

God Always Gets the Glory

Acts 12:20-25

Rev. Brian Bill

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Over 8 years ago, Beth and I had the privilege of going to Israel. We were impacted by the people we went with and the places we visited. Our team consisted of 30 Asian believers from seven different countries and was led by friends of ours who teach at the East Asia Theological Seminary.

It was very moving walking where Jesus walked and getting to know people who have been walking with Jesus in hard places. One of my prayers was for God to teach me and reach me; to rearrange and change me. We didn't want it simply to be educational, we wanted it to be transformational. It was.

- We got to know a missionary from East Timor who started a church planting school which launched 30 churches. One of these pastors has since been martyred.
- One sister ministered for many years to women who were forced to have abortions in China.
- A disciple from South Korea reached out to North Korean refugees in China. He told us about police raids and torture...but he couldn't wait to go back.
- I became friends with the national director of Cru in Mongolia. He told us the church in his church was growing rapidly.
- One sister worked in IT at a well-known international firm and was using 90% of her income to support multiple missionaries. She lived on 10%.
- One pastor headed up a literature ministry in Myanmar, which translated *Anchor for the Soul* into Burmese.
- Another brave brother ministered in China. His Bible studies were being bugged, so they moved his meetings to motel rooms to avoid being arrested. He told me, "*We experience amazing things.*" When I asked him about the persecution, he smiled and said, "*Yes, but that's amazing, too.*"
- One fellow follower from South Korea served on a team in Turkey where three of his missionary teammates were brutally martyred for their faith. I'll come back to him later in the sermon.

One of the most beautiful sights we visited was Caesarea, a port city located on the Mediterranean Sea, built by Herod the Great to honor Caesar. With the smell of sea salt in the air and blue water as far as the eye could see, our guide led us to the

Hippodrome. This was a place for chariot racing and for leaders to address their people who sat on tiered seats in an outdoor amphitheater. Herod made his way to the throne located high above the crowds. This is the setting for our passage today.

Listen as I read Acts 12:20-25: ***“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. 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.”***

I see two main points from this passage.

- **God always wins.**
- **The gospel always works.**

Here’s what I’m hoping we learn today: *Make the pursuit of God’s glory the story of your life.*

1. God always wins. Last week, we saw how *God often does the unexpected when we’re earnest in prayer.* Herod’s plot to kill Peter was turned upside down when the Angel of the Lord set Peter free. Herod was so angry, he had all the prison guards put to death. According to Acts 12:19, he headed home to Caesarea because he was humiliated.

Verse 20 tells us he was annoyed for another reason: ***“Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord...”*** The word for **“angry”** means, *“furious, exceedingly hostile and enraged”* and is in the present tense, indicating Herod was continuously angry. Proverbs 29:2 comes to mind: ***“when the wicked rule, the people groan.”*** We’re not really sure how these cities got on his bad side or why Herod was so lit up. Perhaps it’s because of some unfair trade competition from these two seaport towns.

Tyre and Sidon were independent city-states, but they came together to make an appeal: ***“...and having persuaded Blastus, the king’s chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king’s country for food.”*** A

“chamberlain” was a personal assistant who was responsible for the king’s living quarters and guarding his personal finances.

These two towns have always needed grain from Israel, going all the way back to 1 Kings 5:11 when Solomon gave them **“cors of wheat.”** Perhaps the famine mentioned in Acts 11:28 was making their situation worse. In any case, they needed Blastus to help blast away the animosity so Herod would lift the grain embargo. We don’t know for sure, but they may have bribed Blastus.

Verse 21 tells us, **“On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them.”** Historians tell us this **“appointed day”** was a two-day celebration with day one set aside to celebrate the birthday of the Roman Emperor Claudius and day two to honor Herod himself.

Herod dressed in his royal military apparel. The historian Josephus mentioned his robe was made out of silver which would have glowed and glistened in the bright middle eastern sun. In addition, silver ornaments were attached to the robe causing bright light to shine in people’s eyes, creating a kind of disco ball effect. Herod was a spectacle of glory and splendor.

