

# It's All About Jesus

Acts 12:1-5



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**FOCAL** (Acts 12:1-5 KJV) "Now about that time Herod<sup>1</sup> the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. {2} And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. {3} And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) {4} And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter<sup>2</sup> to bring him forth to the people. {5} Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him."

The last few weeks we've been studying truths in the Book of Acts. We saw how the Church grew phenomenally, wonderfully, by leaps and bounds because it was doing as Jesus told it to do. We saw Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, stand before a crowd of people and win thousands to the Lord. We saw Peter preaching boldly around the Temple, winning many of Israel - people who had been instrumental in crucifying the Lord of Glory - to salvation by faith in Him. We saw Philip and Stephen, dear deacons, move out into areas that the Apostles were slow in reaching, and saw these men reach many with the Gospel of Christ. We saw God emphasize to Peter and the rest of the Church that the Gentiles - that's us, Beloved - were also to be offered the Gospel of salvation.

But we also saw the *bad things*, the dark side of growth in the Church. We saw dear Stephen die as the first

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1 Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, the man who killed all the babies in Bethlehem when he tried to kill Jesus

2 pasche, Passover, not Easter. This was a reference to the Jewish Passover.

Christian martyr. Stephen preached one of the finest sermons in Christian history (**Acts 6:9 - 8:2**), and perfectly showed the unbelieving Jews who caught him and were tormenting him that Jesus Christ was - is - and will always be the Savior. After preaching the finest sermon ever preached these depraved and devilish men literally chewing on him like wild dogs murdered him, disguising their terrible deed as an act of righteousness by calling him a blasphemer. How could such a saint be a blasphemer? Yet he was still murdered.

Today we come to a similar incident in God's Church. An evil man named **Herod** murders the Apostle James, then imprisons Peter. This Herod, by the way, is not the same Herod that killed all the children in Bethlehem (**Matthew 2:16**) when he tried to kill the baby Jesus. That was the so called **Herod the Great**, this man's grandfather.

We know that all around us there is a great spiritual conflict going on, a battle for the souls of mankind. On one side of that battle are the evil men, men like Herod, who strive against the preaching of the Gospel. The Apostle asked the Church to pray as he preached:

**2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 (KJV) "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: {2} And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith."**

because not all men have the faith. Satan has deceived some, like Herod, and caused them to attack God's

Church while thinking they were doing the world a favor. Others have been deceived by lesser degrees, and have allowed their own interests to become greater than God's.

Yet in the midst of everything that goes on in God's Church the Lord bids us to remember - especially today, as we partake of His Table - that **it's not about you, and it's not about me**. We who are *part of His Body* the Church are not the key nor the stars of this Show. The Devil came into Herod Agrippa I and led him to kill James and imprison Peter because Herod made himself the star of the show. Herod's end was grisly, as is the end of all those who take the place of God. We didn't read that earlier, but now let's read Herod's end:

**FOCAL Acts 12:21-24 (KJV) "And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. {22} And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. {23} And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. {24} But the word of God grew and multiplied."**

1. When man makes himself God, God makes man a worm. It's not about you, and it's not about me - it's all about \_\_\_\_\_. It's what He wants that matters. It's what He says that matters. It's His \_\_\_\_\_ that matters.

**When man makes himself God, God makes man a worm. It's not about you, and it's not about me - it's all about**

Jesus Christ our Savior. It's what He wants that matters.  
It's what He says that matters. It's His glory that matters.

Because it is He Who died for us, so we could be with Him in eternity. It's all about Jesus. George Beverley Shea used to sing that beautiful song *I'd Rather Have Jesus*, and I truly believe the secret of his success was just that: he's rather have Jesus! He sang:

**I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold,  
I'd rather be His than have riches untold;  
I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands;  
I'd rather be led by His nail pierced Hand;  
Than to be the king of a vast domain,  
Or be held in sin's dread sway;  
I'd rather have Jesus than anything,  
This world affords today.**

The dark moments come to the Church, not because God is *not in control*, but because God often shows us that **Jesus is all.**

### **1. It's NOT About James, It's All About Jesus**

**FOCAL** (Acts 12:2 KJV) "... And he killed James the brother of John with the sword."

When I looked at this passage I wondered and asked the Lord, "Father, why did James just rate a short note in the Scripture? He was martyred just as Stephen was martyred, yet he barely rates one verse of Scripture. Yet Father, Stephen's death nearly covered two chapters of Holy Scripture. Why?" And as I prayed and thought and sought God was faithful. He has often shown me to be

true to His Word when He said:

**James 1:5 (KJV) "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."**

No one lacks wisdom more than I. He showed me, by Spirit and power, why James' death is covered in just a moment of Scripture, but Stephen's death was splendid in detail.

