



## Acts – Can I get a Witness? Wk. 37 Fighting to Believe the Truth of God’s Glory By Pastor Jody May 06/11/2023

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### Acts 12:12-25 ESV

<sup>12</sup> When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. <sup>13</sup> And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. <sup>14</sup> Recognizing Peter’s voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. <sup>15</sup> 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!” <sup>16</sup> But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. <sup>17</sup> But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, “Tell these things to James and to the brothers.” Then he departed and went to another place.

<sup>18</sup> Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. <sup>19</sup> And 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.

### The Death of Herod

<sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. <sup>22</sup> And the people were shouting, “The voice of a god, and not of a man!” <sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> But the word of God increased and multiplied.

<sup>25</sup> And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.

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### [INTRODUCTION]

From Last week: **Deliverance** of God can lead you home, it can come miraculously, and it reveals His glory. When God delivers Grace many times the results are unbelievable, and they catch us off guard because we thought



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deliverance was unattainable, **because we believe** our lives are **undeserving**. **Being surprised** by God’s Grace is one of the ways that God reveals His glory, His Grace is always catching us off guard because it is so good, great, gracious, and yes glorious! AND that’s what makes living as a Christian sometimes so rewarding BECAUSE we are so amazed by Grace all the time!

### [ILLUSTRATION]

The year was 1987, a year earlier at 16 I had inherited my mom’s car, a 79 Monte Carlo, and as much as I liked that car, I loved my dad’s truck more. It was a 1985 Chevrolet Silverado Pickup and sometimes my dad would let me drive it to get gas, go by the *Farm store* and run errands. On this particular summer afternoon, I was getting on I-95 after a sun-shower that happens on a regular basis, in Miami in the early afternoon. At the 135<sup>th</sup> St. ramp I sped up to get on the highway and upon merging into the lane I lost control of my dad’s truck, spun the truck 360 and came to stop waiting for the CRASH! To my surprise when I opened my eyes and looked around there wasn’t a car in sight, I was in shock, I was in a state of **AMAZEMENT/UNBELIEF** and ever so slowly started to drive away.



I couldn’t believe it because life usually doesn’t work that way. I had already wrecked that Monte Carlo twice in one week a few months earlier, that taught me how life works: **Under normal circumstances something bad is usually going to happen** when life literally spins out of one’s control. And because of the statistics of something bad usually happening here’s the belief system I had generated and had come to rely on: **The worse will always happen because I am too miniscule for God to be concerned with.**

**I don’t believe in His attributes like omnipresence, immutableness/steadfastness, love: I don’t really buy Sovereignty.**

That’s why when something happens miraculously to us it usually creates a sense of awe, and shock, because it’s not how it usually works.

While it is easy for us to view the natural world through the lens of fallenness and Murphy’s Law, that is **not the only way** we are to respond to this life. We are to



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live aware that at any moment, for any reason, in any place, God will move without warning to accomplish His will. We are in fact to believe not only what we can see but we are to **walk by faith and not by sight** (2 Cor. 5:7).

On that day in that truck what looked like coincidence to everyone else I believe that I encountered the **Providential Grace of God**. God knew I would be at that place at that time, and knew if I didn’t die in a wreck on I-95 then I would die by the hand of my father on 113st. So, as you see, God intervened because He had planned work for me here in 2023! That all requires me to look at things a little different and when I start to believe that only bad things can happen, I need to remember even if they do, all is **Providentially ordained by God**. That means that God Sovereignly reigns with a purpose to bring Himself Glory, or the knowledge of His existence and that is, He is worthy to be praised!