The **“throne,”** also known as the *bema seat*, was an elevated place of judgment, often used for making pronouncements on judicial matters. From this spot Herod **“delivered an oration.”** The tense indicates he did something similar to your pastor when he *“went on and on.”*

In verse 22 the crowd pampered and praised the pompous king: **“And the people were shouting, ‘The voice of a god, and not of a man!’”** The word **“shouting”** indicates this was a *“continual cry or loud clamor.”* Luke used this same verb of the Jewish crowd in Luke 23:21 when they kept on saying, **“Crucify, crucify Him!”**

This was Herod’s final test. Would he receive this blasphemous praise, or would he quickly refuse it and give God the glory? In contrast, when Peter encountered people wanting to worship him in Acts 10:26, he was quick to say, **“Stand up; I too am just a man.”** Instead, Herod neither denied nor deflected this adoration.

It’s a serious sin to take God’s glory from Him. Listen to these passages.

Exodus 20:5: **“You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God...”**

Leviticus 10:1-2: “*Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.*”

Deuteronomy 4:24: “*For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.*”

Isaiah 42:8: “*I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.*”

Isaiah 48:11: “*For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.*” God repeats, “*for my own sake*” twice for emphasis.

Psalms 115:1: “*Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name be glory.*”

Showing our propensity for taking glory for ourselves, we must continuously repeat, “*not to us, not to us.*”

Herod did not rebuke or reject the people’s applause. As a result, God took Herod out 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.*”

The word “*immediately*” means, “*forthwith, directly, on the spot.*” When touring the Hippodrome in Caesarea, I remember becoming undone when standing in the spot where Herod was eaten by worms.

During the Civil War, Union general John Sedgwick was inspecting his troops. One day he came to the top of a protective wall and gazed out in the direction of the enemy. His officers suggested this was unwise and he should duck while passing the top of the wall. The general snapped back, “*Nonsense. They couldn’t hit an elephant at this dist----*.” A moment later the general fell to the ground dead.

The angel of the Lord struck Peter to wake him and now assassinates Herod because He did not “*give God the glory.*” The same angel who sprung Peter so easily, with a finger’s worth of effort, struck down the great king Herod. He died a horrible death, with worms eating him from the inside out before taking his last breath. One pastor said, “*Herod was living for the moment, but would spend eternity in Hell paying for the brief moment of glory!*” Indeed, none are so empty as those who are full of themselves.

This makes me think of how God switched the outcomes of Peter and Herod as seen in Proverbs 11:8: ***“The righteous [Peter] is delivered from trouble, and the wicked [Herod] walks into it instead.”***

Before moving on, let’s slow down and seek to understand how we’re ***“to give God the glory.”***

Brothers and sisters, you and I exist for one primary purpose and that is to give glory to God. *The greatest good we can do is to always seek God’s glory.* One of the statements of faith from the Reformation was *Soli Deo Gloria*, which means, *“to the glory of God alone.”*

I love the answer to the very first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

Q: What is the chief end of man?

A: *Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.*

The word ***“glory”*** is one of those religious words we often use but may not understand. It literally means, *“To be heavy or weighty”* and has to do with *“reputation, fame, splendor and prestige.”* It’s also related to the word ***“magnify”*** which means when we give God glory, we’re really helping people see how big and beautiful He really is.

The opposite of giving glory to God is selfishness and pride. If I’m interested in taking credit or just focusing on myself, then God doesn’t get the glory.

The Greeks equated ***“glory”*** with “opinion.” To have a high opinion of someone, was to give them glory. The Hebrews on the other hand, would think of the brilliance of God’s Shekinah glory, as the sum of all His attributes. To put it all together, to give God glory means our opinion of Him is heavy and weighty because He is brilliant in His beauty. One thing to keep in mind is we are not giving to God what He doesn’t have - God already *has* glory innately; we simply acknowledge and magnify what He already has, and who He already is.

Charles Ryrie said it like this: *“God’s glory is His reputation. To live for God’s glory means to live so that God’s reputation is enhanced (heightened in quantity and quality) and not diminished in any way.”*

Some time ago, I read part of a sermon by Thomas Watson, a Puritan from the 1600s. In answering the question, “*How shall we know when we aim at God’s glory?*” Watson offered three answers.

