

“Herod Is Judged”
(Acts 12:20-25)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we saw the Lord call for a famine on the whole Roman Empire as an act of judgment for their sins.
 - a. Though the Lord raises up nations to judge other nations, that doesn't mean they're innocent.
 - (i) The Lord used Rome to judge Greece, but now used a famine to judge Rome.
 - (ii) Certainly the Jews were also to blame.
 - (a) They had rejected John the Baptist, Jesus, and His disciples.
 - (b) Jesus predicted there would be famines before AD 70 came.
 - (c) Here was one of them.
 - b. But while the Lord was bringing this secretly on the Romans and Jews, He wasn't on His people.
 - (i) He sent prophets from Jerusalem to Antioch.
 - (ii) One of them – Agabus – predicted a great famine by the Spirit.
 - (iii) The Christians listened and prepared, so that when the famine came, they would be able to minister to their Jewish brethren.
 - (a) Again, since they shared in Israel's spiritual blessings, it was only fitting that they share their material blessings with them.
 - (b) After the famine came and the gift was prepared, they sent it to Jerusalem by Saul and Barnabas to give to the elders to distribute to the needy.
2. The famine, however, didn't stop the Romans from persecuting the church.
 - a. Though the Jewish persecution ceased for a while – the famine might have been one factor that caused this – Herod began one of his own – since the rich aren't as troubled by famine as the poor.
 - (i) First, he began to arrest and mistreat some of the brethren.
 - (ii) Then he had James beheaded.
 - (iii) Finally, when he saw how this pleased the Jews, he arrested Peter and then waited until the Passover to bring him out to the people for execution.
 - b. But the church fervently prayed for Peter.
 - (i) On the night before Peter was to be brought out, an angel delivered Peter from such a situation that there could be no doubt that it was from God.
 - (ii) Though the church had a hard time accepting that their prayer had been answered – a lack of faith – they finally did and glorified God.
 - (iii) Peter then went off to a safe place while Herod searched for him without success.
 - (iv) The Lord had not only delivered His people from the famine, He also delivered Peter from the sword.

B. Preview.

1. The same, however, would not be true for Herod.
 - a. If Herod had repented and turned to Jesus Christ for mercy, like Saul, he could have been saved: but because of the evil of his heart, he didn't.
 - b. Now the day of God's reckoning was at hand:
 - (i) Herod had committed many sins not the least of which were putting James to death, arresting Peter and intending to put him to death.
 - (ii) God has His day to settle accounts.
 - (a) For those who trust in Jesus, that account has been settled through Christ.
 - (b) But for those who don't, God will settle it *with them*.
 - (c) Sometimes He begins that judgment in this life – begins since there is no end to it.
 - (d) Sometimes, He waits until they die, such as the Rich Man in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.
 - (e) But whether sooner or later, He will settle the score when once the cup of His wrath is full.
2. This morning, we see here how Herod finished filling up God's cup for him: through his pride.
 - a. Solomon tells us, "Pride *goes* before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling" (Prov. 16:18).
 - (i) Pride was Satan's undoing (Eze. 28:17).
 - (ii) It was why the Lord removed Nebuchadnezzar's reason for seven seasons (Dan. 4:30-31).
 - (iii) God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6).
 - (iv) He especially judges those who will take His glory for themselves
 - b. This morning, we'll see four things regarding God's judgment on Herod:
 - (i) The circumstances of that judgment.
 - (ii) The sin for which he was judged.
 - (iii) The judgment itself.
 - (iv) The results of that judgment.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, what were the circumstances surrounding God's judgment of Herod? It had to do with a conflict that had developed in Tyre and Sidon. "Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one accord they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king's country" (v. 20).
 1. The men of Tyre and Sidon offended Herod.
 - a. At that time, they were under Rome's authority.
 - (i) Herod, a governor of Rome, had jurisdiction.
 - (ii) They were guilty of something he believed warranted punishment.
 - b. In response to this offense, he had either cut off, or was threatening to cut off, their food supply:
 - (i) Tyre and Sidon were coastal port and trading centers.
 - (ii) As such, they relied on the produce of Palestine to provide their needs.

2. And so now they came to him in order to make peace.
 - a. Beginning with Blastus, the king's chamberlain – Herod's high official in charge of his personal living quarters and affairs – they won him over, perhaps with bribes and flattery, that they might gain a hearing with Herod.
 - b. With him in their corner, they then went to Herod.
- B. It was then, second, that we see the sin of Herod. “On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and *began* delivering an address to them. The people kept crying out, ‘The voice of a god and not of a man!’ (vv. 21-22).
1. Their plan worked, and Herod granted them an audience.
 - a. On the appointed day, he appeared in his royal apparel and sat on his judgment seat/throne.
 - b. After he sat down, Herod made a speech, probably one that was favorable to them, since they responded as they did.
 - c. Since it was in Herod's power to let them live or die, they were thankful for the mercy he was showing them.
 2. But here's where Herod went wrong.
 - a. When he finished speaking, the people began crying out, “The voice of a god and not of a man.”
 - b. The glory of his presence, the clothing he wore, the mercy he showed – which was undoubtedly to glorify himself – moved the people to cry out as they did:
 - (i) This is more than a man; this is a divine being.
 - (ii) Or it may have been that they wanted to flatter Herod in an attempt to strengthen the peace they had now gained.
 - c. What they did was wrong, but how Herod reacted was worse.
 - (i) Instead of giving glory to God for his authority and ability to speak as he did, he received their praise, as though it was true.
 - (ii) He should have stopped them, rebuked them, rejected their praise, and given it all to God.
 - (iii) Instead, he owned it, perhaps believing he was a god and should be treated in this way. Herod's sin was that of pride.
- C. But third, we now see the judgment God poured out on Herod: Herod began to decay like a corpse while still living. “And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died” (v. 23).
1. The Lord has said and will not repent of it, “I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images” (Isa. 42:8).
 - a. Who was it that gave Herod the ability to speak in this way in the first place? Who was it that deserved the glory?
 - b. The Lord brought this occasion about as judgment on Herod for what he had done to James and Peter, as well as other crimes.
 - c. He placed this stumbling-block in front of Herod knowing how sinfully he would handle it, giving the Lord further basis to judge him.
 2. We read about this judgment in *The Works of Josephus*, which, although not an inspired account is an historical record of the events of that day.