In this next section in Acts what you will see this morning is a theme and that is people have a **hard time believing that God is Gracious to His church**. Even through the bad, He is bringing glory to Himself, but God’s people are still shocked when it happens! **Today my aim is to remind us all to never just believe only what you see or what you have learned, that only bad things happen in a fallen world, no, believe in the Providential Sovereign hand of God.**

### **The LBCF 1689 Chp. 5.7 Divine Providence**

*The providence of God in a general way includes **all creatures**, but in a **special way** it takes care of his church and arranges all things to its good.*

[1 Tim 4:10](#); [Amos 9:8](#); [Is 43:3-5](#)

Today we are looking at the reactions of people, and how those actions showed a disbelief in the Providence of God, **for some the consequence caused joy while for others it caused intense pain**: **The difference is that God’s children are rewarded by growing deeper in faith through their surprise at God’s Grace but those that oppose God are turned over to God’s wrath**. So today we are looking at **3 different responses** to God’s direct working in the lives of people - Awe of a Gracious God, then Anger at the acts of God, and then lastly the Affliction by the wrath of God. All results of disbelief in God’s Providential will to glorify Himself.



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**1. Amazed at the Grace of God**

<sup>12</sup>When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and **were praying**.  
<sup>13</sup>And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. <sup>14</sup>Recognizing Peter’s voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate.

So here we have a comical situation developing. Peter has just been sprung out of jail, miraculously by an angel under direct supervision of the prison guards. You thought the Epstein imprisonment was a scandal, that’s got nothing on this. Peter on run from the law comes to Mark’s house and this is important for our story. Mark’s house has a front gated entryway, means there was a courtyard/garden behind big doors, then on the other side of the courtyard are the main quarters that has now become one of the bases for the early church. All of this to point out this is rich real-estate that required servants. So, we have a house that is centrally located near the palace grounds near the temple, down the street from the jail on a street that was possibly lit and under the patrol of the local temple Herodian guards.

The disciples who are there are praying (v. 5 & 12), why? Well two of the 3 pillars of the church James, John, and Peter, had been jailed and James had been killed, and the other was waiting his turn. The church is facing one of her darkest moments, its’ not just that people are persecuted for their beliefs, it is the top level of leadership being **indicted on phony incredulous charges** by their **government**, and then are being put to death. In the middle of this dark night of the soul, Peter has escaped and is trying to get inside to those worried sick about him and is trying to get out of public sight.

Rhoda, a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation believer knows Peter, know his voice, don’t even have to see him, has probably been praying too, she hears his voice and instead of getting him off the **street she runs away!** Now let me speculate here but what would keep her from opening those doors? Here’s what I am thinking is going through her mind, **“It’s just too good to be true!”** Her amazement at the revealed Glory of God’s **Providence** shows that she may have forgotten/disbelieved that God could work in miraculous ways. So, she runs off to share the news.



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<sup>15</sup> 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!” <sup>16</sup> But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were **amazed**.

**AMAZED** - ἐξίστημι (*existēmi*), ἐξίσταμαι (*existamai*): vb.; ≡ Str 1839—**1**. LN 25.220 **astonish greatly**, amaze, astound (Lk 24:22; Ac 8:9+); ...**3**. LN 30.24 (dep.) **be insane**, **be out of one’s senses** (Mk 3:21; 2Co 5:13+)<sup>1</sup>

The disciples had just accused Rhoda of being crazy and now in turn **they’re the ones acting crazy**, because of the gift of what they had received. And it’s all heightened by the fact it’s **their Easter**, it’s Passover, the Providential Hand of God had delivered Jesus on the third day years ago on this day and now Peter had returned from death itself on the same day! They can’t take this in, they had not allowed for such hope to blossom.

<sup>17</sup> But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, “Tell these things to James and to the brothers.” Then he departed and went to another place.

Can you see this scene, Peter is shushing this group of crazed people, that have forgotten they are in the middle of the street during a prison break. Peter then makes their joy full and goes on to tell them indeed God directly had a hand in delivering him out of that jail, their prayers had been answered. Oh, the joy of knowing God hears you, that you have prayed rightly for God’s will, to discover that nothing happens without God’s divine attention and command. And in a flash, he’s gone again into night, like St. Nick delivering the joy of his gift of freedom to the believers.

**[PROBLEM to DISCUSS]**

It may be hard to believe this but **“hard to believe things” are “run of the mill” things for God.** Or to quote scripture:

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<sup>1</sup> Swanson, J. (1997). [\*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek \(New Testament\)\*](#) (electronic ed.). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.



