

The Persecutor & the Persecuted

Acts Series 2023

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Good morning. Good to see you all here this morning and the longer I live, good to see me here this morning. If you want to follow along with the message this morning, turn to Acts, the book of Acts chapter 12. I had our elder read 2 Timothy chapter 3 because I am dealing with a chapter on persecution. By the way, for you young folks who are here for the challenge up front and everybody else, the term that's translated persecute means to chase or to pursue. This was a very common term connected to hunting and persecution is when people hunt down Christians to harm us because they hate the Lord Jesus Christ and because they hate the gospel. So it's a good way to remember what is persecution, it's people who hunt down Christians to harm them.

We have lived for nearly 300 years in, well, not just here in Canada, but in North America without that being a government policy, but as we have this service, there are millions of our brothers and sisters in Christ who live in countries where that is in fact a government policy. I pray for a group of people called restricted access workers and that means they're in a country where if they started, if they went down to the corner and started handing out gospel tracts, they would be arrested and in some of those countries, just because they were Canadian or just because they were American, they would not be let go. They would either spend their entire lives in prison for handing out a piece of paper that tells people how to go to heaven, or they would be executed, put to death for having done that.

Verse 12 in 2 Timothy 3 says all who desire to live a godly life, all who are wishing to be holy in our lives, who are willing to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Now, we do suffer persecution here. We don't have a government policy against Christianity here, but there are people who don't like Christianity and if our children go to public schools, they'll see other young people in that school who do not like to be told about the Lord Jesus Christ and they would call names, they would behave badly. The thing that encourages my heart about verse 12 is it's not that we have to be godly to suffer persecution, we just have to want to be. By the way, if you want to be a godly person, that's a very good indication that you are in fact born again and saved because unsaved people don't want to be holy. I remember the first few times I heard the gospel, I thought to myself, I won't be able to do anything fun if I become a Christian because to me,

everything that I did that was enjoyable was sinful, and I knew that. I grew up in church, not a gospel preaching church, but I was aware of what things people liked. My mother and father raised us to be moral people, and I thought, I never want to live like that. So there is this reality that we suffer, but I'm glad that it's because we want to be godly because I don't know how many people in this building would say, "Oh yes, I am very godly." But I think a lot of us have a desire, hopefully all of us have a strong desire to live a godly life.

In the book of Acts, there are 21 separate occasions that describe persecution. 21! In a book of only 28 chapters, and the time period covered from the very beginning of Acts in chapter 1 at AD 30, in chapter 28 we get to AD 60, that's only 30 years, but it was a time of persecution. In all except three of these 21 incidents, in 18 of them, who do you think were the persecutors? They were all Jews, all the Jewish people, and so it reminds us of John chapter 1, "Christ came unto his own, but his own received him not." The Jews hated the Lord Jesus enough to cry out for him to be crucified. And you know folks, sometimes we think, well there are those who really hate Jesus and they're just regular people, and then there are Christians who love Jesus. No, if they're not born again, they have an innate hatred of the Lord Jesus. Even the religious ones, if they are confronted with the truth of the word of God, they have an antagonism that only God can remove. Only God can draw someone to love the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Acts chapter 12, there's a guy named Herod. He is one of the persecutors. In chapter 12 is definitely an occasion for this persecution. And the other two who aren't Jews are idolmakers, interestingly enough, because they lost money if people got saved and stopped worshipping their idols that they made for people to worship. This tells us that there is in the early church, a great desire for godliness among the believers, and that's because they're saved, and they do have a desire to change, they have a desire to love the Lord and show that love by the way they behave as we ourselves do. So we have in Acts chapter 12, the story of that godliness and of persecution and so there are three sections in this chapter that I want us to look at this morning. The first one is in the first five verses, the persecutor persecuting and the persecutor is a guy named Herod, and he is persecuting. Then the persecuted, that would be Peter from verses 6 to 19. And then finally, well, the persecutor is rescued. I didn't tell you what happened to Peter, but he got rescued from having to face death because of his love for the Lord Jesus. And then finally in verses 20 through 25, the persecutor judged.

