

Fellowship Group Notes - Acts 12:1-24 – 23/24 April

There are many 'theme' lessons to learn in this passage. You might like to look at all of them, or perhaps just focus on one in more depth.

1. God's ever working sovereignty and providence in action

- Firstly what do 'sovereignty' and 'providence' mean? (Daniel 4:35)
- How do we see God's sovereignty and providence in action in this passage? And how do we perhaps see people trusting in God's sovereignty and providence? *Examine the key examples below.*
 - **James death**
 - Isn't God losing the game? Hasn't he just given away a penalty to the other side?
 - Why did God save Peter later and not James?
 - *Well why didn't God save Stephen? (Who witnessed Stephen's death which stuck with him later in life? Acts 7:58, 8:1, 22:20)*
 - *Tertullian (early Christian defender of the faith): "We multiply whenever we are mown down by you; the blood of Christians is the seed of the church"*
 - **Peters escape**
 - How do we see God's sovereignty and providence in action through Peter's escape? Do we see or *recognise* God's sovereignty in practice today? Is Peter trusting in God's sovereignty?
 - *We often see Peter as a 'hapless', 'go get'em' character – but what does it say about him that he was sleeping (v6)? Is he simply consigned to his death? Or is his confidence in God's sovereignty and providence?*
 - *How can we practically trust God's sovereignty and providence today? Do we need to trust Him more?*
 - **The Gospel prevails**
 - How is v24 a 'theme' verse of the book of Acts?

2. Two powers – Herod vs. God

- What does Herod seem to be fuelled by? (v1-3, 21-22)
 - Why is pride such a bad thing? Why is pride the 'root of all sin'? What did Herod think of himself? (v21-22).
 - Richard Sibbes: "Such was the pride of man, that he, being man, would exalt himself to be like God"
 - John Owen: "there is nothing that God abhors more than an elation of mind in the forgetfulness of our mean, frail condition. "You say" said he to the proud prince of Tyre "I am a God, I sit on the throne of a God" (Ezekiel 28:2)... When Herod prided himself in the acclamations of the vain multitude ("This is a voice of a God, not of a man") the angel of the Lord immediately filled that 'god' with worms which devoured him. There is indeed nothing more effective to degrade the prideful thoughts of men than a due remembrance that they are but men. Psalm 9:20: "Strike them with terror, O Lord; let the nations know they are but men".
- How do we see that God is much greater than Herod? How does God foil Herod's plans?

3. Prayer and the sovereignty of God

- We've seen through this passage that God is sovereign and providential. We've also seen that believers were praying for Peter.
- So why pray if God is sovereign/providential? Flip the question upside down... Why pray if God is *not* sovereign? Why pray if God is *not* all wise? What would be the point in praying to a *not* all powerful, all wise, all sovereign God? What could He possibly do?
- So why do we pray to our sovereign and providential God? *Discuss the quote below and the following bible passages.*
 - Bruce Ware - "God has devised prayer as a means of enlisting us as participants in the work he has ordained, as part of the outworking of his sovereign rulership over all... The relationship between divine sovereignty and petitionary prayer can be stated by this word: *participation.*"
 - Look at Romans 10:14-15 and Jeremiah 1:5. What means does our sovereign God choose to spread his Word?
 - Thinking of what Bruce Ware says, 'enlisting us as participants in the work he has ordained'... How does God enlist us in participation with his ordained work of preaching and evangelism? How is this the same for prayer?
 - We see in this passage that God is 100% sovereign and he works 100% of his sovereignty through us as his means.

Additional notes

- v1 – this is Herod the Great (The Herod of Jesus' time) grandson. He was a powerful and successful King who was very anxious to hold on to his power (hence his forcefulness with stamping out anybody who got in his way)
- v2, v17 – James x2. James in v2 is one of the apostles, James in v17 is the brother of Jesus.

Pray – Thank God for who He is, pray for us that we might remember just how sovereign and providential God is, pray for current church news