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Matthew 19:26 ESV

*“With man this is impossible, but with God all things are **possible.**” - Jesus*

When you and I stop believing as the LBCF put it *“God arranges all things to the church’s’ good”*, If we give in to disbelief on how God works through His Providence, His direct intervention to accomplish things in our lives, then the danger is this: **unbelieving** people are **non-praying** people, unbelieving people are a **frozen people**, unbelieving people are a **disengaged people**. Let us instead replace those untruths with the truth of God’s Word:

**1 Timothy 4:10 ESV**

For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our **hope (not in what we see and feel)** set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

In other words, the Christian never stops believing, never stops praying, never stops living - for God is alive and, on the move, accomplishing the desires of His heart, and constantly saving His people from their sins, through the ongoing work of glorifying His Son! Remember Acts teaches us that things happen in the power of Jesus’ name because He’s alive!

People who remember this fact will **NEVER**:

- Stop praying for a spouse that needs to be saved by God, that needs a heart change, that needs emotional stability, because to them their God still saves!
- Stop praying for wayward children, friends, and relatives, because God moves in the prisons of people’s hearts to break the bondage to drugs, false ideologies, and sexual desires because their God still saves!
- Stop praying for a country that seems to have jumped into the hands of Hell, where the rights and safety of everyday citizens are discarded to make unjustified rights for the wicked, for the criminals, and for those seeking our destruction because God still saves!



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**We remember and we wait on the Lord:**

**Isaiah 40:31 ESV**

but they who wait for the LORD shall **renew their strength**; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

**AND when we wait on the Lord, we will also see the justice of God played out, for those that also have a hard time believing in the Providence of God.**

**2. Angered by the Acts of God**

<sup>18</sup> Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. <sup>19</sup> And 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.

This story is not so funny. There is a big ruckus over what had happened to Peter. Why? Because Herod had been building his political persona on how to persecute the church. To understand this, you have to know his political world in which he lived.

You see Herod had spent a lot of time trying to earn the favor of the Romans, for he grew up in Rome, went to school there, and even spent time with Cesar’s family, so he had commitments, and he had their favor. He had also spent time developing loyalties and the favor of the Jews by appealing to their misplaced religious fervor. So, on one side he has the **Romans** who are all about **politics** to protect the **capitalist ventures** of that day, and on the other side you have Jews or the **religious zealots** that are willing to make everyone suffer to keep peace and keep power. **Herod’s scheme is picking on the people that are in neither camp and makes them the scapegoat.** By picking on those that are for capitalism but not for emperor idolatry, and picking on those that pay no heed to the religious demands of the Jews, Herod has built his policies on **people pleasing**, does this at all sound familiar to you?



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Well, here we go, so both the Romans and the Jews are looking at Herod like a fool when Peter is found missing, he’s fallen short and so he starts the **blame game**. Politicians never ever take the blame, it’s always someone else’s fault, especially if you’re dependent on people to like you. He then blames the guards but in that day a failure of this magnitude means capital punishment.

Herod’s pride now has permanently hardened his heart and just like Pharaoh he **refuses to see God’s Providential hand** in the supernatural deliverance and growth of the church. If he does so, if he repents, he loses his favor with man.

The guards **learned a hard lesson** that day, it doesn’t matter how much you support the modern trends, it doesn’t matter how brutal you are in carrying out your superiors’ wishes (James), **it only takes one failure**, and everyone turns on you! That’s because lost people cannot replicate the Grace of God.

All American Beer companies like **Budweiser** learned the hard way when they tried to support transgenderism, and they lost billions in profit. Middle class and Gen Z superstore **Target** moves less-offensive items to please everyone, then the LGBTQ groups turned on them and called them homophobic even when they have lost over 15 billion to bend over backwards to please them.

America’s superstore for penny pinchers, **Walmart**, closed stores as in Chicago because of theft and losing billions in the city environments, and then are labelled Racist just this past week.