All right, so let's begin in verse 1, which begins with this phrase, "About that time," this is how Luke opens the story in which he relates everything. About what time? When you read that, you ought to say, "Well, wait a minute, what time is he talking about?" Well, remember that until the 1500s during the church age until the 16th century, there were no regular chapter divisions and no verse divisions at all. So they got the book of Acts. It didn't have chapters. It had paragraph divisions, but those didn't tell when a brand new story was being told. But if we go back to Acts chapter 11, you remember that Barnabas and Saul took the collection, the money that the brothers and sisters in the Antioch church raised because Agabus the prophet had told them that there's going to be a famine, and the famine had probably already started because of the droughts for two years, and then

on the third year, there would not be any stored food left. So it was pretty bad, but they took the collection down there for those brethren to buy food in AD 46 and 47 and about that same time, we have this story.

Now it's a little bit earlier because we know from the events that are described here, we know that James was put to death in AD 43. We know that because history tells us that Herod died in AD 44. So we have a way of kind of estimating anyway, when things occurred, and Herod began to respond to the persecution that took place, starting with the death of Stephen in Acts chapter 7, and Acts 8 begins by saying that this persecution started in Jerusalem and this is part of that. This is Herod the king, Herod Agrippa the king who was doing the persecuting here. So the first thing we run into is it's about the same time as the events back in chapter 11 and it's interesting that Luke wants to relate this story before moving on to the first missionary journey, which starts in which chapter? Acts chapter 13. Yes.

So the story opens with verses 1 through 3, "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." So you must remember then who James's father is. James and John were the sons of Zebedee, right? So this is James, the son of Zebedee who died. It says there that he killed James, the brother of John, "and when he saw that it pleased the Jews," that he had killed James then, "he proceeded to arrest Peter also." Now who's Agrippa? Who is Herod Agrippa? He's the grandson. He's first of all, Herod Agrippa I, which means there's a second but we'll get to him later. Herod Agrippa I was the grandson of Herod the Great. Herod the Great was a very bad guy, and he raised a very bad son. He was a typical bad boy sent off to Rome to get his education and while he was there, he learned how to steal, how to kill, how to be a really bad guy, and I'm smiling because of something I'm going to read to you here where there was somebody who thought he was a really good guy. Well, Herod Agrippa lived from 10 BC to 44 AD. He was the king from 37 to 44, and he was called a friend to the Jews. Now we get that idea because when he saw that it pleased the Jews that he killed a Christian, that's what they wanted, the more Christians Herod would kill, the better the Jews liked it. So it's kind of unusual that the Jews would take offense even today by somebody saying they were the ones who murdered the Lord Jesus, because that's exactly what happened, and there still is antagonism. If you don't think so, just take a little tour of Israel and hand out tracts everywhere you go. You'll find yourself made to stop that.

Well, this Agrippa was a friend of the Jews, verse 3 makes this clear, he saw that it pleased the Jews. And Josephus, he's the guy, he's a Jewish historian, not a Christian fellow, but we often refer to him for historical facts and he said Herod Agrippa was not at all like that Herod who reigned before him, that is his grandfather. By the way, his grandfather was the one who murdered all the babies under two years old in Bethlehem, and this was just one of his fits of murder. So grandpa was a pretty bad guy, but he says, Josephus says, "Herod Agrippa's temper was mild and equally liberal to all men. He was humane to foreigners and made them sensible of his liberality," means he gave money away. "He was in like manner rather of a gentle and compassionate temper." And yet in Acts chapter 12, he laid violent hands on some of the Christians. Now that's an odd

expression, you know, "See, my hands are violent." Well, I mean, mine are only violent when I'm trying to get paint or something off my skin, and they're violent to me. But what does that mean, a strange expression there? Well, apparently Agrippa was not so mild or gentle or compassionate to Christians and notice that James is not the only one who feels his wrath. There were some Christians on whom Herod laid his violent hands. It may have well been that they were martyred just as James was. So this odd English expression means that Herod laid hands on them to do them evil, that's the word that's translated violent. They laid hands on them not to pat them on the back, not to shake their hand and introduce themselves, but to harm them. He wanted to do them evil.

