

TO GOD BE THE GLORY

Acts 12:20-25

Acts 12:20-25

As one who grew up in the church, there was, fairly early on, a familiarity with the Bible and with the stories of the Bible. This included those sections that were

- **captivating** because their excitement (stories like the plagues that came upon the Egyptians, David's slaying of Goliath or Joshua and the battle of Jericho)
- **seductive** because of their content (sections of the Bible like the Song of Songs, the story of David and Bathsheba, or the story of Amnon and Tamar), or
- **intriguing** because of what took place (the miracles of Jesus, Lazarus being raised from the dead (especially with the King James Version line, "Lord, by this time **he stinketh**: for he hath been dead four days" (John 11:39)), or Eutychus' falling asleep during Paul's preaching and then falling out the second story window).

Well, today's text before us here in Acts chapter 12 falls into this third category. "And he was eaten by worms." I guess, even as a child, I knew that that is what **inevitably happens** to dead bodies that are **buried** in the ground. I had seen worms and bugs of all sorts making their way through animals that had been hit by cars (what we now call "roadkill" though, as a child, I don't recall that term being used at the time). So I had seen that. And so the idea that worms and all kinds of small insects would one day be feeding on the flesh of the bodies of those who die...I understood that.

But the impression from this Bible text is that these worms didn't show up weeks, months or years later. Indeed the text mentions the worms eating away at him **BEFORE** it mentions him dying, implying that the worms had already been doing their work on his body even before he died.

Ooh...this is the kind of stuff that is **VERY INTRIGUING to a young boy**. Later, by the time I was in Junior High, I began learning more about things like round worms and tape worms...all sorts of parasitic creatures that can live in people while they are still alive. Kids at school would tell stories about such things and it was always

more than a little bit intriguing. Indeed, even to this day, the existence of parasitic creatures is one of those subjects that...well...**it's not for everyone.** (If you want to see what I mean, go to Google, type in parasitic creatures and then look at the images. Consider it rated "R" and definitely don't show it to your young children). But by Junior High...that was the kind of stuff that boys like me thrived on.

So here is this story regarding Herod, the tetrarch. Since the time of the Greek Empire (a couple hundred years earlier), the Herods had served as puppet kings: first under the Greeks and later under the Romans. The greater region of Palestine had been divided into four sections, with Jewish aristocrats being placed into power who would be subservient to Greece or Rome.

And thus the reign of the Herods: Jews, yes...but compromisers through and through.

Their role was to maintain the peace. In this case, it was for Rome. The Herods had their perks. They retained their property. They were still considered royalty. They had a great amount of freedom. But they were, in the end, "sell-outs" to Rome.

Herod the Great, the king over Judea at the time of Jesus' birth, was **a great developer and builder.** It was he who put a lot of time and energy into developing Jerusalem. But he could not be trusted. He was highly suspicious of everyone else, having a number of his own relatives put to death to help safeguard his own position. It was he, who upon the visit of the Magi (as recorded in Matthew chapter 2, had all the baby boys killed in and around the region of Bethlehem. It was because he thought of these potential infant "kings" as a threat to his own position.

Later, one of his sons, known as Herod Antipas, had John the Baptist beheaded. It was this Herod who met with Jesus, albeit briefly, the morning of Christ's crucifixion. And it was this Herod that we read of here in Acts 12...

Acts 12:1-3a

Now Tyre and Sidon were coastal cities, located over 100 miles to the north and west of Jerusalem. They were important for trade within the greater land

of Israel, but they were definitely considered to be **on the outskirts** of daily life. And apparently they were **feeling disconnected** to what was going on in Jerusalem, the capital city. For upon learning that Herod was in Caesarea – a coastal resort town used by the Roman emperors, and located somewhat midway between Jerusalem and themselves, the text tells us that they made an appeal through one Blastus, one of Herod's inner circle. They were seeking, as we would say, "an audience" with the king. They were in need and they were looking for a handout.

Having heard their request, Herod decided to not only give them an audience but give a speech. You may or may not like our modern politicians, but one certainly gets the impression that almost any of them would be happy to give a speech before almost anyone who actually likes them. And Herod was no different. So sensing that he **had a friendly audience**, he gave a speech. I wish we had a recording of that speech.

Long ago, children were taught the 3 Rs. The three Rs were not Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. Indeed, only one of those three words even begins with an R!!!

No, the 3 Rs were Reading, Reckoning and Rhetoric, meaning Reading, Arithmetic, and Public Speaking...or more particularly **Public Debate**.

Long ago it was thought that people should be able to work through difficult topics, issues, philosophies and theological nuances and then present one's thoughts on these various topics in a clear and cogent manner, and thus this third R: rhetoric. Rhetoric...being a good public speaker and debater is, of course, pretty much **a lost art**.

People are, in general, no longer being taught to think...to reason...to dissect an argument and then persuasively convince another as to what is the truth. Indeed, pluralism has become the newly touted answer to all disagreements allowing people to now hold their opinions and even voice those opinions and **be free of verbal contradiction**...not because their opinions are reasonable or valuable but because we desire that **no one ever FEEL OFFENDED because of their beliefs**.

Harold Bloom called this The **Closing** of the American Mind (and he wrote a book on the topic with that as its title).

Today we are experiencing this Death of the American Mind as we witness the Death of Reason all around us.

Songwriter Don McLean wrote about "The Day the Music Died," but we are today witnessing, "The Day All Reason Died."