Lesson to learn: you cannot protect yourself, you cannot live in peace, you cannot just make an easy profit, **“we all just can’t get along” if you’re going to play the game of people pleasing! Why? Hell lacks the ability** to make its’ people forgiving, because that’s Christ-like. The spirit of **Antichrist** is what rules our current day and the **spirit of the Devil** is all about **vengeance, blame and hate**.

The only thing you get when you virtue signal to this world is ulcers and worry for at some point you will discover it is never enough for the world always competes with itself for your attention, your commitment, and your love and that’s **called idolatry**. The world continues to ignore God’s Providential hands in all things to bring about His Kingdom and in the end, we are told, all old ways of governance





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will bend a knee to King Jesus, and that makes people so Angry that they will persecute those around them. Even then when rulers still refuse to believe God is Providentially working in this world, there is only one fate...

### 3. Afflicted by the Wrath of God

<sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. <sup>22</sup> And the people were shouting, “The voice of a god, and not of a man!”

Herod runs away, he goes on a political tour, a trip, he retreats to his camp David. He leaves behind his guilt, and he leaves behind his failures, and he looks to boost his ego. The next on the chopping block to be used as a scapegoat are the people of Tyre and Sidon. He has them over a barrel, they owe money, and they have no way of feeding their populations well, they are dependent on the grain from Galilee. So, Herod’s people set up this photo opp., that was actually recorded by the historian Josephus as well.

We are told by the historian Josephus, that Herod shows up in a **silver gown**, some type of material that reflects light, he’s a walking disco ball. The suck-ups of Tyer and Sidon exclaim about the majesty of Herod when he began an oration – *public address, political posturing, a written speech to look good*, that his voice was the voice of a god not man! Does Herod correct them, does he tell them to stop, no because his ego needs feeding, and it becomes his doom.

<sup>23</sup> 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.

Josephus gives the unpoetic side of this story. Herod immediately, on that day, suffered severe bowel pains and was removed from the court. Then over five days he cried out in agony from some type of intestinal disorder and then died. He became **food for worms**. The hunt for people pleasing, the recklessness of hurting others that did not help him along in his quest to be adored, it got him agony and



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death before his time. And now he will still have to face the true King, Jesus, in judgment one day for his failed policies and wicked heart, along with his family.

The Amazement of the church, the anger of Herod, and the affliction of those that failed to see God’s Providential hands in all things produces what it always does:

**[GOSPEL]**

**<sup>24</sup> But the word of God increased and multiplied.**

The church learned not to doubt that anything good can happen even in time of persecution but learned to never stop praying. The guards learned the hard lesson of trusting people pleasers around you for that leads to being thrown under the bus. Herod learned that God will not share His glory with anyone else (Isaiah 42:8). What are we learning today church from these examples when it comes to how we fight our disbelief that God will be active in His glory revealing?

**[CHALLENGE]**

**1. We pray continually, and we expect the best for the Kingdom.**

**1 Thes 5:16-19**

<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. <sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit.

- a. We continue to pray for our loved ones and our nation.
- b. We continue to believe God can do the impossible.
- c. We continue to pray together and record the results.

**2. We commit to staying away from societal fads/trends and move deeper into our spiritual community.**

**Col 3:23**

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and **not for men**

- a. We commit to befriending better in this church to encourage and be encouraged.
- b. We commit to shutting out those things that promote antichrist messaging.



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- c. We commit to spending more time in growing the church than experiencing this world.

**3. We praise man less, and glorify God more.**

**Gal 1:10**

For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

- a. We give God praise in whatever community you’re in.
- b. We give God praise when people try to uplift others.
- c. We give God praise when people try to steal His glory.

**[PRAYER]**

**[COMMUNION]**

**[BENEDICTION]**

Go in the name of the Father, that Providently *takes care of his church and arranges all things to its good (LBCF).*

Go in the name of the Son, that reveals the Glory of God in His life, death, and resurrection and in His church.

Go in the name and power of the Holy Spirit, that will always keep you amazed at God steering you away from people pleasing, now go and share this good news.