The James that he puts to death was brother to the apostle John and so the son of Zebedee, the James mentioned down in verse 17. You've probably read this for your devotions and you saw where Peter tells the church, "Go tell James and the brothers that I'm out of prison." And you think, well, now wait a minute, James is dead. How's he going to tell anybody? Or how's he going to listen to anybody tell him anything? Well, it's a different James. The James down in verse 17 is Jesus' brother, James, who got saved after the Lord entered into that time of his death or just after that time, and this is the fellow who wrote what book? Yes, there you go. The book of James written by the Lord's brother. So this is really just answering the question about when we get down to verse 17, whoa, the guy came back to life. No, he didn't. He did wake up in heaven, which was a nice thing.

So Luke notes that Herod arrested Peter during the feast of unleavened bread. This was, it says in verse 3, "This was during the feast of Unleavened Bread." Now, if you're interested in the festivals at all, you've read about them in Leviticus 28, but if you're interested in that, you've probably noticed that the feast of Passover was the beginning of their new year. It's like their New Year's day is the Passover and they remembered what happening on the Passover? Why did they call it the Passover? Because the angel of death did not kill the firstborn who were protected by the blood of an appointed sacrifice being put on the door-jams and the lintel of the door. The angel would pass over that home and not kill any of the firstborn. But they had to be sent out immediately. Pharaoh knew that his firstborn child had died and this is enough, this is the 10th of the 10 plagues and so he tells them, "You Israelites get out of Egypt!" But they were making bread for the next day, but they wouldn't have had time to leaven it so they left with unleavened bread. So the feast of the Passover is followed by seven days of the festival of Unleavened Bread. This is the freedom festival, the leaving Egypt festival and it says that he put him in prison and he was going to bring him out to execute him after the Passover and Unleavened Bread festivals, which are back to back. So all of it was called the Passover.

So when Herod was about to bring Peter out, this is verse 6, on that very night God rescued him. Isn't that just like the Lord? Not going to do it early, not going to do it quick. Very often he waits. George Mueller used to say, "I think the reason the Lord waits is because he loves to hear us pray." And that may be. I don't know of anywhere that says that, although he does invite us to come to his throne of grace and to pray.

Thank you, brother. I should have pulled out my bottle under here so that you didn't have to go downstairs. No. From a baby too, brother. Wow. Wow. All right.

So God waited to rescue Peter until the last possible time and it just reminded me, I am like this, I grow impatient sometimes. "Now, Lord, when are you going to answer this?" And there are some things that I really do need for him to answer within a certain time period and that's how I know either I don't know the answer yet or I will find out that I don't know or why I don't know. So we get a sense of Herod's roughness in verse 4, when he had seized Peter, he put him in prison, probably the Antonia Fortress on the Temple Mound. It had entrances to the outside of the Temple Mound, entrances and exits. So if somebody was thrown into prison there, they wouldn't have to be carried back through the Temple Mound. And depending on what time during the feast of Unleavened Bread that Peter was arrested, in other words, how long was he going to be kept in? How long of that week? What part of that week was he going to be kept in prison? I'm sure Herod thought about this and what was the best way to do this, the quietest way to do this. That's what happened before so why not do the same thing again? It's what happened when they arrested Jesus and crucified him. They arrested him in the evening when he was by himself so nobody would find out and then he was crucified the next morning. So they're doing the same kind of thing with Peter.

So Herod's worried about the possibility of his desire to kill Peter being interrupted. By the way, stop and think of this, you have a city that has usually between five and six hundred thousand people living there regularly, their population, and Josephus, our very perceptive or in Herod's case not perceptive at all, historian saying that there were between two and three million people in the city during the Passover. So he waits until the Passover is over and then he wants to have Peter tried and then executed. So it is something that he's planning and what he does for that is he orders four squads of soldiers to protect him. Squads are also called quaternions of soldiers to guard him intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. So whatever time of the week he arrested Peter, he has at all times four guards, one chained to each wrist inside the cell, the cell door locked, and right outside the cell, one on either side of the cell door, and that doesn't include all the watches that they would have as you're going through the rest of the prison to the main gate into the city or into the temple, whichever side you would go in or out on.

