

The Lord Jesus vs. King Herod

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 July 2021

Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] Acts chapter 11 verse 27 today. I covered, we're going to read those a few verses at the end of chapter 11 again and we'll go to chapter 12 verse 25. Acts 11 27 to 12 25. I'll give you a moment to find your place in scripture. It's okay. It's totally fine.

I'm sure Jesus had a lot more distractions so this is, it's totally fine for kids to be in the service and we want kids to be here because that means the parents are here and we want the kids to be here too because we want them to see their parents worship the Lord, see other adults worship the Lord and come to know the Lord Jesus themselves. Acts 11 27 to 12 25. Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's word. Heavenly Father, we confess that it is easy to be carried away by the course of this world with its own priorities, desires, fears.

But Lord, we want to be a people because we are citizens of another kingdom because we have a heavenly citizenship. We want to be governed by a different charter.

We want to be governed by you, our King, our Lord. So we ask that you will now address us as your subjects, your people.

We in us from our dependencies in this world, from sinful fleshly attachments, and make us dependent wholly on you.

[2 : 47] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Acts 11, starting in verse 27. Now in these days, prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch, and one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world.

This took place in the days of Claudius. So the disciples determined everyone according to his ability to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

About that time, Herod the King laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James, the brother of John, with the sword. And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.

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

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

[4 : 05] And centuries before the door were guarding the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, Get up quickly.

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

And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city.

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

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

[5 : 23] Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. They said to her, You are out of your mind. But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, It is his angel.

But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of prison.

And he said, Tell all these things to James and to the brothers. Then he departed and went to another place. Now, when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter.

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

Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. And they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food.

[6 : 33] On an appointed day, Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. And the people were shouting, The voice of a God and not of a man.

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.

But the word of God increased and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.

This is God's holy and authoritative word. We live in a culture where matters of spirituality and religion have been relegated to the realm of kind of private, personal opinion, rather than the public realm of facts.

So evangelism and proselytization is almost kind of a bad word in our culture. They say, Don't try to impose your beliefs on others. Not only that, but because we live in a world where our enemy, Satan, is at large, there's a general opposition, spiritual opposition, to proclaiming the name of Jesus.

[7 : 54] People are free to share their opinions about a wide range of controversial topics, but speaking of Jesus is considered offensive, intrusive.

For these reasons and more, there is a social and relational risk whenever we share the good news of Jesus Christ. And sometimes there is more than mere risk.

Sometimes there's actual cost. You can lose friends. Your relationship with your neighbor can grow cold.

In the book of Acts, we see a gradual escalation of the costs that the early Christians had to bear for bearing witness to Jesus. In Acts chapter 4, verse 21, they were arrested, and then they were tried, but with a warning, they were released.

In Acts chapter 5, verse 40, they were again arrested and imprisoned, put on trial, charged not to speak in Jesus' name, but this time they were beaten and then released. And then in Acts 7, we had the first martyr.

[9 : 03] Stephen was killed for bearing witness to Jesus' name. And then now here in Acts 12, 1 to 2, the stake is raised even higher, where the punishment, at least with Stephen's death, the martyrdom was caused by mob violence, right?

They did have the approval of the Jewish authorities, but the Jewish authorities didn't have the legal, political right to mete out, you know, capital sentences. And so it was a mob action, really.

But here now, person with the authority to execute people, King Herod, is now persecuting Christians, and he kills Apostle James.

So in the book of Acts, we're seeing that increasingly, it's increasingly costly to be a follower and witness of Jesus.

And that raises a question for us, when the cost is high, how do we find the courage to bear witness to Jesus? This passage teaches us that we can proclaim the gospel with confidence because God is with us and His word is unstoppable.

[10 : 09] There's a reason why I read the passage starting in chapter 11, verse 27, instead of beginning in chapter 12, because this whole passage has a roughly chiasmic structure.

And by chiasm, I mean that it has matching elements on each side, each half of the passage, beginning and the end match, and then the next two elements close to each other match until it gets to the middle element, which stands by itself.

