door kept the prison." They're the four guys, two outside, two inside, chained to Peter.

Now it's tough to sleep on a jail floor. I don't know if I could sleep there anyway, and to have two guys chained to you, can you imagine just the pain of trying to go to sleep with two guys hooked to you? I mean you know how it is in the morning when you get up and all the kids jump in bed. It's just, that's it, right?

So here he was on the jail floor with all these people chained to him. And I'll tell you something else. It would be a little tough to sleep the night before your execution, but he's asleep. Sound asleep. You say he was just dozing. No. The angel came in and had to poke him to wake him up. In fact the angel arrived in a minute and lit the whole place up and that never even budged him. The angel started poking him, "Get up, get up." He got all the way out of the jail before he knew what he was doing. He thought he was dreaming the whole thing. He was really out.

Say how in the world, in a society that spends two million three hundred and eighty thousand dollars annually on sleeping pills how does he do it? We spend three million two hundred thousand dollars on tranquilizers this guy the night before his execution is sound asleep chained to two soldiers in a dingy jail. Well somebody once said, "If you can keep your cool while all others are losing theirs you just don't understand the situation." But that is not true of Peter. He knew what was going on, but you know what else he knew? This is good. John 21:18, Remember when Jesus restored Peter? Peter had blown it so many times and then the Lord said, "Go to Galilee Peter and stay up in that mountain."

Peter went up in the mountain for a few days and said, "I don't know what I'm doing in this mountain." He had itchy feet. He just couldn't stand anywhere. He was just going all the time. So he says, "I'm going fishing. I don't know about this win the world thing. I don't know what's going on. I haven't seen the Lord in a few days, I'm going fishing." And he was the leader, so everybody said, "Okay Peter, we're going too," and they all marched down and went fishing. So the Lord rerouted all the fish in the Sea of Galilee. Came in the morning he says, "Have you caught anything?" That's sticking the knife in. So he says, "No." He says, "Try the other side of the boat." Which your first reaction would be, what does he think we've been doing, going on the left side all night? Do the fish know which is right and left?

But anyway he pulled in so many and they came to the shore and Christ had created breakfast, instant breakfast, and they sat down and ate, and then Peter sat down to eat with Jesus and Jesus began to talk to Peter, remember? He said, "If you love me, feed my sheep. Do you really love me, do you really love me, do you really love me? And he restored him and then He told him this: Verse 18. "Peter when you were young you went where you wanted, did what you wanted to do. When you get old you'll stretch forth your hands and another shall gird you and carry you where you wouldn't go. This he said signifying by what death he should glorify God." He said, "Peter you're going to die when you get old." You know why Peter was sleeping in this jail? He wasn't old. He had nothing to fear. You know one great security a believer has is promise, isn't it? It's promise. You know why you don't need to lose sleep when you can't meet your needs? Because, "My God shall," what? "Supply all your needs." That's promise.

The second feature that put Peter to sleep was past performance. He'd been in jail before and it wasn't any big deal. He just got to witness and soon got out. He went to sleep because he knew two

things: future promise and past performance. You know why I trust God? 'Cause of what He said He's going to do, and what He's already done. Right? That's it. So if He's done what He's done in the past and will do what He's going to do in the future I'm not going to worry about the present. It'll soon become the past and it's nearly the future now. So I'm secure in His past performance as well as His future promise. So Peter went to sleep. What's to worry about? He's young. Peter also said in I Peter 5:7 "Casting all your care on him, for He cares for you."

Well, Herod had everything rolling but there was something about to happen that Herod didn't figure on. Verse 7, "Behold an angel of the Lord came in on him and a light shown in the prison." Angels and light are often associated. You know what? Because they spend their time in the glory of the presence of God and they radiate it when they come out of His presence. They were just like, remember when Moses went up and saw the glory of God on the mount in Exodus? He came down and it was all over him. Well angels who have been in the presence of God radiate that glory. Celestial beings and the glow of God go together, so this angel comes in the prison and it lights up like the Psalm said, "It flamed with light." And that didn't even wake Peter up. He was so out nothing happened.