And so we know that he was concerned to protect him but the church has weapons that Herod has never dreamed of. Oh, I'm sure he's heard of Christians praying, but really what does that mean? People typically are not very impressed that we think prayer actually accomplishes things. So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. And what is earnest prayer? Well, the word means eager prayer, prayer that we're eager to express to God. Prayers that are fervent. Fervent has the idea that we are very anxious, concerned in a good way to lay our petition out to God. I just finished listening to the autobiography of George Mueller. Some of you know that he was the beginner and the head of orphan homes in Bristol, England for the care of orphans in the 1800s. He was a godly man. The thing, I've never read the autobiography before, but the thing that impressed me was he would say, "I'm praying for this and these

are the 11 reasons that I'm using to present to God for doing this thing." And sometimes there were only four or five reasons. "These are the nine reasons. These are the 13 reasons." And he lists them and they all make really good arguments but he's doing this, that's fervency. It also means persevering prayer. I don't stop until I have an answer and they made this kind of prayer probably for God to please leave Peter alive to continue to be a help to the church. That would be a normal thing.

So how is God responding to this middle of the night, earnest prayer for Peter? Well, perhaps I should begin and, you know, Brother Logan touched on this, but I wanted us to be sure that two people were rescued from persecution. One was James, because in a moment of time, God delivered him from all of the difficulty that he was facing into heaven, into the presence of God and I am certain that he would hear before the Lord when he arrived there, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in a few things. I will make you ruler over many things, or I will bless you. Enter into the joy of your Master."

And then there was Peter, of course. The Lord decided he did need to be rescued. He was going to have about 20 more years of service to the church. Same kind of thing Paul said in Philippians. He said, "I'm really torn. I would like to go to heaven now. I would like for them to say you're going to be executed in the morning. Hallelujah. That's going to get me out of all of this." But he said, "I'm torn between two. It's better for you if I stay." And perhaps that was Peter's attitude as well, but he did have that extra time.

But this next section, verses 6 through 19, is divided between three things. Number one, Peter leaving the prison. Number two, Peter reporting to the church. And number three, Herod is not happy. For such a mild guy, he spends the whole chapter mad. So in verse 6, Peter leaves the prison. Peter's frame of mind and heart are clearly seen the night before his death is supposed to take place in verse 6. And when I was a very young Christian, I underlined this, "Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night," and I'm guessing they arrested him the last night, and Peter was rescued in the fourth watch of the night. In other words, he had someone on from 6 to 9. That was the first watch. And then from 9 to 12 was the second. 12 o'clock to 3 o'clock in the morning was the third. And then the fourth was from 3 a.m. till 6. Those were all the watches during the night. We know it was night. It says that several times in the chapter. So my guess is it was right before because in the first watch of the day, Herod was going to execute him.

So Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, and he's bound with two chains. And sentries before the door were guarding the prison, fast asleep, even being chained to two guards. They were probably fast asleep. And he's in this condition when, I mean, it's obvious he's not anxious about anything. "If I go to heaven, that's good. I'm happy." Are we? Are we that way? When my wife was diagnosed with cancer, no one expressed that I can remember anyway, to me, the joy that she might soon be in heaven but it was always, she needs to be delivered from this. She has to live. She should not die. What are we Christians for? I mean, I want to be forgiven of my sins indeed but I always want to be looking forward to going there. Now you say, "That's easy for you to say. You're a real old guy. I'm young. I'm not looking forward to going to heaven." Well, I don't want to go

early. I don't want to hasten into the presence of God uninvited. But when it's time, I want to be filled with, well, at least no anxiety. I'd like to just fall asleep.