And so you can kind of see that in the slide that I prepared for you. So at first, God speaks through His prophet and provides for His people. In the end, at the end of the passage, Herod does not speak for God and does not provide for His people.

You see that Herod kills James, but then at the end, Herod ends up killing his own men. Herod puts Peter in prison, but then the Lord rescues Peter from prison. The church prays for Peter, and then church is praying for Peter again, and then those two accounts of the church in prayer kind of envelops the miraculous deliverance of Peter from prison.

I'm going to roughly follow that structure, but I'll also use this outline to talk first of how, why we can have confidence to proclaim the gospel, and that's because God has the power to provide for us, and second, because God has the power of life and death, and thirdly, because God has the power to deliver us.

[11 : 28] And that's why we can have the confidence to proclaim the gospel. So let's first look at how God provides for us. I'll be brief on my comments here because I already preached on this last week, 11, 27 to 30, but we see God speak through His prophet Agabus to warn them ahead of time of a coming famine so that the church can be prepared and they can have food, so that the church in Antioch, which is better off, is alerted to this famine that's coming, and then they're able to send relief to the poorer believers in Jerusalem.

Now, in contrast, look at what happens in verse 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.

The Herod here that's in view is not Herod I, popularly known as Herod the Great, who is responsible for the massacre of the innocents at the time of Jesus' birth. That's accounted in Matthew 2.

And he's also not Herod Antipas, who was the son of Herod the Great. He was the Tetrarch of Galilee. The Herod that you encounter through most of the Gospels is Herod Antipas.

But this Herod is a different Herod. It's confusing why they're all named Herod. But this one is Herod Agrippa I. He is the grandson of Herod the Great and a nephew of Herod Antipas.

[12 : 54] This Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. We don't know why, but there was some kind of dispute, a conflict, between the citizens of Tyre and Sidon and Herod.

And because of this loss of peace between them, Herod was angry, and it seems like he deprived the people of Tyre and Sidon of the food they usually depended on from his country.

So he cut off probably some trade supplies or maybe he's imposing an embargo on them. They're not getting the food that they need. And so this is in sharp contrast from the way God provides for his people that we saw earlier in chapter 11.

God, who knows all the things, past, present, and future, prepares his people for even the famine that's coming in the future so that they might have food, they might never know, lack.

But here, Herod, in chapter 12, verse 20, is not only blissfully unaware of the famine that is coming, even now, before the famine, he intentionally deprives his people, people who are dependent on him, of food.

[14 : 00] The resulting scarcity of food was unbearable for the people of Tyre and Sidon, and so they send a delegation to persuade Herod. And they recruit Blastus, Herod's chamberlain.

Chamberlain is the person who is in charge of the king's bedchambers, so that means he is not only trusted, really, Herod probably trusted him with his life, but also he had direct access to Herod.

So he's a really good person to have as your advocate, and so they get him on their side, and in order to try to plead with Herod to provide food for them again. It seems that their appeal successfully mollified Herod because it says in verse 21 that on an appointed day, Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them.

So it seems like given the crowd's flattering response to him as he's speaking, it was likely that he was making a public announcement of the settlement that they had reached. And he was likely exalting himself as this generous patron of the people of Tyre and Sidon.

And the people in the audience knew that Herod was a petulant ruler, self-absorbed, and easily offended, and so they indulged him with flattery in verse 22.

[15 : 17] They were shouting, the voice of a God and not of a man. This too forms a contrast with what we saw the account in chapter 11, 27 to 30, their prophet Agabus.

It says in chapter 11, verse 28, spoke by the Spirit. Later, in chapter 21, verse 11 again, it says, Agabus says, thus says the Holy Spirit.

Agabus is a true prophet who faithfully relays only what God really says. He does not speak for himself.

He is a servant. He is a humble herald, a mere messenger of what God has to say. Herod, on the other hand, is a claim to be something more than that.

People flatter his ego by saying that his voice is divine, not human. And at this point, Herod should have been alarmed by such blasphemous praise.