When our Lord Jesus met and called James and John the sons of Zebedee to be His Apostles our Lord nicknamed them *Boanerges*<sup>3</sup> or *The Sons of Thunder*. These brothers were fiery, bold men, outspoken and brash fishermen. They spoke their minds! When Jesus was going to go into Samaria and His way was blocked by the unbelievers it was James and John who said:

**Luke 9:54 (KJV) "... Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?"**

Jesus rebuked them by saying:

**Luke 9:55-56 (KJV) "... Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. {56} For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them...."**

There are many James and John's in our Churches, even today - men who believe that we should call down fire from Heaven to destroy the unbeliever. No, No Beloved,

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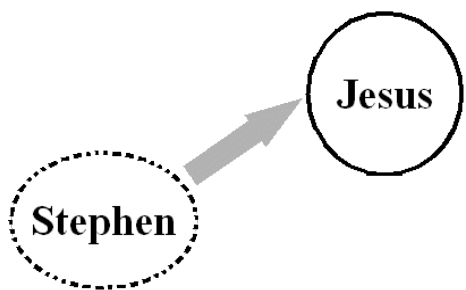
<sup>3</sup> Boanerges {pronounced bo-an-erg-es'}, see Mark 3:17

that is not the manner of the Christlike Spirit. We are called to love and to call to salvation, not to destroy. Destruction will come only when Jesus calls it, and not before. Until that time God is long suffering:

**2 Peter 3:9 (KJV) "... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."**

It's not about James, it's about Jesus! It's not about you and I, but it's about Jesus! It is He Who died, He Who was crucified, He Who rose again so I would not have to fear death.

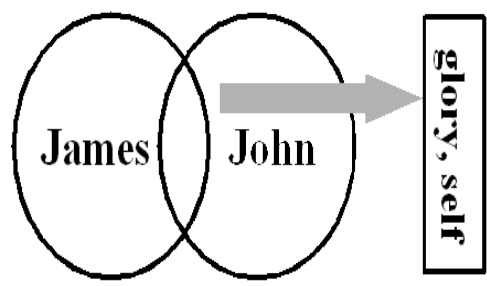
2. Why did James' death rate only one verse of Scripture, whereas Stephen's death covered so much text? Because Stephen \_\_\_\_\_ **through most of his trial** - Stephen knew it was all about Jesus. And even as the \_\_\_\_\_ men around him picked up stones to bash him to death he preached Jesus Christ.



Back to the question: **Why did James' death rate only one verse of Scripture, whereas Stephen's death covered so much text? Because Stephen preached**

**Christ through most of his trial** - Stephen knew it was all about Jesus. And even as the wicked men around him picked up stones to bash him to death he preached Jesus Christ, Lord of all, Savior of all. Even as the stones fell on his poor body he looked upward and saw Jesus

standing on the right hand of God the Father, ready to receive him into Heaven<sup>4</sup>.



One day the mother of James and John came to Jesus and asked Him a favor. She asked Our Lord to allow her children to sit on the right and left hand of

the Master in glory. You see, I suspect that James and John put their mother up to this, and, like a good mother, she asked the question. Jesus turned and looked at these two brothers, these fiery *Sons of Thunder* and asked them:

**Matthew 20:22 (KJV) "... Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? ..."**

You see, Jesus Christ sits on the right hand of God the Father *because of the horror of the Cross*. He sits on the right hand because, as the Scripture says:

**Hebrews 12:2 (KJV) "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."**

He endured the Cross, He despised the shame of the beating and the pouring out of our sins on Him. He drank

<sup>4</sup> see Acts 7:56

the Cup of suffering so we could share the Cup of glory. James and John had no right to ask to sit on the right and left hand of Jesus, for where Jesus sits enthroned none can sit. It's not about you, not about me, but its about Jesus! Jesus told these brothers:

**Matthew 20:23 (KJV) "... Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father."**

3. James suffered beheading under \_\_\_\_\_ dying as the second martyr in Christian history. He died quickly, unlike our Savior Who died slowly and over time. He suffered little, unlike our Savior *Who suffered as no man has ever suffered.*

James did drink of the cup Christ drank of, and was baptized with His baptism ... and it was recorded in one verse of Scripture. James suffered beheading under Herod Agrippa I, dying as the second martyr in Christian history. He died quickly, unlike our Savior Who died slowly and over time. He suffered little, unlike our Savior Who suffered as no man has ever suffered. But he is with Jesus, blessed be His holy Name.

It's not about James - it's about Jesus!

## **2. It's Not About Herod or Peter, It's All About Jesus**

**FOCAL** (Acts 12:3-4 KJV) "And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter

**also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) {4} And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter<sup>5</sup> to bring him forth to the people.**

I don't want to belabor the point too much, but we need to also look at Peter. Dear Peter, again a brash fisherman, chosen by Jesus to be the chief Apostle. Anytime you see three mentioned in Scripture it was always **Peter, James, and John**. Though Andrew was called right alongside of Peter<sup>6</sup>, these three were the ones that our Lord always took to the side. These were His lieutenants, the ones who were to lead the early Church, and with leaders more care is always given. The leader may be harsher with the captains, but their position is more precarious, for pride always nibbles at the lead dog! **Peter, James, and John**. They were a lot alike.