Here he was in prison. Peter was sleeping between two soldiers bound with two chains. Sentries before the door were guarding the prison. And in verses 7 and 8, it's interesting to see, number one, that God used an angel. He could have just awakened Peter and just made him think of all the things that the angel told him to do. But no, angels are ministers of God sent forth to minister to those who are the inheritors of salvation and so he sends this angel in the fourth watch or whenever it was during the night. And the thing that's interesting is what the angel did for Peter, but what he told Peter to do for himself. The angel comes in and the first thing he does is turned on his torch or his flashlight or whatever an angel uses to see. Don't know that they'd really need that much, but Peter needed to see. And then he strikes Peter on the side. The word really just means to sock or to hit. I don't know that that's what it has to mean here. I don't think he punched him unless it was a punch to wake him up, but he woke up, a light shone in the prison so that he would be able to see what he's doing. And the angel tells him the first thing, "Get up, quick." "What about, you know?" They fall off, chains fall off and the chains fell off his hands and I put that down as something the angel had to do. And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself." Well, I didn't know he was undressed. You say, "Well, it was at night he's sleeping." But my guess is they either let him keep the toga on in March or April, which is the time of the year when this is, it's still chilly over there, especially at night. Maybe he just meant, "Get your belt and put it on and then put on your sandals. Get up quickly, dress yourself and put on your sandals." And Peter does all of this, but you're going to find out he's not sure if this is real. Maybe you've had the experience of being involved in something and you say, "Is this really happening? I mean, what's happening?" People say, "This is surreal," which they think it's not real. Well, this happened to him. He says, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," and so he does but notice that he doesn't do the things for Peter that Peter can do for himself.

Now, some have said that this angel was a human messenger who broke into the prison, rescued Peter, but really, this doesn't make any sense. I mean, if you had to look at things in the passage that tell you this can't be what happened because, what kind of things would you pick out? Well, how did the light shine? Did they give Peter a first century flashlight? I doubt it. Okay. How did his chains get taken off because it says that they fell off? How did the guy breaking in make the chains fall off? He had to tell the bleary-eyed apostle to do those three things he wanted him to do without waking up the guards. They're just asleep. And if you find plausible answers for these questions, how can you explain what it says about the outer prison gate in verse 10? This is like the chains. When they came to the iron gate leading into the city, it opened for them of its own accord. I mean, I don't know what they would say. Well, he'd actually unlocked it getting in and it wasn't mounted evenly, so it just slowly creaked open while he was in there rescuing him. People can be very inventive. But no, I don't think this was happening at all.

So this was a work of God and Peter realized it in verse 11, "When Peter came to himself." What does that mean? I mean, he's already walking along, so he's not asleep unless he thought he was sleepwalking. But when he came to himself, we have a similar

expression, ironically, in Luke chapter 15. Luke's the author of both of these, where the prodigal son is feeding the pigs, "and when he came to himself." It is an expression of self-awareness. "Oh, I need to do something different than feed pigs. I know that something is going on here, that I'm awake and something has happened."

Well, notice what he says in verse 11. When he 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." Now that's my last question to ask there, why is Peter completely deceived about how he got out if there's a guy telling him to do one thing after another? Well, no, clearly this was a work of God and so Peter 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." So Peter was not expecting rescue from prison, he was expecting certain death. He probably knew that the church would be in prayer for him but according to verse 9, "And he," Peter, "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." And then he realized, "No, this is the Lord doing this." God could have supernaturally done everything for him and I said that about what the angel did for him and what he asked Peter to do for himself, because sometimes when it comes to our sanctification, and I've heard brethren say this over and over again, "I wish God would just take away the temptation." Yes, we all do but that's not the way the Christian life works. God doesn't save us from falling by never giving us a chance to fall. And I always say to brothers who say that to me or sisters who say that to me he's not going to do that. There is some part of our salvation that God does everything in, that's called by the term monergism. Monergism means when God takes the initiative in our salvation, he uses his Spirit to draw us to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God convicts us of sin and of righteousness and of judgment, and part of that righteousness that he convicts us of is it would be kind of nice not to be captive to sin anymore. I mean, would it be such a bad thing if I yielded to God? He works in our hearts to believe, to repent, so that from beginning to end salvation, as Jonah chapter 1 says, is of the Lord. Monergistic. But sanctification is not monergistic. He doesn't do all of it from beginning to end. He says, "Now love me enough to resist." In fact, He gives us in Matthew 4 and Luke 4 the example of the Lord Jesus dealing with temptation. It didn't just evaporate, he resisted it using God's word. And yet, tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin, Christ showed us how not to sin, not by removing the temptation, but by resisting it.