[16 : 18] He should have vigorously denied the claim and insisted that he is only a man. If you remember in Acts 10, when Peter first encounters Cornelius, remember, Cornelius falls to the ground and starts worshiping Peter because he doesn't know any better.

And then Peter stops Cornelius and says, Stand up, I too am a man. That's what Herod should have said. He should have hushed the crowd saying, I am only a man, but Herod doesn't do that.

God's swift judgment of Herod shows us that in fact, Herod relished the crowd's blasphemous praise. He is basking in his undeserved glory.

And in the heart, in the heart of hearts of all every sinner, there's a desire to be God, to receive, steal his glory for themselves.

And so it says in verse 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. Eaten by worms is a phrase, it's not a technical, medical description, but it does seem to suggest some kind of parasite that kills him.

[17 : 35] And this account is actually, there's a fascinating corroboration of this account in another ancient source. There's a Roman Jewish historian named Josephus who was a contemporary of Herod Agrippa.

And he writes in his historical work, Antiquities, of this account. And this is what he says in that account. He says, Herod put on a garment made wholly of silver, of a truly wonderful texture, and came into 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.

Presently, his flatterers cried out that 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, but shortly afterward, a severe pain arose in his belly, striking with the most violent intensity.

[18 : 45] 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. It's a fascinating, corroborating historical account. Herod, despite his pretensions, despite his receiving that glory that he didn't deserve, is not God, and so God puts him in his place by reminding him of his mortality.

English pastor, 20th century English Pastor John Stott comments on this passage this way. He says, Tyrants may be permitted for a time to boast and bluster, oppressing the church and hindering the spread of the gospel, but they will not last.

In the end, their empire will be broken and their pride abased. And isn't this true? Throughout history, many have tried to persecute the church, many have tried to stamp out the gospel, but the gospel, still proclaimed all throughout the world.

The church still stands all throughout the world while those empires have fallen. This is, and even though the people of Tyre and Sidon had hoped that Herod would be able to provide for them, he actually ends up not being able to provide for them despite the plans that he had made to do so because he dies prematurely.

[20 : 12] This is precisely why in Psalm 146, we are enjoined not to put our trust in earthly rulers. It says, Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man in whom there is no salvation.

When his breath departs, he returns to the earth. On that very day, his plans perish. Herod made plans to supply food for Tyre and Sidon, but his plans were all for naught because his plans perished the very day he died when his breath departed.

Where is your trust? Is your trust in mortal man or in the immortal God? We can easily look to people with power in the world to provide for us, to look out for us, to protect us.

We can look to our bosses or employers. We can look to politicians. We can look to our spouses even. Some people even look to celebrities who appear to represent us.

But our trust must ultimately rest on God, not on man. Why do we act like orphans begging for food from strangers when we have a Heavenly Father who provides for us?

[21 : 47] If your ultimate trust is in man, you will always be insecure. You will find yourself flattering people whom you perceive to have power over you because you want to be on their good side.

You will be unable ultimately to stand up to them with God's truth because you are their servant, not God's servant. Herod was a king and therefore he did have a lot of power and authority.

But the Christians back then understood that even Herod could do nothing outside of God's authority and power. God's servant and so they were able to proclaim the gospel with confidence because their ultimate trust was in God and not in man.

And let's look at another contrast, chapter 12, verses 1 to 3 and chapter 12, verses 18 to 19. In verses 1 to 3, Herod kills Apostle James, the one of the twelve, the brother of John.

He says, About that time, Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James, the brother of John, with the sword and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.

[23 : 00] This was during the days of unleavened bread. Killed with the sword likely means that James was beheaded, which was the customary way of executing with the sword at the time. And when Herod saw that this pleased the Jews, he was eager to please his constituency and so during the high Jewish feast of Passover, the feast of unleavened bread, he persecutes the church as a way of doing a favor to the Jews.

The death of Apostle James shows us that God at times not only allows his saints to suffer, he also at times allows them to be killed. The ultimate suffering.

But this is not because God is powerless to deliver his saints. As God's dramatic rescue of Peter shows, he is more than capable of rescuing anyone he wishes.