- When we prefer God’s glory above all other things.
- When we are content that God’s will should take place, though it may cross ours.
- When we are pleased to be outshined by others in gifts and esteem, so that His glory may be increased.

Our role then, to borrow from Watson, is to respond with appreciation, adoration, affection, and subjection. In particular, when people look at us, they should see the weightiness and beauty of God on full display in our lives because Colossians 1:16 says we have been created by God and *for* God. We now we care about God’s glory when we can say along with Isaiah 26:8: “...***Your name and renown are the desire of our hearts.***”

No one can match His power, avoid His punishment, or frustrate His purposes. If you take on God, He will take you out.

I think of what happened when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon started boasting and bragging in Daniel 4:30-34: “***Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?’ While the words were still in the king’s mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, ‘O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.’ Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles’ feathers, and his nails were like birds’ claws. At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever.***”

Nebuchadnezzar was given a second chance. You might not get one.

Because God always wins, *make the pursuit of His glory the story of your life.*

2. The gospel always works. While the king became compost verse 24 says, ***“But the word of God increased and multiplied.”*** The word **“but”** is a term of contrast. Nothing could stop the spread of the gospel. It didn’t just increase incrementally, it continued to multiply magnificently. The word **“multiplied”** means *“to be made full.”* Herod was history and Jesus was alive. The leader of that part of the world was dead, but the living Word was alive. Chuck Swindoll offers this insight: *“Since then, the word of the Lord has continued to grow and multiply for two thousand years. Agrippa’s pathetic, three-year reign is a piece of lint on the scroll of church history.”*

Both the worms and the Word of God were God’s instruments. The worms wiped out Herod while the inspired, infallible, irresistible, inerrant, invincible, and authoritative Word of God marches on! The Word continues to save sinners and sanctify saints! God always wins and the gospel always works!

Steven Cole has some great insight: *“At the beginning of Acts 12, we have James dead, Peter in prison, and the tyrant Herod basking in his popularity and power. At the end of the chapter, we have Peter free, Herod eaten by worms and dead, and the Word of God growing and multiplying.”*

Isaiah 55:10-11 tells us God’s Word always works: ***“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it..”***

Commentator Thomas Constable writes, *“Nothing seemed capable of stopping the expansion of the church. Corruption and contention in its ranks did not kill it (Acts 5-6). Its religious enemies could not contain it (Acts 4:1; 8:1-3; 11:19). Even Roman officials could not control it...God’s purposes will prevail.”*

Throughout the centuries people have declared God to be dead and have tried to ban the Bible to no avail. The French author and atheist Voltaire, who lived in the 1700s, reportedly held up a Bible and smugly declared, *“In 100 years this book will be forgotten and eliminated.”* Shortly after his death, his own house became the headquarters for the Geneva Bible Society, which distributed millions of Bibles he had assigned to extinction.

Verse 25 shows us how God positions gospel workers to do the work of gospel proclamation. While King Herod was being hollowed out by worms, our holy God was preparing some key servants for missionary work: ***“And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.”*** They had been in Jerusalem to distribute the money raised by the church in Antioch. When they returned, they brought the nephew of Barnabas with them. We’ll read more about how God used these men on mission next weekend.

Now I return to the story of Joseph from South Korea who saw his teammates from Turkey martyred. During our time in Israel we were all praying God would make His way and His will clear for our brother. It was obvious he was wrestling with the decision whether to go back to Turkey.

I’ll never forget what happened. We were back on our bus, having just left one of the historical sites. I noticed Joseph sitting by himself, so I went over and sat next to him. We chatted briefly and then he said humbly, *“God wants me to go back to Turkey so I’m going.”* I was stunned and undone. I couldn’t get a word out. I wanted to encourage him, but I just sat there, tears filling my eyes. I excused myself and went back across the aisle and sat down next to Beth.

By this time, I was blubbing. I turned to Beth and said, *“He’s going back to Turkey, knowing he could die there.”* And then I said, *“Actually, he has already died.”*

Herod didn’t give God glory, so God took his life. Our brother gave God glory by giving his life for the sake of the gospel. I’ve tried to get an update on where he is today but haven’t been able to reach him.