I don't think it was really a temptation that Peter was trying to resist. He was really happy to wake up. He was really happy to follow the angel. He was really happy to get to the gate and come to himself and say, "I think God's letting me out of prison here." So when the angel finished his job, he left. Verse 10, "When they had passed the first and the second guard," in the prison and at the door, "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." Well, second part, Peter reports to the church. Peter's free. No one is chasing him. No whistles are being blown. No one is yelling among the soldiers or Herod or anybody else. It's like they just wake up several hours later and the guards are rattling their chains, "Where is he? He's gone." And this is not a happy thing for a guard to think about. You remember the Philippian jailer when he

realized that the prison doors were thrown open by this earthquake. He takes out a sword. He's ready to take his own life. Why? He knows his life is forfeit if the prisoner's escaped. And so these soldiers are not very happy and therefore Herod is not very happy.

But what does Peter do meanwhile? Well, when he realized that God had arranged for his freedom, he went to the house of Mary. He knew where it was apparently, and Mary, the mother of John, I doubt her husband was alive or his name probably would have been mentioned, and John's other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. Mary must have been a woman of means. She has a big enough house to have people praying. There the thing that's interesting is that whether it's the first, second, third, or fourth watch of the night, it was in the middle of the night and here they all are praying. Peter's familiar with where the house is, probably with John Mark as well, and even with Rhoda the maid. That's the surprising thing. But we know that because verses 13 and 14 tell us when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer and she did what? First three words in verse 14. She recognizes Peter's voice. Well, I mean, you have to have some affiliation to remember what his voice sounds like. The interesting thing is in her joy, she didn't open the gate, but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate.

Now, really, really, you cannot read about the enormous faith of this group of praying Christians without smiling. What are the three things that the text says about their reaction that tell us that they were not thinking in their prayers, they were not thinking about an angel getting Peter free? She runs in and tells them Peter's standing at the gate and the first thing they said to her, "You are out of your mind. Why are we here praying if he's standing at the gate?" Yeah, good question. Why are you here praying? And what are you praying for? But she kept on insisting that it was so, and they kept on saying, this is in the tense that indicates they just kept on saying, "It's his angel. It's his angel." But Peter kept on knocking and when they opened, they saw him and were, here's the third thing, they were amazed. "It's really him." And I can just see Mary slamming the door and turning to the crowd and saying, "It's really him. He's right out there." Probably praying for Peter to be released the next day, they apparently were not expecting that he might be released that night, but you have to appreciate that they were there and they were praying. If we had a prayer meeting for some great need and we went through the night, would you come to a prayer meeting like that?

Well, Peter silences the exclamations and says, motioning to, the text says, "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 these things to James and to the brothers.' Then he departed and went to another place." It's likely that he knew Herod was going to be looking for him so he's finding a place where he can be out of the way, undercover.

And then verses 18 and 19, Herod is not happy. When the soldiers came to and saw that Peter was gone, they're asking each other, "when day came, there was no little disturbance," verse 18 says, "among the soldiers over what had become of Peter." So Herod Agrippa searches unsuccessfully for Peter. He interrogates the soldiers unsuccessfully. And then the poor soldiers have no answer for what happened. They must

have just dropped off into a very deep sleep or whatever so that they wouldn't wake up while the angel's talking to Peter. By the way, what language did the angel use in conversing with Peter? It's likely the one that Peter was most acquainted with so probably either the Greek language or the Aramaic. They would understand both of those well.

And so they have no idea what happened to him and so Herod ordered their execution, same reason, they lost their prisoners, they lose their life. But then it says he leaves Jerusalem. Why did he leave? What does he want to kill Peter for? For the Jews. So what if he says, "We kind of lost him in the middle of the night." That's not going to fly with the Jews and I think he just leaves to get away from the kickback or the pushback he's going to receive for losing Peter. Now, it would have been nice if the angel had woken everybody up and said, "Now this is what happened. You can tell Herod this." But as far as we know, that's not what happened. Peter was freed by the angel in whatever watch of the night he was. If he was freed in the last watch, only four soldiers would be executed. If it was earlier, there would be more executions.

