

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

R₂L – Resolved to Live: To the Glory of God

Acts 12:19-25

19 When Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away to execution. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there. 20 Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one accord they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king's country. 21 On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them. 22 The people kept crying out, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" 23 And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died. 24 But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied. 25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.

What is the Bible about? Some would say the Bible is the story of redemption from start to finish; that it is about how God loves and saves mankind from sin. Such a theme is about salvation and to be sure, the Bible is about how God rescues humanity through His Son Jesus Christ. Some theologians thus believe that the key theme or purpose of the Bible soteriological. That big word is from the Greek word for salvation, “*soteria*”. You know how theologians love their big words.

But is this the key theme of Scripture, “salvation.” From start to finish, is the Bible’s key purpose to get us to see the salvation of God? Do not get me wrong, that theme is beautifully interwoven throughout the Scriptures. But I am not convinced that this is Scripture’s key theme.

Now others would say that the Bible is about Jesus, from start to finish. Now this certainly gets us closer to true purpose, but this too still leaves us with more ambiguity than I am comfortable. There are several portions of Scripture that are not specifically pointed at the Second Member of the Trinity. So what is the Bible about? What is the key, over-arching theme of all of Scripture? I would suggest to you that the key truth that governs the Bible from start to finish is the proclamation and practice of the glory of God. Rather than “soteriological” – or primarily salvation focused, I would say to you that the Scriptures are “doxological” or primarily focused on the glory of God. The Greek word for glory is “*doxa*” and thus the word “doxology” and “doxological” means “with a focus on glory” and specifically for us, a focus on the glory of God. Thus, I see as the unifying center of the Bible not God’s activity in the redemption of mankind, but something bigger than the saving of His elect through the Gospel, but rather upon God’s ruling and reigning over all His creation and extracting glory from each and every one of its parts. Salvation is a part of God’s reigning and ruling, but it is not all of it. There is more to God’s plan than merely saving mankind; it includes all creation, the heavens and the earth; the angelic realms. So I would have you think with me on this thought; that the key underlying purpose of God in the world and the universe is His glory!

So, what comes to your mind when you think of the glory of God? Does the glory of God speak of His great works? Is His glory found in His attributes and character? Perhaps the glory of God is the revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ. No doubt, the glory of God is displayed through

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all of these, but this is not all that the Bible means when it speaks of the glory of God. What is the glory of God?

The Old Testament word for “glory” – *kabod* comes from the Hebrew word for weight, or heaviness. It speaks of something weighty and thus spoke of a person or thing of great substance and importance. By way of example, in Genesis 45:13, when Joseph finally revealed himself to his brothers in Egypt, he instructed them, **“Now you must tell my father of all my splendor [glory – kabod] in Egypt, and all that you have seen; and you must hurry and bring my father down here.”** Joseph wanted it reported to Jacob his father of his greatness, his privileged position, his importance and power. Thus “kabod” speaks of importance and prestige.

In the New Testament, the word “glory” – or “doxa” conveys the same idea. A man’s glory is his good reputation; those things about him which is worthy of praise. Jesus used the word this way in Matthew 6:2 saying, **“So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored [doxazo – verb form “to have or receive glory] by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.”** The point here is that such hypocrites turned their giving into a grand drama so that their so-called generosity would be seen as great and important by the people.

All of this to say that when the Bible speaks of the glory of God, we are to know that it refers then to His worth, His honor, His importance, His weightiness. When used of God, the word “glory” speaks of His majesty or supremacy as all other things are crushed under the weight of His surpassing greatness.