People of faith are always called to live by faith as they give glory to God with their lives. The phrase ***“by faith”*** is used 22 times in Hebrews 11. After listing the men and women in God’s Hall of Faith, the writer describes what they went through in verses 33-37.

Then, we read these words in verse 38: ***“Of whom the world was not worthy.”*** Another translation puts it like this: ***“The world was not worthy of them.”*** I like this paraphrase: ***“The world didn’t deserve them – making their way as best they could on the cruel edges of the world.”*** That’s how we felt when we interacted with these sold-out Christ-followers who made the glory of God the story of their lives.

Incidentally, it was in Israel that Beth and I prayed a prayer which ended up being answered when Edgewood asked us to partner together in ministry. Surrounded by people who lived for the glory of God while touring places where God's glory was displayed, we prayed, "*Lord, we'll do anything you want us to do and go anywhere you want us to go.*" On my very first day back in the office I received a call from Jim Koehler, the chairman of the deacon board at the time, asking me to consider joining Team Edgewood!

Make the pursuit of God's glory the story of your life.

Taking it Home

1. Work at doing everything for God's glory. 1 Corinthians 10:31: "***So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.***" 1 Corinthians 6:20: "***For you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.***" Let's reflect His glory and when praise comes our way, let's deflect all glory to Him. We should be reflectors and deflectors.

2. Is there anything you're doing right now, that does not bring glory to God? If so, confess it as sin and ask Him to help you turn it around for His glory. Here's a good question to ask when you're faced with a decision: *Can I do this activity, or have this conversation, or post this comment online, to the glory of God?* If you can't do something for God's glory, then you shouldn't do it. Matthew 5:16: "***In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.***"

3. It's impossible to live for the glory of God without complete surrender. Isaiah 43:7 says you have been created for God's glory: "***Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.***" Have you ever surrendered to Christ? Is there something you're holding back? Have you been backsliding? If so, it's time to come back.

4. Because God is a jealous God, He will judge those who do not trust in the saving work of Christ. Romans 12:19 says, "***Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord.***" Maybe you're sinning and believe you're getting away with it. Perhaps you think since you haven't had any consequences yet, there won't be any. Listen to Hebrews 9:27: "***And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.***" If hearing about Herod being eaten by worms grosses you out, you better make sure you don't end up in Hell where worms who never die are

waiting for you. Listen to what Jesus said in Mark 9:48: ***“Where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.”***

Earnest Hemmingway once wrote that morality was not going to impose itself on his life: *“I’m living proof that one can live any way he chooses and succeed...I have fought in revolutions...I have satisfied my desire, and I stand as living testimony to the fact that you can sin and get away with it.”* Ten years to the day after he wrote that, he put a shotgun in his mouth and pulled the trigger.

5. Repent and receive Christ as your substitute. Romans 3:23 says, ***“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*** Romans 6:23 adds, ***“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** God has made a way for you to be saved. It’s time to repent and receive Christ now.

Philippians 2:11 says: ***“And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*** Everyone will eventually bow before Christ. Do it now and you’ll be saved. If you wait too long, you’ll face God’s judgment seat and will still bow before Him...but it will be too late for you to be saved.

If you’re ready to give your life to Christ for the glory of God, pray this prayer with me.

“God, I confess I have not been living to reflect Your glory. In fact, I fall way short of Your glory and goodness. I repent of my pride and sinful selfishness and turn to You. I believe that Your Son Jesus died on the cross, in my place, as my substitute and rose from the dead on the third day. I receive the free gift of eternal life by faith, asking You right now to come into my life and save me from my sins. Enable me by Your grace to live for Your glory and Your glory alone. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.”

Brothers and sisters, *God always wins, and the gospel always works.* I urge you to make the glory of God the story of your life. It’s the only way to live, and it’s the only way to die.

1 Timothy 1:17: ***“To the king of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”***

New Members

Saturday Night

Wade and Kayla Rollins
Drew and Cindy DeBrey

9am

Josh Conder
Richard and Alice Dailing
Kitty Israel
Judy Millies