And so the Bible says this: "And he smote Peter on the side." He whacked him a good one. That's the same word used down later in verse 23 of the chapter and that really was a smiting. It's the same term but had opposite effects and we'll see that in a little while. So the angel really gave him a good shot and raised him up. He poked him and then he kind of helped him up, the angel. "Get up Peter. Arise quickly. Get up," he said and the chains fell off from his hands. And meanwhile these two guys had been given a divine anesthetic. They're out. Chains are over. He's up and he's standing there and he doesn't know what's gone. Bleary, groggy, still asleep, he's standing there in his sleep. You say, "How do you know that?" I'll show you in a minute.

God is freeing him and so in verse 8, the angel, notice there's no hassle, there's no struggle, there's no hurry. The commentary I was reading this week, Barkley, said we don't need to see a miracle here. This was just a clever plot in Peter's escape, which of course is ridiculous. There was no struggle, the angel just came, the guys were asleep, the chains fell off, the angel said to him, "Now get your clothes on and put on your shoes." He didn't just say let's run. He just says, you know they used to wear an inner garment that hung very loosely and in the daytime they'd cinch it up with a belt. At night they'd loosen the belt and let it hang loose.

So he says, "Get your belt, pull it together, get your sandals on, Peter we're leaving." And he said unto him, "Cast your garment," the word garment is cloak or mantle "about you and follow me." Get your jacket, throw it on, and follow me. Oh Peter's there in a stupor. He's got any idea what's going on, see. And all of a sudden he's on his feet. He's got his sandals on and he's there and he's probably kind of bleary eyed and he says, "Follow me." And off they go down the dark corridors of the prison. And he went out and here's the good part and he followed him. Here's ol' Peter following

the angel in his sleep, "And he knew not that it was true, which was done by the angel." He thought he saw a vision. It very likely he'd been dreaming about getting out anyway and just figured that this was part of the dream. And he's just marching down the halls there all groggy and blurry eyed thinking it's just a dream.

Well they go on down, verse 10, "When they were past the first and second guard," already the other two guards are knocked out in the cell, here goes guard one, guard two, that takes care of the four that were on guard, "Came to the iron gate." Boy they're going to have to have something here. What are they going to do? Well, "They came to the iron gate, which leads into the city." Apparently the prison was elevated. There were maybe according to the Bezan text nine steps down into the street of the city. And so they came to this big giant gate, and the Bible simply says, "Beautiful, which opened to them of its own accord." Just swung open there's the ol' angel and Peter walking right out the main gate. All the guards are out and they're gone. And I like this. "And they went out and passed on through one street." Just went a block away, "And immediately the angel departed from him." The angel had done his job.

Hebrews 1:14 says, "Angels are ministering spirits sent to minister to the saints." This angel had done his job with Peter, got him out of there, just turned him loose in the middle of the street. Here he is in the middle of the night, in the middle of the street, half awake, doesn't really know what's going on, and it reminds us of Acts 5 when they were in prison before. Remember? And the authority said you got get them and bring them and they went down and they said we've got something to tell you. The prison is locked, the gates are secure, the locks are on, the guards are there, however the prisoners are gone. And then the next guy runs in and says, well you're not going to believe this but they're back in the temple preaching again. So he had been released again by an angel that time, so this was just another angelic opportunity. No prison can hold the servant of God that God wants out. Believe that.

Well Peter finally wakes up and comes to his senses in verse 11, "And when Peter was come to himself," in other words he stood out there in the middle of the street and he started to think and he says, "Now I know of a surety," this is not dream, "That the Lord hath sent His angel and delivered me out of the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jews." He knew the Jews wanted him dead and he knew about Herod's plot. He says, "The Lord has done it, here I am, it's happened, it's not a dream. Well there he is in the middle of the street. He knows he is a marked man. He has no idea how long those soldiers are going to be out. He knows if they come to and look for him and can't find him they're going to come running and when they see the gate stand wide open they're going to start running down the street and he doesn't have much time. What does a guy do? What's your first move in a deal like this? Go to your friends, verse 12.

