

Don't Be a Herod

Acts 12:18-24

This past week ended up being pretty wild and chaotic- crazy amounts of rain, tornado warnings, a school board meeting discussing masks, schools starting up, but then getting immediately shut down because of flooding- we're already living in a generally stressful season of history, and this week was probably one that could have escalated for many that stress. Now, there's many scriptures we could look to, to help us remain centered and rooted in Jesus, in encouraging us how to positively react to the stresses of our environment. A verse that often comes to my mind is [Philippians 4:6-7](#) "*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*" For me, it's helpful to remind myself not to be anxious, but to take all my concerns to God along with thanks to Him, and ask that He would honor this promise that His peace would guard my heart and mind in Jesus. I also think of [1 John 5:5](#) "*Who is the one who overcomes the world, but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*" It's helpful to remind myself that God's word says I will eventually have victory and be an overcomer, because of my persevering faith and belief in the work of Jesus.

Now hopefully you have some promises, some verses that you cling to, that you remind yourself of when you find your emotions getting out of hand, or your stress level increasing, so that you can be reminded of what you *should* do in these situations. But sometimes we also need to be reminded of what we should *not* do in these emotional, stressful situations. We often learn what not to do in life as a result of our *own* mistakes, and this is good- but what's even better is learning what not to do by watching *others* make mistakes. Yes, much wisdom can be gained from watching Funniest Home Videos, right? Raise your hand if you learned what not to do by *personally* sticking something in an electric outlet. Raise your hand if you learned what not to do by watching, or hearing of someone *else* stick something in an electric outlet. This morning, I encourage you to learn from the mistakes made by someone else, a man known as king Herod. We're going to note some characteristics he displayed in a stressful environment that ultimately lead to his death- characteristics we must be alert to avoid in our own lives as we face stressful environments.

Now, in this passage I'm referring to Herod Agrippa I. There are several "Herods" mentioned in the Bible, each related to one another by blood. There's Herod the Great, who interacted with the wise men around the time of Jesus' birth, who sought to kill Jesus by mandating that all male children in the Bethlehem vicinity two years old and under be killed. Then there's his son Herod Antipas, who was ruling as king when Jesus began His ministry, who had John the Baptizer arrested and killed, and who was part of Jesus' trial and crucifixion. His nephew was Herod Agrippa I, the Herod we are looking at this morning, who ruled from 41-44 AD; so this gives you a little time perspective on where we are in history in this place in the book of Acts- roughly 10-15 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. Later we'll see another Herod, Herod Agrippa II who witnessed Paul being put on trial in Caesarea. But right now we're looking at Herod Agrippa I, and before we look to our passage in Acts, I want to bring your attention to the stress he was feeling. King Herod was in the precarious position of being a Jew employed by Rome to keep things calm, peaceful, and orderly during the unrest that occurred as a result of this man Jesus. The religious leaders and others had formed mobs, things had gotten out of control as they stoned Steven, Jesus-followers were being hunted down and dragged from their homes, yet... miracles had been taking place, and no matter what pressure was applied, these Jesus-followers continued to defy orders and kept boldly sharing about Jesus. Things were divided; there was much unrest. Life was not easy for a leader who had to keep Rome happy *and* the Jewish people happy at the same time. And so, let's look at how king Herod *unhealthily* dealt with the stress. Let's first revisit the beginning of the passage Pastor Dave walked us through last week, [verses 1-3 of Acts 12](#)...

Herod, in this stressful environment, decides maybe the peace would be best kept if he cracks down harder on the people who are getting the religious leaders all riled up. So, he puts in jail some more church people, and seemingly even without trial, has James killed with a sword. This isn't just some random dude, this is *James*, brother of John, one of the 12 disciples, one of the guys who had been the closest to Jesus- in Jesus' inner circle. And note what this in effect did- [verse 3](#)- it pleased the people. It pleased the religious Jews who had grown to hate this new group of people now known as "Christians." Because it pleased the people, Herod thought it a good idea to arrest Peter and perhaps do the same thing to him. Now the outcome of James, very well could have been the outcome of Peter, but note [verse 5](#)- "*but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.*" That word fervently means they were praying *passionately* and *intensely*- there

was a burning in their hearts to cry out to God for His intervention. And as we saw last week, God in His goodness answered their fervent prayers and miraculously rescued Peter. As a side note, I think there's probably a good lesson for us concerning prayer in seeing the church's ironic response to God answering their fervent prayers- they told the little girl who had seen Peter that she was out of her mind. ([verse 15](#)) They didn't believe her. Just make a quick note to self that if you're going to pray fervently for something, be looking for signs of how God might be *unexpectedly* answering your prayers. Because that is often how He works. He very often answers prayers in the ways we least expect, and I believe we often miss the fact that He has indeed answered our prayers.

