

## Facing Death

Acts 12

### Intro

If you're like me, it's a little difficult to think about your own death and the death of people who are close to you. It's almost like my mind has this little defense mechanism. When I start to think about it, my mind quickly bounces away from the thought. In this great text we're looking at this morning, we going to see two ways to face death. And our text is going to show us how we can not only think about death, but face it with confidence, peace, and hope.

### Facing death in Christ

Herod – Agrippa the 1<sup>st</sup> – Grandson of Herod the Great (king when Jesus was born), and nephew to Herod Antipas (king at the time of Jesus') death

- Laid violent hands on some who belonged to the Church
- He killed James (brother of John) with the sword
- He arrested Peter

We're not told very much about James' death other than it was by the sword, meaning he was beheaded.

Tradition says that before he was killed, the soldier that was guarding him was converted and became a Christian. Upon James' death the soldier professed his faith in Christ and was beheaded along side James.

### ***The Church was moved to earnest prayer...***

Peter – v6 – On the very night before Herod brought him out – meaning, Peter was more than likely going to be put to death the next day.

God, through an angel, miraculously rescues Peter (all these details we're given)

v6 – Sleeping between two soldiers, chained to them (chains fell off when the Angel woke him)

v7-9 – The Angel is giving Peter all these instructions

v10 – As the angel is leading Peter past the first and second sets of guards, the gate opens on its own

Peter shows up at the house where, it looks like in the middle of the night, the church is gathered praying

If you're the kind of person who has trouble believing in Angels and miracles and all this stuff, just look, Peter and the church are having a hard time believing all this is really happening too.

Question – what do we make of the fact that God went to all this trouble to rescue Peter, while he left James to slaughtered by Herod? Where was God the night before James was martyred? Do you honestly think that James was praying before he died?

### *Three choices*

Bad things happen, therefore there is no God

Bad things happen, and God sympathizes with us when they do but he's either unwilling or unable to help us

There's the Christian view – God is on his throne, and he is in control, and nothing happens in the life of his children except what he allows for our good and his glory.

Romans 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Here's the reason sometimes we struggle to accept the biblical view. We tend to only want to accept that God is in control of our bad circumstances if we can understand the reasons. But that can't possibly be true. Nothing is true or false based on your ability to understand it.

So, imagine the worst possible thing happens.

Imagine Jesus calls your child home to be with him (that's going to mean incredible pain for your family)

Your child is with Jesus

The loss of that child moves hundreds or thousands of people closer to Christ

Many people come to faith in Christ because of your child's death

Your loss and your pain lead you deeper into Christ than would ever have been possible before

Because of your pain and the way it has led you to closer to the heart of God, now you are incredibly equipped to love others who walk through the darkest moments of their lives with them, and now it's you leading them deeper into Christ

And this doesn't even begin to address the ripple effects of the millions of things God is doing in these circumstances.

My experience at the Pitney's (home Bible study)

Prayer, thanking God for his goodness in sparing me and my mom. "You would still be just as good if this had ended differently."

Tim Keller – "God will only give you what you would have asked for if you knew everything he knows."

Look at how Peter faced death – It's the night before he's going to be executed and he's asleep!

He's sleeping so deeply that the angel has to strike him to wake him up (harder than waking your kids up for church on Sun morning)

The whole thing's over and Peter woke up and said, "Hey, I just got rescued by an angel!"

How can Peter, and how can you and I get a peaceful night's sleep when we're dying the next day.

How can we face death with peace and hope.

The Christian view of death. All of those who face death in Christ have nothing to fear.

According to the Bible, what happens when we die?

Our soul separates from our body – Your consciousness (awareness), the part of you that thinks and knows and feels emotions. And where does our soul go? Our soul goes straight to Heaven where Christ is, so that for the Christian our last breath in this life is our first breath in the arms of Jesus.

Thief on the cross

Luke 23:43 And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

2 Corinthians 5:6-8 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Psalms 116:15 Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.

What about leaving our loved ones?

Jerry Jr. – Who's going to take care of my kids? "Who do you think has been taking care of them so far?"

Urgency of the gospel for those who don't know Christ

The key to facing death with peace is, 1. to be in Christ, 2. resting in God's perfect sovereignty, 3. and clinging to the biblical view of death.

## **Facing death outside Christ (or as the enemy of Christ)**

Caesarea

A public assembly

Put on royal robes

Josephus – robe of interwoven silver that glistened in brilliance when the sun shone on it.

Herod gives a speech

The people began shouting

“The voice of a god, and not a man!”

Immediately

An angel of the Lord struck him down

Why?

Because he did not give God the glory

Interesting description –

v. 23 He was eaten by worms...

I don't think this is accidental or coincidental.

Isaiah 14:11-15 Your pomp is brought down to Sheol, the sound of your harps; ***maggots are laid as a bed beneath you, and worms are your covers.*** 12 "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! 13 You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' 15 But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.

Jesus' description of Hell

Mark 9:47-48 And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 48 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'

Here's what the Bible is telling us, that living for our own glory is not only selfish and moronic but it puts us on the fast track to dying like Herod and spending an eternity in a bed of maggots. The fruit of living for anything other than the glory of Christ and his kingdom is a hellish future.

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

We should not be surprised that Herod was struck dead, We should be surprised that people are not struck dead every day for not giving God the glory.

Romans 2:4 Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

We are all facing death. As we stand here today, every one of us is facing death. The only question is are we facing death in Christ or are we facing death like Herod, as Christ's enemy.

The story of Amazing Grace is that for every sinner who has fallen short of God's glory but will turn to this Christ, they find that Jesus has already faced the death that we deserved. He faced our death and swallowed up our hellish future so that you and I can face death as a doorway that leads to his loving arms.