But now we come to the last part. By the way, let me go ahead and read verse 19, "after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered 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," they were in Syria, "and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain," a chamberlain is an older word for a butler. He's the head of the whole household. That's what Joseph was in Potiphar's house. He was the butler. He ran everything in the house. Well, this is a guy named Blastus. His name in English anyway doesn't really fit someone who does a good job of ordering your house. But that being the case, it says there that, "they asked for peace, because their country depended," Herod's country, "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!'" Now, I've call this last point the persecutor judged because that's what I think is happening here. When you read through verses 20 to 23, it has absolutely no connection with the rest of the chapter above it. It's an entirely different thing unless Luke put it in the record here because Luke wanted his readers to be clear that God was taking Herod's life for taking James's life and for putting Peter in prison. It doesn't say that that's why he took his life, but I believe the persecutor is being judged for not giving glory to God, but doing that in an egregious way by taking the life of the man who took the life of one of God's chosen ones, James, and putting in prison another of God's chosen ones, Peter.

The details of the incident are spelled out in those verses. The problem with the Tyrians and the Sidonians is they did something to make Herod angry. You know, for a mild, peaceful guy, he's mad a lot, isn't he? He just is constantly angry, and they think they're going to get their food taken away from them, so they bend the ear of the butler, "You know, tell him that we're sorry, and we want to talk to him, and he can come and talk to us." So he comes out there, he's all in his dress-up clothes, and he sits on his throne, and he gives an oration, and just to make sure they're fawning over him enough, they say it's the voice of a God and not a man. Well, apparently, Herod agrees with them because,

"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." My first thought is, poor worms. He must have tasted awful. A guy who's always mad, always angry, you know, no good guts.

So what lessons do we take away from this besides just remembering for the next two months that Herod died by being eaten of worms? What? In sharp contrast to this situation, here's the guy, he gives his oration, they make this statement, he begins to feel bad, we don't know if it was immediate while he's still sitting on the throne, if he goes back inside and starts to feel bad, we don't know how it happened. But over in contrast to that, verse 24 says, and this is right after verse 23, "But the word of God increased and multiplied." There's the first lesson. James can die, the word of God will increase and be multiplied. Peter could die, the word of God would increase and be multiplied. Everyone in this room can die, and the word of God will still increase and be multiplied because it's the word of God and while he loves us and uses us, he is in the business of raising up replacements. And it is a blessing to see not just, by the way, the expression, they will continue to increase and multiply, that is a continual meaning there. They're always going to keep on doing this until the time of the end and this foresees, verse 25 foresees, what happens next. If you're thinking, "Well, I wonder how it's going to increase and multiply." Verse 25, "And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem," to Anitoch, "when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark." And the next chapter is number 13 and what happens in chapter 13 is Barnabas and Saul start the first missionary journey, and in Cyprus people are saved, and in Asia people are saved. The word of God will increase and continue, and one day Barnabas and Saul will die, but the word of God will keep multiplying and increasing. And here we are, 2,000 years later, and it still is.

The other lesson is that there is great power in prayer, even if you're amazed at the answer. There is great power in prayer, even if we're not anticipating how God's going to answer our prayer. "Oh, you who hears prayer." You know, I memorized this when I was early on in salvation. "Oh, thou that hearest prayer," that's how it's supposed to sound when I say this, "To you shall all flesh come." I do not have to understand how he's going to answer. I don't need to give him information that's going to help him answer my prayer. "Lord, you could do this by," and then telling him how he could get that done. I don't need to do that. He will answer. I need to pray, and I need to pray seriously. So let's do that.

Father, we thank you for your truth. Bless your word to our hearts, we pray. We thank you so much for the revelation of your power. What an encouragement this must have been to Theophilus, who was the reader that this book was written for, according to Acts chapter 1, that you are supernatural, and that you do great things for the promotion of your work. We pray that you'd help us, Lord. We pray, Father, that your word would increase here in this community and throughout Edmonton, and that we might see the blessing of having some of our own folks sent off to foreign fields and preaching the word of God and participating in that increasing word, in that multiplying word. We thank you for what you'll do. In Jesus' name, amen.