But back to king Herod- what I want you to notice in these first 3 verses of chapter 12, is that in this stressful environment, Herod was reacting not according to logic, not according to facts being sought out and discovered, not according to what was right or wrong, not even according to a personal conviction- Herod allowed his actions to be dictated by opinions and pleasures of others. Now, the Bible commands us in [Romans 12:18](#) "*If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.*" While we are to do our best to promote peace, we as followers of Jesus cannot live our lives striving to please others. Paul says it like this "*For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.*" ([Gal. 1:10](#)) In the book of Proverbs we find: "*The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted.*" ([Prov. 29:25](#)) Throughout the Bible, scripture after scripture, we are warned not to live our lives or make decisions based on what others around us think, but rather solely on what God thinks. We are to look to His word, His teaching, His truth, and live to please Him alone. As soon as a stressful situation causes you or I to drift from what the Bible clearly says, that is the moment when confusion starts to settle in, with potential of leading us down a pathway that in the end leads to destruction and death. Don't be a Herod. In the stress, don't look for other's approval.

After Peter was rescued by the angel of the Lord, Herod found himself in additional stress. Let's read today's passage in its entirety, [verses 18-24](#), and then we'll walk back through it step by step...

Alright, so we're looking at how not to be a Herod, and we've already noted that in the stress, don't look for other's approval. Verses 18 and 19 here are going to

give us a couple more ways to learn from Herod's mistakes and aim not to do what he did. [Verse 18](#)... "No small disturbance" is the Biblical way of saying, there was a very *large* disturbance- people were freaking out! Back up in [verse 6](#) we are told Peter was chained up with two chains, in-between two soldiers, locked in a cell with guards at the door. [Verse 4](#) tells us that ultimately there were four squads of soldiers assigned to guard him. It was a big deal to Herod for Peter to all of a sudden be missing. It caused quite a stir amongst the soldiers and all eyes had to have been on Herod. So, what does he do in this moment of stress, as people are calling on him to make sense of the situation? [Verse 19](#)...

Packed in this verse are two different examples of what *not* to do in reaction to stressful circumstances. Number one, notice how quick Herod is to blame and hold someone else accountable, how quick he is to punish and throw someone else under the bus. He ordered that the guards be executed. Was it the guards' fault that Peter was missing? No. *Herod* made the decision to arrest Peter, influenced by the pleasure of the people, and when God disrupted the situation, Herod was quick to judge and cast guilt on someone other than himself. All around us, we see the blame shifting, and it is very rare these days to see someone take responsibility for their own actions. Yet, at the very core of the gospel is the foundational idea that in order to receive Jesus' forgiveness, in order to receive eternal life, in order to follow Him and His teaching- we have to take responsibility for our own actions. We have to realize our mistakes, our sins, the ways in which we miss the mark- and we have to humbly admit to God that we need His forgiveness and salvation. And that humble attitude of admittance, repentance, confession- is not to stop after the moment of receiving Jesus. No, we as His followers are to live in that humility as a *lifestyle*. We are to be quick to own things, apologize, and make things right. We are to do what we can do personally, to change *ourselves* rather than attempting to change *others*. We aren't to seek revenge, that is reserved for God. We aren't to be a judge, that position is reserved for God. Don't be a Herod. In the stress, don't be quick to blame others.

Then notice what Herod does next in the remainder of [verse 19](#), he leaves the palace in Jerusalem where all the stress is, and goes to Caesarea. In Caesarea was another palace, right on the Mediterranean coast. In fact, much of its remains still stand today. It's right on the beach overlooking the water, and there are large corrals for horse and chariot racing- it was kind of like a vacation/ entertainment

palace. Now there's nothing wrong with taking a vacation, and often it might be wise and best to remove yourself out from the place that is causing the stress, but I think rather what's happening here is that perhaps Herod is running from the problem, attempting to ignore and escape the situation that God would rather him face directly. Here was an opportunity for Herod to dig deeper, to search for truth, to ask the right questions- hopefully leading him to the conclusion that these Christians served a living, powerful, miraculous God who has revealed Himself to mankind through the resurrected Jesus. But no... he chose to run from, and ignore the opportunities that might have led to this conclusion.