The question is not whether or not he is able, the question is whether he is willing. It may, in fact, be God's will that we suffer and die for him.

Revelation chapter 6, verse 11, tells us that the end of the world as we know it will not come until, quote, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

[24 : 23] God has ordained that a specific, although to us unknown, number of Christian martyrs must be filled up before the arrival of the new heavens and the earth. That's why the second century Christian minister, Tertullian, apologist Tertullian, put it this way, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

This is because God has called us Christians to follow in the footsteps of Jesus because our Savior, our King, our Lord died for us.

He suffered and died. 1 Peter chapter 2, verse 21, for to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in His steps.

It's not a coincidence that James is killed during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Remember, who else was killed during the Feast of Unleavened Bread? Jesus was killed during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Jesus, the ultimate Passover lamb, who died for our sake to receive the penalty for our sins and to grant us full remission of our sins so that we who deserved eternal death and condemnation might be saved because of Him and have eternal life.

[25 : 51] Jesus died on Passover, during the Feast of the Passover. And then He was raised from the dead to prove that His sacrifice on our behalf had been accepted by the Father, that our sins had been atoned for, that we have resurrection life guaranteed to us in Jesus.

And if you want to participate in that victorious resurrection, you must go through the path of suffering, through the path of discipleship. Every Christian thereafter is called by God to follow in the footsteps of a suffering Savior.

remember what Jesus said, if anyone would come after me, he must pick up his cross. He must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.

Jesus didn't say, take up his scepter and follow me. He said, take up his cross and follow me. the cross entails suffering.

The cross entails submission, utter, total submission to the will of our Master. The cross entails death to self, to our selfish ambitions, to our dreams, selfish desires.

[27 : 11] It requires death to self. Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts it this way in his book, The Cost of Discipleship, the cross is laid on every Christian.

The first Christ suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ.

As we embark upon discipleship, we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death. We give over our lives to death. Thus it begins, the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise God-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ.

When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. This is why Christians need not fear death.

Why? Because we have already died. We have already died with Christ. We have died to ourselves and our desires. We have died to the world.

[28 : 14] We are completely resigned to the will of our Master. I heard recently that during one of the oral exams for pastoral candidates within our denomination, they had the chance to test a candidate from India who was trying to be ordained throughout the denomination.

And one of the questions is a question about baptism. What is the meaning? What is the significance of baptism? What is that for you? And usually, you know, you get various theological answers, biblical answers.

Well, it means you participate in Christ's death and resurrection. In resurrection, you are cleansed from your sins. You have new life. But this man talked about all of that, but then he also talked about the actual experience of getting baptized where he's from in India.

So if you want to be baptized in India, the whole way to the river, you're getting mocked, sped on, and you're being stoned, literally, by your neighbors, sometimes, by your friends and family members.

That's the only way you get baptized and say, I'm a Christian in that place. That's what that means for him.

[29 : 30] It means, I die to the world. I die to myself. I am now Christ's. Christ's. In the U.S., we enjoy great religious freedom.

So unlike many parts of the world where Christians are regularly persecuted and killed for their faith, we do not need to risk our lives to bear witness to Jesus. But some of us still fear other forms of persecution, don't we?

we fear the death of our popularity. We fear the death of our reputation.

We fear the death of our careers. We fear the death of our friendships. We fear the repercussions of proclaiming Jesus which is increasingly looked at with suspicion and even contempt.

But we must not forget that when Christ calls a man he bids him come and die. And it's when we recognize that we have died with Christ, it's only then we can proclaim the gospel with confidence.

[30 : 47] In some ways, I think the lack of persecution has hurt the church in the West. When Christianity is dominant in a society, some people become Christians in name only.

for the sake of comfort and acceptance, respectability. And then people start to aspire to Christian leadership for the sake of power and prestige. But under persecution, there is nothing romantic about being a Christian.

Nothing glitzy about being a Christian leader or a preacher or a pastor. Look at how James and Peter are treated. The leaders of the church are singled out to be slaughtered.