4. Following the killing and eating of the Passover the Jew was forbidden to eat *leavened* or \_\_\_\_\_ for seven days<sup>7</sup>. This was considered a *holy feast unto the Lord* so no \_\_\_\_\_ could be accomplished. This was not a coincidence, but God - and not Herod - was in control!

But the Lord allowed Peter to be taken and his life threatened by Herod Agrippa I. Herod didn't kill Peter immediately is because "**Then were the days of unleavened bread**". That is, the Feast of Unleavened Bread. **Following the killing and eating of the Passover**

<sup>5</sup> pasche, Passover, not Easter. This was a reference to the Jewish Passover.

<sup>6</sup> see **Matthew 4:18-19**

<sup>7</sup> see **Exodus 12:15, 19**

the Jew was forbidden to eat *leavened or yeast risen* bread for seven days<sup>8</sup>. This was considered a *holy feast unto the Lord* so no executions could be accomplished. Herod, dog that he was, still honored the Jewish feasts lest he cause an uprising. This was not a coincidence, but God - and not Herod - was in control! The Scripture says:

**Psalms 84:11-12 (KJV) "For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. {12} O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee."**

Peter was thrown into prison to wait out the seven days of *unleavened bread* - then Herod expected to kill Peter.

Listen Beloved: it's not about Peter, and it's not about Herod either. It's all about Jesus! The sooner you learn this, the easier your life gets. Herod thought he was in charge. He seized Peter, had him bound in chains, and put what the King James calls "**four quaternions**"<sup>9</sup> or *sixteen men* in charge of guarding him. Peter was covered up with guards.

And one angel freed him! We read:

**FOCAL Acts 12:7-10 (KJV) "And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the**

<sup>8</sup> see Exodus 12:15, 19

<sup>9</sup> tetradion {pronounced tet-rad'-ee-on}, A guard consisting of four soldiers (for among the Romans this was the usual number of the guard to which the custody of captives and prisoners was intrusted; two soldiers were confined with the prisoner and two kept guard outside). Four quaternions of soldiers would be used to guard one all night, one for each of the four night watches.

**prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. {8} And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. {9} And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. {10} When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him."**

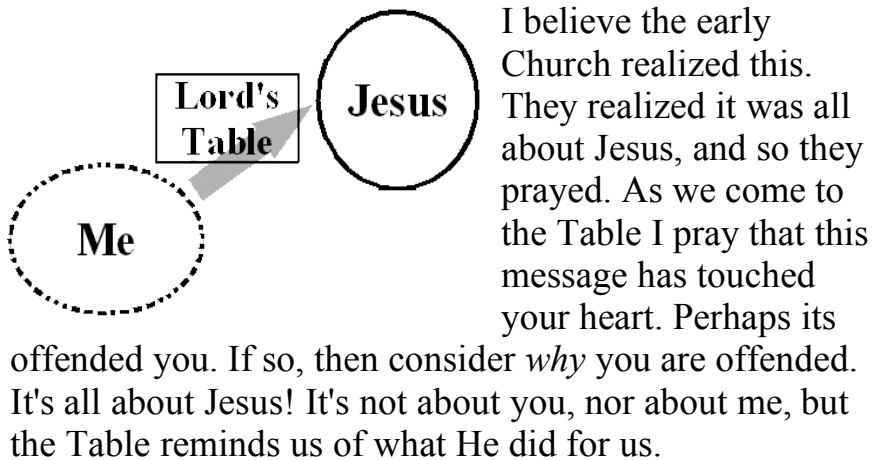
5. Human effort comes to nothing where Jesus is not in it. \_\_\_\_\_ men left to guard one prisoner, enough men to put men inside and outside the prison - and the Lord brought Peter unharmed past them all. Strong men bound Peter with chains, hammering the fetters in place - yet \_\_\_\_\_ caused them to fall off as if they were tissue paper.

**Human effort comes to nothing where Jesus is not in it. Sixteen men left to guard one prisoner, enough men to put men inside and outside the prison - and the Lord brought Peter unharmed past them all. Strong men bound Peter with chains, hammering the fetters in place - yet one Angel caused them to fall off as if they were tissue paper. An iron gate, well locked, we are told "opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street". Where God is, power is. Where Jesus is exalted, Herod is shamed!**

### 3. The Early Church Realized It's All About Jesus

**FOCAL** (Acts 12:5 KJV) "Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him."

Do you realize, as we come to the Lord's Table today, that everything revolves around our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Do you realize any success we have as a Church relies on us, as His Church, realizing it's all about Him. I do not matter in the eternal scheme of things, but what matters is that Christ be glorified, be magnified in all that I do.



The reason we exist and continue to exist as a Church is because of Jesus. No more, and no less. I encourage you to draw near to Him Who saved you, Who alone can prosper you, Who alone gives you life and eternal life.

Pray with me as we approach the Lord's Table.