In whatever stressful situation you might find yourself, don't be tempted to just "check out." Don't just put it on autopilot. Ask the questions: What is God wanting you to learn through the circumstance? How is He wanting you to react? Is He building your character in some way? How might He be wanting to work in the lives of those around you through the situation? Don't be a Herod. In the stress, don't run from and ignore what God wants you to face. [Verses 20 and 21...](#)

It seems that even in the Caesarean vacation palace, Herod was not able to truly avoid stress, but rather he was just confronted with yet another stressful situation. Two northern areas, outside of Israel- Tyre and Sidon, which would today be in modern Lebanon- these two areas were dependent on the hand of Rome in Israel for their food supply. We don't know all the details, but it appears that there was some sort of conflict, some way in which the trade agreement was not functioning correctly, and the people of Tyre and Sidon united in their common frustration, and had won the favor of one of Herod's own leaders. I'm sure this isn't something Herod wanted to be bothered with, [verse 20](#) tells us he was very angry with these people. This situation made him *angry*. Now anger is a response we often see from within ourselves or from others in stressing times, but anger in itself is not a negative, sinful response. Anger is a neutral emotion that can be acted upon for good (in Godly ways) or for bad (in sinful ways). Often anger is the emotion vehicle through which God's people seek to right wrongs, stop injustices, or stand up for what is right. So even in Herod's anger, there was opportunity for him to tune into the Lord's work, to respond correctly to the Lord, and thus be used greatly by the Lord.

But this is not what takes place. I can imagine him rolling over from sunning on the beach and reluctantly, frustratingly- in anger- scheduling an official time for

him to answer and deal with this issue. So, whenever the date and time arrives, perhaps beforehand he rinses off the salt and sand in one the luxurious bath houses, then gets on all his official, royal, fancy attire- and I'm kind of picturing king Julian in Madagascar- he's like "let the peasants gather round to hear the great oracles of king Herod." We don't know exactly what he said, but it appears whatever speech he delivered sounded wise and authoritative because in verse 22 we are told... ([verses 22-23](#))

This was the last straw, even the patience of God has a limit. And it's interesting to note that perhaps Herod didn't *himself* proclaim any connection to deity, rather the last straw was that he didn't refute what *others* were saying about him, in order to give the credit to God. Pride can definitely eat at you from within, in this case Herod was *literally eaten from within* as a result of his pride. Through the supernatural working of miracles Jesus performs in the New Testament, He points to the future reality of His kingdom. God's display of power illustrates the coming reality for those who trust in Him. This supernatural working of Herod's death also points to a future reality, it illustrates the coming reality for those who pridefully reject God.

Now, most of us probably learned at an early age that bragging is not something good to do, but most of us probably enjoy it when *someone else* brags on us. We're like, "it's not pride if someone else said it," right? There's nothing wrong with giving or receiving a compliment and giving or receiving thanks where thanks is due, but very quickly- if we're not careful- a line can be crossed where we start to elevate men and women or ourselves, and we ascribe a greatness to someone that should only be ascribed to God. We should be careful in justifying our words, our actions, our deeds, our viewpoints- careful not to become puffed up and proud of what we've said, where we stand, what we've done, or what we think. Especially in stressful life situations, it can become easy to blame others for all the bad, but then to take credit for whatever good there might be. Don't be a Herod. In the stress, don't react with pride. [Verse 24...](#)

Here's the thing. With or without you and me, God is going to work and move and spread His good news. The advancement of His kingdom will not be stopped. You nor I, nor any other person, organization, politician, famous person, government can prevent Him from bringing about His Kingdom- and along with it- blessings for God's people. But instead of standing in the way of Kingdom work, by seeking the

approval of men rather than the approval of God, standing in the way by passing the blame on others, standing in the way by running from and ignoring what God wants you to face, or standing in the way by reacting with pride- instead may we be vessels God can use and work through for the building of his Kingdom and for the encouragement of His church.