

Acts 12

The profile of a hard heart

(The heart of Herod stands as an example of how to miss out on God.)

Introduction:

- **Romans 12** “¹ I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, {which is} your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. ³ For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.”
- Herod Agrippa I (the grandson of Herod the Great who was king at the time Jesus was born) is mentioned here. Like the other Herods, he was a native of the area appointed by Rome to keep peace and make sure that taxes were paid to Rome. He tried very hard to please the Jews by “putting down” any fringe groups. No matter how hard he tried, he was never really respected by the Jews because of his loyalty to Rome.
- While Saul and Herod shared a common disdain for the early Christians their ultimate responses to the work of God represent a dramatic contrast - Acts 9. We can look at this chapter in terms of “a profile of how miss out on participation with God.”
- This chapter is Herod’s story, a profile of a hard heart.

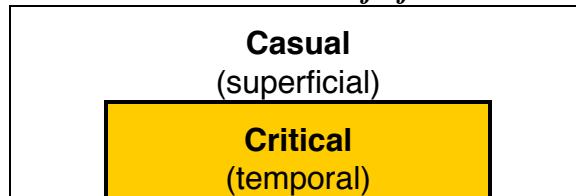
1. Herod is more concerned about making peace with his culture than with God.

If you want to miss a chance to participate in what God is doing – insist on being popular with the world.

“¹ Now about that time **Herod** the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church, in order to mistreat them. ² And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. ³ And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread. ⁴ And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people.

- The fact that this all took place during the days of Unleavened Bread suggests that Herod intended to make Peter’s trial and execution a public display to the large crowds that would be present.
- “Fitting in” with the world, being a “people pleaser” is natural but it puts us outside the playing field of God’s Kingdom.

Three levels of life



Crucial

- Luke also wants us to realize that there are two instincts in our fallen nature that will be challenged by the Gospel of Grace.

<i>Religious instincts</i>	<i>Secular instincts</i>
Saul's concern	Herod's concern
We find security in the merit of our sacrifices.	We find security in the acceptance of others.
"Where grace abounds sin will all the more abound." "We fear that grace will undermine our fear of God."	The Gospel will seem foolish, unfair, and imperialistic. I will be excluded if my message excludes those who disagree with me.
Matt.9:17 "Nor do men put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out, and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved." Rom.10:4 "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." (See Theology file #107)	Jas.4:4 "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." Jn.15:19 "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

2. Herod sees God's hand but does not recognize it.

If you want to miss a chance to participate in what God is doing – insist on being in control.

5 So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God. 6 And on the very night when **Herod** was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. 7 And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared, and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and roused him, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands. 8 And the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." 9 And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. 10 And when they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street; and immediately the angel departed from him. 11 And when Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of **Herod** and from all that the Jewish people were expecting." 12 And when he realized {this,} he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark,

where many were gathered together and were praying. ¹³ And when he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴ And when she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate. ¹⁵ And 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." ¹⁶ But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened {the door}, they saw him and were amazed. ¹⁷ But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, "Report these things to James and the brethren." And he departed and went to another place.

¹⁸ Now when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers {as to} what could have become of Peter. ¹⁹ And when Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away {to execution.} And he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there.

- "If you want to see God laugh, show Him your plans."
- This story sees Herod's plans thwarted by God and when this happens, Herod makes those under him pay for the fact that his planes failed. Herod assumes full control of the situation. If his plans do not work out someone has to pay.
- Secular humanism is "defining life and making decisions as though God did not exist."
- Our culture seems to be committed to two propositions – rights without responsibilities.
 1. I have a right to be whatever I want to be and do whatever I want to do.
 2. If I do not like the consequences of my behavior I have a right to sue someone for not making it happen.
- This story challenges us in a second area. It does not fit well into the image of God that we would like to see.
 1. We want to be able to control God's blessing with our prayers or virtue. The actions of God and the passivity of Peter are contrasted. We would like to see Peter be more active in prayer or negotiations as an example to us when we are in trouble. Peter is sleeping when God acts.
 2. We want God to treat everyone alike. While Peter was delivered, James was not. We would like to see God delivering all of his people but the miracles do not happen for everyone. There is no indication that James and his friends were at fault or lacked faith. God chooses to deliver Peter but not James. There is no formula for controlling God's hand.
- The Greek word for "angel" can also be used for a human "messenger." The context in this passage suggests "angel" is the best translation.
- Just what was Peter's responsibility in this story?

*Discipleship is all about
"power and control".
When do we give it up?
When do we take it?*

How do we use it?

Peter did not:	Peter did:
Worry and maneuver to save himself.	Sleep
Fear the risks involved in following God's leading.	Listen to the voice of God and risked responding to it.
Doubt God's hand even when it was not clear at first.	Recognize the gift of God.

- There are two easy mistakes that we can make as residents of God's world.

<i>I can attribute something to God that is not His doing.</i>	<i>I can fail to see God's hand in the affairs of life.</i>
When things go my way, it is too easy to assume it is of God.	When things are painful for me it is too easy to attribute it to Satan.
If I were Satan and going to keep me from being all that God wanted me to be, what might I do?	What is God's goal for my life? That should give me an idea of what He will be doing with me.
Does God anoint circumstances?	Or does God anoint people as they respond to circumstances?

3. Herod's world was centered on Herod.

If you want to miss a chance to participate in what God is doing – insist that the world revolve around you.

20 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. 21 And on an appointed day **Herod**, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and {began} delivering an address to them. 22 And the people kept crying out, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" 23 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. 24 But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied. 25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with {them} John, who was also called Mark."

- Herod did not give glory to God but took it for himself.
- When we feel that we deserve recognition and compensation for what, in the final analysis, is the work of God, are we not acting like Herod?
Matt.10:39 “He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it.”
- You might notice how this narrative reveals Herod's hope for security and significance to be tied to his popularity, power, and position. It also shows us how God frustrates Herod at every point.