And amidst the fire of that kind of persecution, only true Christians answer the call of Christ to come and die. And it's when we recognize that God holds the power of life and death that we can proclaim the gospel with confidence.

Please read verses 18 to 19 with me. It says, Now when they came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries in order that they should be put to death.

[32 : 02] Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there. Herod originally wanted to put Peter to death with great fanfare, with his Jewish constituency watching.

But God thwarted his plans by rescuing Peter from prison and now Herod is so angry that he orders the guards that were supposed to watch Peter, he orders them to be put to death.

Herod, as we saw earlier, is not only able to save himself from death, but also vengefully kills his own men. James' death, Peter's deliverance, and Herod's death all show us that power of life and death ultimately lies with the Lord.

No one can take your life one second sooner than God has ordained it. No one. And no one can extend your life one second longer than God has ordained it.

Every one of our days written in the book, we can proclaim the gospel with confidence without fear of what people can do to us if we recognize that God holds the power of life and death.

[33 : 30] Third, God has the power to deliver us. This is the middle section. In verse 17, well, in verse 4, we saw how Herod put Peter in prison, and then verse 17 forms a contrast with that.

It says, the Lord had brought him out of prison. Peter recounts how the Lord Jesus brought him out of prison. And so once again, this structure highlights the powerlessness of Herod on the one hand and the power of God on the other.

How do we access such power from God? The dramatic account of Peter's deliverance is bracketed by the account of church praying.

Look at verse 5. So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. That verse is matched by verse 12. When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

The church that has power is a church that prays. Our power comes not from ourselves, but from God, which is why the only way we access power is through prayer.

[34 : 43] Whatever threats we face in this world, whether it's disease or death or the devil himself, we must remember that God has the power to deliver us.

Only then can we proclaim the gospel with confidence. I mean, it's almost comical the way Peter is delivered. Look at verse 12, verse 6, sorry.

I mean, the odds are totally stacked against Peter's deliverance, right? I mean, if there were betting odds for whether he was going to get freed or not, nobody would be betting for him getting freed from this situation. Peter was sleeping.

He's sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, two D soldiers, and centuries before the door were guarding the prison. So he's chained literally to the soldiers and he's sleeping between them and there are more soldiers guarding the gates.

Even if they fell asleep, he would not be able to get away. I mean, that's the situation. But this is no obstacle to God Almighty and so he sends an angel to wake up Peter and of course, the guards have no idea what's happening and then the chains by themselves fall off Peter's hands.

[35 : 56] He walks out of the prison. The guards are nowhere to be seen and then when Peter gets out, the door, the iron gate that you need the key to open, opens by itself.

And in this passage, the word angel is repeated again and again five times because it's trying to show us God's abiding presence with Peter in the midst of his confinement.

An angel is God's emissary, messenger of God, a representative of God. The presence of the angel represents the presence of God himself with Peter and that's why a light shines in the cells when the angel appears.

The God of light in whom there is no darkness at all is present with Peter. Even in the darkness of prison, there is light because God is with him. Even in the loneliness of prison, Peter has company because God is with him.

Even in the midst of seemingly certain doom, Peter has hope because God is with him. Brothers and sisters, do you really know, believe, that God is with you?

[37 : 14] I know some of you are experiencing great darkness, loss, grief, sadness, depression, anxiety.

In the midst of your crippling anxiety, do you know that God is with you? Don't ever believe the devil's lie that God has abandoned you.

In the midst of your stressful work or your stressful relationships, do you know that God is with you? In the midst of your grief, suffering, God is with you and you are not alone.

Even in hopeless situations like Peter's, when everyone around you has given up on you, God has not given up on you.

God is with you. And he is able to deliver you. It appears that even the faithful church wasn't expecting to see Peter delivered, at least not in such a sudden and miraculous manner because when the servant girl named Rhoda answers the door and sees Peter, she is so overjoyed that she forgets to open the door, runs back to report to the rest of the group.

[38 : 45] Peter is at the gate. And they're not like, oh yes, God has answered our prayer. No, that's not their response. Their response is, you're out of your mind. You're crazy.