"And when he had considered," I love that word considered *soonhedon*, *soon* means together and *hedon* means to see. To consider means to see together. It means to take all the parts of something

and see it together in perspective. So Peter thought the whole thing through, all of the spiritual ramifications, physical ramifications. What should he do? The first reaction would be get out of town, right? Go and let God worry about confirming something to the believers. Just bail out. But he began to look at it, see it in perspective, he said no, I've got to go their house where the believers are gathered to pray and I've got to tell them. Why? Those Christians were into persecution. It was hot in Jerusalem.

You know what they needed more than anything? They needed two things: they needed to know that God was still in control, didn't they, because Herod was really moving hot. Secondly they needed to know that God answered prayer. They had been praying for Peter for a few days now and they hadn't seen anything happen. And if the church under persecution didn't have confidence that God was still in control and that prayer was still being answered they would really be shaky and so Peter knew in his mind, I've got to go to see 'em, because I've got to confirm how powerful God is and that God answers prayer.

And so he fires out, verse 12, "And he comes to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying." The church always met in homes. Apparently this woman Mary, there are many Mary's in the Bible, this one, the mother of John Mark. She one was wealthy. She had a maid, Rhoda, she had household servants, it was large enough to have prayer meetings and gatherings. Her son, whose surname was Mark, is the same Mark who wrote the gospel of Mark and he was a companion and buddy of Peter and got most of his information for the gospel of Mark from Peter. Of course, the Holy Spirit gave it to him, but it comes out of experiences that he had in the time of Peter. And so here's the house of Mark. Incidentally it's the same John Mark that accompanies Saul and Barnabas on the missionary journey at first and is finally sent home and later restored.

But anyway, this is the house. So Peter says I've got to go and tell 'em. So here he is going through the streets. He is a marked man. He hasn't got much time. He knows he's got to get out of town. It's too hot, and so he comes in, verse 13, and knocks at the door of the gate. Every house was kind of like a big square or rectangle around the patio and they had an exterior door that was on the outside and then you would go in and there were interior doors going into various apartments. So he's banging on this outside door, in the middle of the street, in the middle of the night, he's a marked man. Everybody knows, everybody in town knew Peter. I don't think there was a guy in Jerusalem who wouldn't know Peter, right? And so there he is and he's, "Open the door, open the door." He's looking up and down banging on the door. So the little maid, maid means the doorkeeper, came to hearken named Rhoda. The name means Rose. So here comes Rose to the door. And she says, in effect probably, who is it, what's going on because she gets an answer. And when she knew Peter's voice, how do you think they knew his voice? He talked to them all the time, taught 'em, preached.

You know I can call up somebody on the phone and say, "Hello!" And they'll say, "Hi John." 'Cause they're familiar with hearing my voice and they knew Peter's voice. "She heard his voice and she opened not the gate for gladness." She got so excited she forgot to let him in and she ran back in and told how Peter stood before the gate. And what are they doing in there having an all night prayer meeting for Peter and she says your prayers are answered. He's at the gate. And meanwhile Peter's going, "Where did she go? Open the gate." Standing in the middle of the road and she's in there having a debate. And you know this is what's so humorous here is because they're so typically like the Christians today who pray with all the zeal in the world but none of the faith to believe. You know you hear a guy give his testimony and you know the Lord answered my prayer. Well shock! But anyway verse 15, "They said unto her, You're crazy." Now isn't that unbelievable. Oh God get Peter out of Jail. Peter's here! Oh you're crazy. He's in jail. I'm glad God answers the prayer of zeal as well as the prayer of faith. I think sometimes mine are mostly zeal and not always faith.