Is this truly the theme of all Scripture? For if it is, it would mean that it is the theme or goal of all humanity. Indeed, all creation has as its stated goal and purpose the glory of God. God created everything for His own glory. Everything that we see has its existence from God and for God. Is this true? Romans 11:36 sums it up for us stating, **“For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory [doxa] forever. Amen.”**

John Calvin put it well when he said that creation is the theater of God’s glory. All of this reminds us that ultimately we, and all creation exist not simply to be saved or damned, rescued or destroyed, but rather we exist for the glory; the prestige, the power, the honor, the importance of God. Even as inanimate creation has been called to glorify God, so have we. All inanimate creation, like rocks and trees and stars, along with the lower animate creatures like birds and beasts and creepy crawling things on the ground; all these bring glory to God simply by being what God created them to be. Psalm 19:1 teaches that the heavens declare the glory of God by virtue of their mere existence; just because they are there.

As the image-bearers of God, we are to glorify God. But what does this mean, to glorify God? What are we to do to glorify God? We might get answers like, “worship,” “witness,” “acts of benevolence” and the like. Is this what it means to bring glory to God? In part, but such things are much too narrow. Beloved, God calls you to glorify Him [to display His weightiness, His importance, His prestige, His honor] in all that we do; in every single little detail. Is this true? Does God really expect you to have such a purpose, such a focus that every detail of your life is to be governed by the principle of doing it to the glory of God? Indeed this truth is summed up in the words of 1 Corinthians 10:31 which says, **“Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory [doxa] of God.”** Our lives are to be doxological, that is “glory to God” driven. Notice that the command of this verse is to know it is our responsibility to glorify God in all that we do—not just in the “spiritual” activities of life. In 1 Corinthians 6:20 we read this,

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“For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.” It is more than just going to church, saying your prayers and reading your Bible. The very activities of your body, the very things you do in and with your flesh are all to bring glory to God.

There is much more that needs to be said about this, but my point has been to impress upon the importance, the weight and the wonder of having as our focus, the bringing of glory to God in all things. This is why all things were created. This is why humanity was created; and specifically, please consider this carefully, this is why you were created, to bring glory to God. And in our Acts 12 text (yes, I remember that I am to be preaching from this text), we find out just how serious a thing it is when a person, when given an opportunity to bring glory to God, fails to glorify God, as was the case with Herod. Herod robbed God of His rightful glory and he paid a severe price; he was devoured by worms and died. Beloved, it is a serious thing to rob God of His glory. Consider the words of the Lord. In Isaiah 42:8 God says, **“I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images.”** And similarly in Isaiah 48:11 He says, **“For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; for how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.”**

God will respond to those who rob Him of His glory. Could you and I be guilty of robbing God of His glory? Any person, whether religious or not, who soaks up the blessings of this life while ignoring the Giver of the blessings is on the verge of robbing God of His glory. Anyone who has demonstrated outwardly, or had the attitude inwardly a spirit of ingratitude, of not caring for what God has or even has not provided, stands upon the slippery slope of God’s judgment.

We recently read through and even sang Mary’s Magnificat in Luke 1 where she uttered the words, **51 “He [God] has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble.”** In our text, Herod was brought down, this is what we find in our text of Acts 12:19-25. This is what happens to people who rob God of His glory. Such people are humbled or brought down. And conversely, the opposite is thus true, that the humble will be exalted, or lifted up. And so, my charge to you as we work through these verses is this, rather than be a possible robber of God’s glory, would you resolve to live fully to the glory of God? This will be our two-point outline; first, that God will humble those who exalt themselves and thus rob God of His glory, and second, that God will exalt those who humble themselves before Him.

I. **God will humble those who exalt themselves (19b-23)**

And to be humbled by God – that is not a good thing! If you have not notice, there are some real problem people out there in the world. There are people with power and clout and they seem at times unstoppable. At times such people can be a detriment to the well-being of others and specially, they may even seek to oppose the people of God. We see people seeking to and sometimes even temporarily succeeding at thwarting God’s plan. But here is the truth; there is no one, not even one, who foils the plans of God. No one gets in His way to halt Him. And thus, the verses before us are both a warning and an encouragement. The warning we have is this; do not make the mistake of seeing the patience of God as apathy or inability to act on those who oppose His purposes. And the encouragement is this; God knows and will take action against all such people who oppose Him.