- a. “Now when Agrippa had reigned three years over all Judea, he came to the city Cesarea, which was formerly called Strato's Tower; and there he exhibited shows in honor of Caesar, upon his being informed that there was a certain festival celebrated to make vows for his safety. At which festival a great multitude was gotten together of the principal persons, and such as were of dignity through his province. On the second day of which shows he put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theater early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him; and 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 did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery. But as he presently afterward looked up, he saw an owl sitting on a certain rope over his head, and immediately understood that this bird was the messenger of ill tidings, as it had once been the messenger of good tidings to him; and fell into the deepest sorrow. A severe pain also arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner. He therefore looked upon his friends, and said, ‘I, whom you call a god, am commanded presently to depart this life; while Providence thus reproves the lying words you just now said to me; and I, who was by you called immortal, am immediately to be hurried away by death. But I am bound to accept of what Providence allots, as it pleases God; for we have by no means lived ill, but in a splendid and happy manner.’ When he said this, his pain was become violent. Accordingly he was carried into the palace, and the rumor went abroad every where, that he would certainly die in a little time. But the multitude presently sat in sackcloth, with their wives and children, after the law of their country, and besought God for the king’s recovery. All places were also full of mourning and lamentation. Now the king rested in a high chamber, and as he saw them below lying prostrate on the ground, he could not himself forbear weeping. And when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life, being in the fifty-fourth year of his age, and in the seventh year of his reign . . .” (Antiquities 19).
- b. An angel was sent to free Peter from prison; but one was also dispatched by God to execute His judgment on Herod.
- (i) Angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation.
 - (ii) But they are also destroying angels sent out to minister God’s wrath on the guilty.
 - (iii) Notice that he struck Herod at the very moment he committed that sin, so that the sin and the punishment would be connected – that Herod might know why he was judged.
 - (iv) He was further humbled by the way the Lord judged him:
 - (a) He was eaten by worms.
 - (b) This could mean – more gruesomely – that Herod’s bowels became rotten, dead, and were eaten with worms, even as a corpse in a grave is.
 - (c) God is able to humble the proud, even in ways that will tarnish their glory forever.

- (d) This stands as a warning to us never to take the credit for the things we do, especially for our salvation – as though our own filthy works merited that – but to give all the glory to God.

D. Finally, we see the results of this judgment with regard to the kingdom of God.

1. First, Herod's death advanced the kingdom: "But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied" (v. 24). It caused the church to grow in two ways:
 - a. It further proved that Christianity was true.
 - (i) It was well known that Herod had persecuted the church (James, Peter).
 - (ii) The way that he died showed that this was at the hand of God.
 - (a) Not only did he persecute Christ's church, he also took glory away from God.
 - (b) The God of the Christians would be the prime suspect in Herod's, especially when you consider how he died.
 - (c) Remember how the death of Ananias and Sapphira caused the church to grow.
 - (d) Certainly, this would have struck fear in the hearts of those who saw and heard what happened to Herod.
 - b. And with Herod out of the way, the church was free to continue to advance.
 - (i) The Jews had apparently stopped persecuting the church for a time.
 - (ii) Now with Herod out of the way, it could continue its work, infused with a greater desire to advance the kingdom.
 - (a) Out of fear: as Herod's death was a reminder of what the Lord is able and willing to do on occasion to immediately judge the sins of men.
 - (b) Out of love: for removing this persecutor and freeing them to do the work.
2. Second, with Herod dead, Barnabas and Saul could return to Antioch. "And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with *them* John, who was also called Mark" (v. 25).
 - a. When they had finished delivering the collection to Jerusalem, they returned to Antioch.
 - (i) It's interesting that they appear to have been in Jerusalem during the persecution. We don't read about it, but this seems to be the case from Acts 12:1.
 - (ii) If so, they would have been aware of it and would have at least been praying for the Lord's merciful outcome.
 - (iii) Now that it was over, they could return to Antioch in safety.
 - b. They decided to take John Mark with them as well – who would later go on the first missionary journey with them.
 - (i) It's quite possible that they stayed at John Mark's house, since Barnabas and Mark were cousins (Col. 4:10).
 - (ii) Now that they were returning, they decided to take Mark with them, most likely to prepare and use him in the ministry.
 - (iii) And so the Lord was preparing the way for the first missionary journey, which we'll see more of this evening. Amen.