And so they wouldn't believe her, "But she constantly affirmed it was even so." It is Peter; it is Peter. And probably some said, "Did you see him? Did you see him?" Well she only recognized his voice. They said, "Well it's his angel." And the Jews had a common tradition. They believed that every Jew had an angel of his own, a guardian angel, and that angel could materialize in the form and the face of that person. And so perhaps this was just his angel. We'll concede. Rhoda you're a good kid. You haven't really been untrustworthy in the past. It's his angel probably. Well she just kept it up. It says in 16, "Peter continued knocking." Meanwhile in the street Peter is knocking. And finally, and he can't knock too loud because he doesn't want to wake up everybody in the neighborhood. So finally they all come to the door. They know something's going on. "And when they had opened the door they saw him and they were astonished," which shows you how much faith they really had.

Well you can imagine when all this gang arrive at the door what a tumult. Oh Peter and so he goes shoo shoo. Look at verse 17, "But he beckoning unto him with the hand to hold their peace." And the word beckoning has the word *catah*, in the Greek, which means down. He was doing this no shoo shoo, because they were all at the door, oh it's Peter, it's Peter, and he's going no the neighbors will hear and everything. So he tells them to be quiet. "He declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison." Wasn't that a testimony meeting? They all sat down and they said, what happened. Tell us. And he starts telling them about it.

Well I was there and all of a sudden the chains fell off and I stood up and the angel was there and all this and gave them the tremendous story. You say why did he do that? I just told you why he did that. The Spirit of God led him to do that. You know what those people needed to know? They needed to know that, one, God still answered prayer, didn't they? I mean they were under the gun. And when you're in a time of pressure and you begin to pray and you pray for a few days and you don't see anything happen what's the tendency you have in your mind? To doubt God isn't it. Sure. And God said, I want to confirm that I'm there. And so God took the time to send Peter there, even though it was treacherous 'cause He knew that those people needed to know He answered prayer.

Two, those people were scared of Herod. You know why? Herod had killed James and God had not spared James' life, had He? And maybe they were thinking oh, this is the first of the apostles ever killed. Stephen was killed; he wasn't an apostle, was he? The apostles have been killed and that little church was probably thinking Herod has so much power that even the apostles can't resist him. And James was a young man and they were scared of Herod. And Peter came to that house to show them look who's in control, people. God's in control. Let me tell you how He got me out of that little ol' measly prison of Herod's. Then he says, "You go and tell this to James." You know he wanted to make sure there were about 30 or 40 messengers who would deliver the message to James. We saw him, he was there, believe it. "And to all the brethren. And he departed and went to another place." The Bible doesn't tell us where he went. Luke didn't record it. You know why? Because this book would have been available to be read very soon after it was written and Luke may have feared if the authorities knew where Peter had gone they might have gone there and gotten him, so he leaves it out.

We don't know where he went, but wherever he went we know what he did just because the kind of person he was. He wound up stirring up trouble everywhere and wound up getting crucified upside down. But nevertheless he departed and went another place and that's the fade out of Peter. Good-bye Peter, that's him. Brief appearance in Chapter 15, but that's all. He goes off. The Catholic Church said he went to Rome and started the church there. There's no evidence for that whatsoever. That's just pure conjecture.

Verse 18. "Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter." Can you imagine? Two guys woke up and there the chains are and Peter is gone, the gates are open, and everybody know that if a soldier loses a prisoner he pays with his life. Remember the Philippian jailer in Acts 16? He was going to kill himself wasn't he when the prisoners got away, 'cause he knew he'd have to pay with his life. Well, somebody had to pay and Herod was mad. Ooh his whole popularity contest went down the drain.

