

# Acts 12:20-25 It's all about the Glory of God

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Let's open up God's word this morning to Acts 12:20

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Last week we looked at cultivating a culture of prayer and this week we pick up the story of the early church with a lesson that the whole world needs to see and know.

But before we turn there, I want to say that whenever we turn to the bible it is a dangerous thing we do, because it shows us God in all his love, holiness, judgment and glory and it shows us our need for his love, holiness and what he has done for us so that we can avoid his judgment and truly live for his glory. But it doesn't happen automatically.

We can often choose to take up the good bits of the bible and overlook or even try to re-interpret what we might consider to be the bad bits.

There was one pastor in the US who many years ago made a conscious decision to not talk about all the so called bad bits like sin & judgment but to emphasize only God's love.

You know if we did that we would only get half of the story and while it would be the sort of thing we might like to hear, the reality is that in the long run it is not very helpful, because it is not very truthful.

How many of you have purchased a second hand car?  
How often have you felt that you may not be getting the full story?  
How many of you have bought a second hand car only to find out that it was not all that it was meant to as the sales person said it should?

We need to hear truth rather than silence.

Albert Einstein said that "the world is a dangerous place not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing."

For those of us who teach the bible and all of us who read and study the bible, we have to grapple with both the good and what we might consider the bad of the bible.

If we don't we get a distorted picture of God, a distorted picture of ourselves and a distorted picture of the world around us.

Now to the scriptures and we pick up the story of Herod coming under God's judgment. You might remember that it was Herod who had the first of the 12 disciples killed by

the sword and then because he saw that it pleased the Jews he was then going after Peter, but through the prayers of the church Peter was miraculously rescued from prison.

### **Acts 12:20-25**

**20 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.**

We don't know why Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon but they were out to make peace with him as without the king's favour food for their people could literally dry up.

**21 On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them.**

**22 And the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!"**

Now it appears that because of their desire to get in the king's 'good book' they praised him up after he had delivered his speech. This was no doubt genuine praise for a great speech, but it went over the top into full on flattery and we will see that the king had a choice at this point in time in regard to how he handled this flattery.

**23 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.**

Unfortunately we see that he made the wrong choice and instead of giving glory to God, he absorbed this praise and glory and kept it for himself and as a result incurred God's judgment.

### **Isaiah 48:11b**

My glory I will not give to another.

Now we might think that this was a harsh judgment of God and we may even say that a God of love wouldn't do that, but honestly the text says that an angel of the Lord struck him down. God did this.

Does this mean that God is a nasty God? Not at all, God is a holy God and will not let sin go unpunished.

The good news is that God determined that his son would absorb this judgment for whoever would believe, but unfortunately king Herod who had already killed James

and was about to kill Peter was receiving the judgment that will come to all who refuse to accept the love of God that was displayed in the death and resurrection of Jesus

This is the one thing that is of crucial importance in life - who will you give glory to?

Will it be God or will it be you?

As humans we are not designed for fame and glory although deep down in our hearts there is always something crying out for these things.

Time and time again we see that when people rise to fame, there will always be those who have first of all put them there and secondly there will always be the famous themselves who refuse to remain humble by recognizing that all the fame they have is a gift to be used wisely.

We are seeing Charlie Sheen virtually imploding at the moment due to the fame that he has from his television series Two and a Half Men of which he gets paid 1.8 million dollars an episode.

With great fame comes great responsibility.

Only God in his perfection is worthy of all fame honour and glory and when we give him the glory due to his name we actually find that we are at our most content and grow in our faith toward God own lives

**Romans 4:20b**

but he (Abraham) grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,

**24 But the word of God increased and multiplied.**

With great persecution often comes great increase and this was the case when these courageous disciples risked all for the sake of God's glory and many of them suffered the loss of their lives as a result - but the word of God increased and multiplied.

I had a phone call this week from a friend who is leading a new church in Craigeburn and he was asking me for some advice about a problem that he had the previous weekend where a street gang from a surrounding suburb came across and got into a full on fight with their Friday night outreach to the youth in their area. The called the police and did all the right things from the perspective of the Law, but it did shake them up a bit and they were considering their options.

The gang also came back on the Sunday and while they didn't cause any trouble they were outside the building in an attempt to intimidate the church.

The first thing that came to my mind was that the early church often faced opposition but it was during this opposition that people's faith grew and the world around them stood up and took notice.

The advice I gave him backed up what he was already feeling and that was first to not give up, but to discuss with the police what they can do and secondly to get the church together and assure them that they were doing all they could and that they as a church they needed to pray and have faith that God would act.

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

After all of this persecution and death Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem where they had taken the collection for the poor and they were on their way back to Antioch which coincidentally was just before the Holy Spirit called them to continue the work of spreading the message out across the Mediterranean Sea to new places and people who had not heard it before.

They could have shrunk back from spreading what was becoming an increasingly dangerous message, but as we will see next time they were determined to bring God glory by being faithful to what he had asked them to do.

I just want to finish off with one final encouragement for us as a church.

This week a number of the pastors from churches around Australia and New Zealand got together here in Melbourne and we heard and spent some time with a young guy from the US called John Bishop.

He has one of the fastest growing churches in the US and has written his first book called *Dangerous Church* and of this book Brian Houston has written.

A dangerous church is a church that is alive, full of the lost and broken, a generous church that takes risks. It is a church that is willing to be exposed to misunderstanding and persecution for the sake of the gospel.

While John was with us he challenged us to really look out for people who don't know Jesus and used the illustration of how he lost his luggage one time on a trip and a guy from the airline tried to make light of it by saying that luggage gets lost all the time, but John replied yeah, this is my luggage and I want it back.

God is the same with the many people who are lost - he wants them back. Jesus said that I have come to seek and to save that which is lost.

He said to us are we willing to risk everything to reach everyone?

Some of the other things he said to us that particularly hit home were:

- Don't be good at doing church for those who love church
- Be a dangerous church
- Go make disciples of all nations
- The Apostle Paul would struggle to get a job in any church in the US or Australia
- Stop trying to protect your image
- Hold onto your plans super loosely. Head in a direction and allow God to determine the steps
- We need to have our faith look foolish so that it intersects with God's faithfulness
- Be predictable and unpredictable in your meetings
- Be desperate for the lost
- You can't expect people to do what you are not willing to do - that is called hypocrisy
- Give generously, sacrificially
- We are salt and light first before we are pastors
- Are you willing to risk
- We are so focused on minimizing failure
- Where do you put your time and where do you put your money?
- The balance sheet is about people not dollars
- Right thing Right reason Right result
- Do people in your church invite people?
- Do you invite people?

I am feeling quite challenged for our church to be a dangerous church, one that accepts people where they are at with all their problems and issues and addictions so that they can see up close how Jesus has transformed our lives and to give them the same opportunity that we have had and to allow Jesus to do the same in their lives.

Will you join me in that?

Let's pray.