So I have longed to hear some of the great rhetoricians.
People like

Socrates
Aristotle
Jesus
William Wilberforce
George Whitefield
Charles Spurgeon
Abraham Lincoln
Samuel Clemens, and
Winston Churchill

Some of these men were absolutely BRILLIANT: quick on their feet, great in wisdom, and persuasive in speech. They say Abraham Lincoln spoke slowly, but his speaking was full of incontrovertible wit.

I like how C.S. Lewis responded to a question put before him during the midst of World War II. He had been asked to come and speak on God, religion and the war to a work crew at a factory, over their lunch break. One person asked him "Which of the religions of the world gives to its followers the greatest happiness?" To this Lewis replied,

p. 58, God in the Dock

That is a GREAT RHETORICIAN...

Well, on this particular day, Herod Antipas was apparently really doing well: he was thinking well, fast on his feet, and ready to give the speech of his life. And that he did. It was great! The people puffed him up by saying, "He speaks like a god, not like a man!"

One problem though: **he failed to give the glory to Almighty God.** And because of that, God struck him down...and he was eaten by worms.

Many years ago I was visiting a young couple who had started attending the church I pastored. They were a vibrant couple with no children. The fellow had written a number of songs and for several years now these two had been, on the side, making money singing as a duet (he played guitar) at various "gigs"...often at bars. As I visited with them that night they told me they really liked the church but they wanted to know what I thought about their **singing at bars**.

It was then that I asked them if they had a Bible. They did. I opened it to THIS PASSAGE – our passage for the day here in Acts 12 – and read it to them.

Then I said, I don't think the issue is **where** you sing. The issue is: **will you give God the glory when you sing?** I said, "If you can sing at a bar and give God the glory, then go for it!"

That couples' names were Steven and Joyce Courtney. Some of you know them.

The issue of giving God the glory is acknowledging that **everything we have** – be it our jobs, our families, our skills, or in the case of Herod Antipas, the ability to give a really good speech – all of these things **come from God**.

Ruth, my wife, did a great job teaching our children, when they were little, the answers to the questions from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. She used an abridged version of that Catechism that I had edited for her use.

Question #1. Who made you?

Answer: God made me.

Question #2: What else did God make?

Answer: God made everything!

Question #3: Why did God make you and everything else?

Answer: **For His Glory!**

That's why we are here.

We are here for the glory or exaltation of God.

This is not because God is some **narcissistic megalomaniac** that is dying for attention. It is rather that in our giving God all the glory – even as the angels were made to give him all the glory – we find our proper place in this creation. Without that, we tend to think **WAY TOO HIGHLY** of ourselves...which is exactly what was going on with Herod Antipas.

Listen...

This world is not **about you** or me.

The world **doesn't revolve** around us.

We are not the center of the world.

God is. It is all about God.

I was reading this past week about Kanye West. Yes, it would seem that he is truly struggling with some of his bi-polar issues. Those closest to him are bearing the brunt of his current mental instability. But for all his instability he has one thing right: and that is that our lives are to be about serving God, and not ourselves.

So yet another angel – "the angel of the Lord" (verse 23) – struck down Herod. Herod then is eaten by worms and dies. But there is **still more to the story**. Look at verse 24...

verse 24

Our nation...no, the entire world...seems currently caught up in this coronavirus. People whom we once thought were brave have become overcome with paranoia...they're afraid of what others might do to them. Conversely, others are proving themselves bold and strong. **Instead of seeing disaster they are seeing opportunity**. When churches in California were told they could no longer sing, some – and praise GOD for these! – some praise leaders **took to the streets**, gathering around them worshippers of God who were willing to sing **IN PUBLIC...REAL LOUD!**

So, regardless of the chaos...and **all the CRAZINESS** of this year...the gospel is going out, and the Word of God is still increasing and multiplying.

That's what was happening in Acts 12 and that is what is happening in this year of the coronavirus.

Now back to the 3 Rs...it seems to me that all too many, including some in the church, have a problem with these 3 Rs.

- **Reading:** They're NOT reading the Word of God and because they are not reading the Word of God they are **IGNORANT** of the Word of God. And because of that they are **living in fear** as if our enemy, the devil, is the one who is going to win the battle over this world! Folks, the enemy is on the losing side! Amen? And if you are in Christ, and in the church, **you are on the WINNING SIDE**. And we know that because we can read it in the Bible.

I don't know about you but I LOVE Ephesians 6:10 where Paul writes, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might."

He then goes on to talk about the spiritual battle that we are in and that as Christians we need to **STAND**...Take a **STAND**...don't give in, don't give up...but **STAND STRONG** in the Lord.

- **Reckoning.** These same people have a reckoning problem. They reckon that if the coronavirus comes their way, they may die and that will be the end for them. Folks, they need to read the numbers. The likelihood of them dying is **EXTREMELY SMALL**. So instead of worrying about the .125 to .5% of Americans that might actually get sick to the point of death, they need to start considering the 75% of Americans who attend no church on a regular basis, are likely ignorant of the good news that is in Jesus Christ, but who are all certain of facing a **VERY BAD DAY OF JUDGMENT BEFORE ALMIGHTY GOD**. They're looking at the **WRONG** numbers! And talking about numbers, 2 Corinthians 5:10 says that we must all give an **ACCOUNTING** of our life before God. That's the Day of Judgment...the day of reckoning. And then consider...
- **Rhetoric.** The apostle Paul said, "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain." Their was **BOLDNESS** in what he had to say. But all too many of those around us don't seem to understand that kind of boldness. They are living in what Hebrews 2:15 calls "the fear of death." These people need to be delivered. But they won't find that kind of deliverance watching the evening news. They need what we have in Christ!

So be strong my brothers and sisters. Live for the glory of God and be quick to give him the glory. For he alone is worthy of all praise.