Peter is scheduled to be trial tomorrow. It seems God answers sometimes even faithless prayers.

They think that it is his angel. So this is, there's a lot of debate around what this might mean, but the Bible in numerous places attests to the existence of guardian angels.

Psalm 91, 11 says, for he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. Matthew 18, 10, Jesus says, so see that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.

Similarly, Hebrews 1, 14 says that angels are all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation. Angels do our bidding.

[39 : 53] They serve us. They minister to us. They guard us. God uses them in that way. And because of this, some believers back then believed that an angel could take on the appearance of the person that he is guarding, almost like a stunt double.

And so they're like, well, you must be seeing Peter's angel. It can't be Peter. But Peter, it was. He was very much alive.

And he shows up and he comes in to show these believers that God is able to do far more abundantly than all that they ask for. No matter how dire your circumstances are, no matter how impossible or remote your deliverance might seem in whatever you're suffering, whatever you're going through, trust in God for whom nothing is impossible.

To summarize what we've talked about so far, we can proclaim the gospel with confidence because God has the power to provide for us, because God has the power of life and death, and because God has the power to deliver us.

That's why we can proclaim the gospel with confidence because God is with us and His word is unstoppable. That's what we see at the end of this passage in verses 24 to 25.

[41 : 13] Herod's blasphemous words came to an abrupt halt in verse 23. But then in verse 24, he says in contrast, but the word of God, the word of the true God, increased and multiplied.

No matter how many Christians are killed, no matter how many Christian villages and Bibles are burned, no matter how many Christians are vilified, how much the faith is trampled upon by the world and the culture, the word of God is unstoppable.

It will endure forever. It will outlast every single person in the world. And this truth should give us the confidence to proclaim the gospel in spite of opposition.

And in this passage, we also see the gospel baton being passed on from one generation to the next. First, we see the appointment of the elders. The leadership of the twelve apostles in the Jerusalem church appears to have passed on to the leadership of the elders because in chapter 11, verse 30, it says that the church in Antioch sent the collection that they made on behalf of the saints in Jerusalem to the elders, not to the apostles.

Second, Apostle James is killed and the apostle Peter leaves Jerusalem, which is significant in the history of the church, to flee from those who are trying to kill him so that he can minister elsewhere.

[42 : 48] And then we see other people rising up to take their place. Peter says in verse 17, tell these things to James and to the brothers and then he departed and went to another place.

This James is obviously not the James that we were just told in verse 2 was killed. This is a different James. This is James, likely the brother of Jesus, mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15, 7, Galatians 2, 9, whom we will encounter again later in Acts 15 where he emerges as the new leader of the church in Jerusalem in Peter's place.

Similarly, starting in chapter 13, the focus of Acts shifts entirely from the account of Peter and his ministry to the account of Paul and his ministry.

There's a shift, a transition taking place in the history of the church. Though James is killed and Peter must flee, James, Paul, and Barnabas pick up and continue to carry the torch.

and then third, the church is seen gathering at the house of Mary in verse 12 and it says at the end in verse 25 that her son John, whose other name was Mark, now begins to accompany Paul and Barnabas in their missionary journeys.

[44 : 03] This is the one we know as Mark, the author of the gospel of Mark, who was Barnabas' cousin according to Colossians 4, 10. This transfer, this passing of the torch has happened in the church generation after generation and today we carry this torch.

It is our responsibility to shine the light of Christ and carry the fire of the gospel to the world. We too will face opposition, we too will face persecution though here perhaps in much milder ways than our brothers and sisters elsewhere.

Even when circumstances are dire and adverse, even when darkness envelops us and hope seems dim, we can proclaim the gospel with confidence because God is with us and His word is unstoppable.

Let me pray for us. God, give us unshakable confidence in Your word. Give us unwavering faith in You, our Savior, that You will never abandon us, that You are able to deliver us, that our life is not in the hands of any tyrant, that our lives are not in our hands, but they are in Yours.

Lord, embolden us to bear witness to Jesus, wherever we are, for the glory of Your name, so that more might be saved.

[45 : 56] Amen. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

■ng