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And the example we have in our text is that of Herod Agrippa. I imagine the early church cried out at times in wonder as Herod had James killed and almost accomplished the same with Peter. But God stepped in while His people were praying and set Peter free. According to verse 19, this made Herod a bit upset and thus he ordered the execution of the guards who had “allowed” Peter’s escape. Herod’s way and plan had been frustrated, not by men, but by God. But before we look at what God did to Herod, let us note four things about Herod that our text reveals.

First, we see Herod’s politics in verses 19b-20. There we read of what happened next to him... ***“Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there. 20 Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one accord they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king’s chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king’s country.”***

It would seem that Herod wanted out of Jerusalem because all these dealings with James, Peter and the Church had given him a royal headache. He headed to Caesarea, the coast, the beach looking perhaps for some rest and relaxation. But as soon as he got there, he encountered another political challenge. Here we see a glimpse of Herod’s political savvy. Tyre and Sidon were just some sixty miles north of Caesarea and were not technically under Herod’s jurisdiction. But they depended on Herod for trade, particularly for food. Somehow a contention arose between Herod and these people. Herod responded with economic sanctions, withholding food. Thus the people came to him asking for peace because they were dependent upon him. Notice that they did not reconcile with Herod because they liked him. Rather, they changed their tune out of expedience. You may not like someone, but if that someone signs your paycheck it is amazing how motivated you become to appease him. The picture here in Acts 12 is of those who cannot get along with Herod because he is an egotistical; self-focused, self-serving fool. He arrested innocent men, killed his own guards, and even ran from his problems, along with fighting with his constituents. Does God see the Herods of this world? I promise you He does and we will see that in a moment.

Second, we see in our text Herod’s power. This is in verse 21 where we read, ***“On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them.”*** According to the Jewish historian Josephus, this “appointed day” was a festival in honor of the Roman Emperor Claudius. It is believed that this celebration took place in the amphitheater built by Herod Agrippa’s grandfather, Herod the Great. Luke says Herod wore his “royal apparel.” In other words, Herod was decked out. Josephus gave this description of his clothing, “[Herod] put on a garment wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theatre early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun’s rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner.” What is the point? Herod was displaying his pompous power and splendor – and thus, his own self-appointed “glory.”

This brings us to the **third** thing we learn of Herod in our text. We see Herod’s praise in verse 22. There we read of what was being proclaimed by the people concerning Herod, ***“The people kept crying out, ‘The voice of a god and not of a man!’”*** Josephus is again helpful to get a fully understanding of what was taking place as he recorded what the crowd said, “Be gracious unto us! Hitherto we have revered thee as a man, but henceforth we acknowledge thee to be of more than mortal nature.” What got the people who hated him to say this? We

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must assume that either Herod was a great speaker, or that the people of Tyre and Sidon were great flatterers, or perhaps it was combination of both. The point is that the people publically assigned Herod the status of a god. Now, if someone said that to you, what would you do? You would tell them to stop! But Herod ate this up. He believed it!

And thus, in verse 23 we see the **fourth** and most crucial aspect of Herod as we see his pride crumble, *And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.*

Here is the point, because Herod would not point the people to God, but rather refused to halt the blasphemy of being called a god, the one true God dealt with him severely. Again, Josephus commented saying, “[Herod] did not rebuke them, nor did he repudiate their impious flattery.” Josephus goes on to record that Herod looked up and saw an owl sitting on a rope above his head. He immediately recognized it as a messenger of evil. A pang of grief pierced his heart. At the same time he felt the attack of a severe pain in his abdomen and was carried quickly from the amphitheater to his palace. Whether or not that is how it happened, Luke does state here in our text that an angel struck Herod down and that he was “eaten by worms.” I do not know about you, but that sounds to me like a horrific way to die. Upon some research, I found a medical perspective of what seems to have taken place here.