Verse 19. "When Herod had sought for him," they sent a search party out find Peter all over that place, couldn't find him. "Found him not. He examined the keepers and commanded they should be put to death," execution for the soldiers and they were slaughtered. And Herod learned you can't fight God why? Because his power can't be contested. Herod amassed all the power that he had and it was nothing, it was a drip against the ocean of God's power. Then old Herod tucked his tail between his legs and crawled off in a huff to Caesarea. Verse 19. "And he went down from Judea to Caesarea and abode." The word abode in the Greek *deiterabens* simply means to rub away. You know what he did? He went to Caesarea to blow some time that's all. He was really upset. His little plan went down the drain. So he went down to soak up a little sun and self pity in Caesarea down by the sea.

Well he had learned a lesson, but he hadn't learned it very well. He learned that you can't fight God because His power can't be contested, but he thought he'd try again. And that brings us to the second point and I just want to show it to you very briefly. A man is a fool to fight God because God's punishment can't be avoided. God's power can't be contested and His punishment can't be avoided. Watch what happens in verse 20. "And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon." Now Tyre and Sidon are two free cities north of Caesarea. Caesarea is right on the Mediterranean Sea west of Jerusalem. And up north in Syria, north of Galilee is Tyre and Sidon, coastal cities, free cities, technically belonging to Syria. They were the neighbors of Galilee and of Herod's territory, so there was a necessary interdependence.

Tyre and Sidon were very good ports that the Jews could use for export and import. But Tyre and Sidon were mostly dependent upon Galilee, much more than the reverse. And Herod was mad. Maybe he didn't like the duties or the tariffs that Tyre and Sidon were charging him for his movement of materials. So he got mad at them and he cut off all supplies and they were hurting badly. Herod was very angry and when Tyre and Sidon couldn't get the food they needed and the supply they needed from Galilee and Israel they were in trouble. And so they knew they needed to make a treaty with Herod.

"So they came with one accord to him." They all came to Herod. They said we want to make peace. "Having made Blastus, the king's chamberlain their friend." They had to get an intermediary. Blastus, the king's chamberlain, or treasurer, was going to be the intermediary. They had bought him off or they had done something to get his friendship and they said make peace with Herod. We've got to have peace or we're going to be in trouble. Why? It said at the end of the verse, "they desired peace because their country was nourished by the king's country." And so they said they wanted to have peace.

So they decided they'd have a big deal and they'd come down and pay their homage to Herod and they'd do whatever they needed to do to make peace so they could get their supplies back. Oh Herod ate this up. Anybody bowing at his feet he absolutely loved. And to see two powerful free cities bowing and scraping at his feet was so great he decided to make a big occasion out of it. He decided that the whole world would know how super he was, how great he was, and watch these two nations bow at his feet, these two cities.

So he declared a great day. Verse 21, "And upon a set day Herod arrayed in royal apparel sat upon his throne and made an oration unto them," them referring to the Tyre and Sidon people who had come down to make peace. Now this is good. Josephus, the historian, records this whole incident and adds some interesting detail, which I'll add to the narrative. It was very likely under the pretense of a celebration for Claudius Caesar, because to throw a party for Herod, for Herod to throw a party for himself was really ridiculous. Nobody would come. And it wasn't official enough to bring the big wheels, so he threw a big thing for Caesar. Caesar had just returned safely from Britain. Hail Caesar

his great work in Britain. Not only that some historians tell us it was Caesar's birthday.

So he thought, I'll put on a big shindig day one will be for Caesar, but day two will be for me. And so he used Caesar as a pretense to get the officials there and he had all the mucky mucks and the leaders all arriving in Caesarea and they met in the amphitheatre that had been built by his grandfather, Herod the Great. I was in that place where that is, big massive amphitheatre and there he had his big throne and all the people were sitting around cheer upon cheer cheering people and he comes out splendid in his royal apparel and Josephus said he had a silver robe on, made of silver. And the sun just came and splattered off of that thing and he just looked resplendid in all of his glory, which is just what he wanted. He was going to get out there and sit in his throne and the cheering people, and he was going to watch all the Tyre and Sidon people bowing down to him and _____ and eat up every second of it. This was day one, the tip of the hat to Caesar, day two my day, see. So he got day one out of the way and the second day comes in his silver robe and he's the glory of man at its pinnacle. All the Rome pomp and circumstances there, the soldiers, the whole shot, everything is set up and all the little mealy mouth favor seekers are sitting in the chairs cheering, crowds lining everywhere.

Verse 22. They heard him give his little speech. And the people gave a shout." They're all screaming and yelling and saying, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." All just buttering up ol' Herod, see. Oh he's a god, see. Boy he loved every minute of it. But you know what? God shares His glory with nobody. Watch the next verse.

"And immediately an angel of the Lord smote him." Same word as what happened to Peter with opposite effects. Woke Peter up, puts him to sleep for good. Why did he smite him? "Because he gave not God" what, "the glory." God shares His glory with no body. Listen if you fight for your own glory people you're in trouble. Any man is be he monarch or be he pauper. And he was eaten of worms and died. When that angel touched Herod God filled him with the worms of death. Josephus says they ate him for five days before he died. That's a sickening debasing terrible way to die. Just when a man thinks he has exalted himself to the place of glory God crushes him to a place of humility. And I say to you, you can't fight God because his power can't be contested and His punishment can't be avoided. Don't fight God. He was painfully smitten. The pompous fool done in by worms.

The third reason a man is a fool to fight God lastly in those last two verses. Because God's purposes can't be frustrated. You know men have tried to destroy God, they have tried to burn Bibles, they've tried to wreck the church, they've tried everything and you know what, God's work just keeps going on. Look at verse 24, just love it. After all of this the word of God did what? Grew and did what? Multiplied. Isn't that terrific? For a man to think he's going to stop the purpose of God is like taking a whiskbroom down to the beach and telling somebody you're going to sweep back the tide. Doesn't work. Can't be done.

God's purposes cannot be frustrated. Fact, verse 24. Example Paul and Barnabas, verse 25, returned from Jerusalem to Antioch when they had fulfilled their ministry took with them John, whose surname was Mark. What's that saying? That's just saying that Herod tried to stop it but all it did was spread it. Persecution shot the church out all over the world. People I say this to you, listen to me, a man is a fool to fight God because His power can't be contested, his punishment can't be avoided, and His purpose can't be frustrated. Why do you want to be against Him? Why not be with Him? Why not be on His side? I'd rather have God fight for me and with me than against me. Wouldn't you?

Listen to what Jesus said: Jesus said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." When God sets His purpose in motion you can't frustrate His purpose. It can't be done. Oh in Psalms listen to these verses: Here's a classic definition of all these kings we've talked about. "The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord." And you know what the Lord's response is? Verse 4, "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh." It's stupid to fight God. Doesn't make sense. Isaiah said this: "Woe unto him that strives with his Maker," Isaiah 49:5. Man's a fool to fight God.

And I say to you this morning if you've never come to Jesus Christ and accepted Him as Savior you're fighting God's only provision for your salvation and forgiveness of sin. If you've never come to Jesus Christ you're not giving God the glory, and if you're not giving God the glory then you're fighting against His glory. And if you've not become a part of His church, a part of His body, you're fighting against His purpose and all three are losers. You say, well I'm not fighting God. Jesus said, "He that is not with me is what? Against me." You say, "Well I'd like to get on God's side. How do I do it? Jesus said, "No man come unto the Father but by Me." You come to Christ, receive Him by faith and you're on God's side. You cease being an enemy. Are you ready for this? And you become a son, a son of God on whom He pours out all His love.

Let's pray. Father we thank you for the opportunity this morning again to consider these truths. Lord I pray that there would be no one in this place who having seen that they're fighting God will continue to fight. I pray, Lord, that you would speak to the hearts of those who have not come to Christ and show them that they are fighting you, that they're living in sin against the Holy God. That those who are desiring to do their own will are pitting their own glory against yours. That those who design to go their own way and do the things they desire to do are fighting your purposes and it's a losing battle. Father, may everyone in this place be on your side, the victory side. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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