The phrase ‘eaten of worms,’ in Greek is *sko-la-ko-brotos*. The root word *skolax* means “a specific head structure of a tapeworm.” Since the word *scolex* (plural *scolices*) is applied to the head of tapeworms, Herod’s death was almost certainly due to the rupture of a cyst formed by a tapeworm. There are several kinds of tapeworms, but one of the most common ones found in sheep-growing countries is the dog tape, *Echinococcus granulosus*. The heaviest infections come from areas where sheep and cattle are raised...” The disease is characterized by the formation of cysts, generally on the right lobe of the liver; these may extend down into the abdominal cavity. The rupture of such a cyst may release as many as two million scolices. When the cyst ruptures, the entrance of cellular debris along with the scolices may cause sudden death.” What a terrible way to die. But I would have you know that this is not the only time the word *scolex* is used in the Scripture. Look with me at Mark 9:43-44 where we read, **“43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, 44 [where THEIR WORM (scolex) DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.]”** Jesus says the same thing in verses 46 and 48. This is disturbingly interesting because a tapeworm keeps propagating itself. Within each section of the worm is a self-contained packet of both male and female parts. The posterior part matures and forms hundreds of worm eggs. The word *scolex* in this text portrays a biological description of permanence, something that will never go away or end.

In reading Josephus, he recorded that Herod Agrippa lingered five days with severe abdominal pain. Then he died at the age of 54, during the seventh year of his rule. The year was A.D. 44. To put Acts 12 in some kind of timeline, Herod executed James on May 1 (just prior to Passover) while he himself died just three months later, on or near August 1. This was the end of the man who had the gall to lay hold of two of the Lord’s apostles. What does this teach us about God?

It teaches us that God is serious about His glory. Our text is clear that this happened “immediately”. There was no delay, no warning, just judgment. The moment that Herod accepted the praise that only God deserves, God took action. Now I know that God does not

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always act immediately today, but He has done so enough throughout history to remind us how serious He is about His glory. In case you have forgotten, you might want to read Daniel 4 and see what happened to Nebuchadnezzar when he did something similar to what Herod did only for Nebuchadnezzar it did not end in death but in praise of God.

The Lord as and will deal severely with self-exalting, self-focusing pride. Here in Acts 12, the Lord executed Herod for refusing to give Him the glory. We might think that Herod alone had it coming, but the truth of the matter is that this is the same attitude for which all unregenerate, unsaved, unwilling to come to Jesus people will be condemned. In Romans 1:21 we read, **“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks...”** and then in verse 25 we read, **“For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.”**

The truth is that God tolerates a lot of glory stealing, does He not? God is full of patience and longsuffering. And thus many people scoff at God and ignore Him, taking personal credit for what He does; and I promise you, it greatly offends Him. Could we be guilty of robbing God of His glory? Are you guilty of doing this? Beloved, anytime fail to give God what He deserves, be it praise, recognition or even our time and possessions, we rob God of His glory. When a student aces a test, when a salesman scores the big deal, when a parent sees her child receive an award; these are all occasions by which we either give God glory or rob Him of His glory.

Let me ask you, what is your reaction to the accomplishments of your life? Do you give the credit and the recognition to God? Do we need to be reminded again how serious a thing it is to rob God of the praise He deserves. Would we even dare for a moment to slight Him, or worse yet, claim to ourselves and by ourselves something that He has done? Do you not realize that we rob God of His glory when we refuse or neglect to participate in corporate worship on Sundays because this is a time He deserves? Do you not realize that you rob God of His glory if you refuse to give Him the first-fruits of your income. Let remember who it is who gives us our health, our jobs, our incomes, our families, and everything possess. And so, when we halt our labors one day a week to meet corporately with God’s people to offer him our praise, our time and our recourses, we are acknowledging that He gave it all to us and that He thus means more to us than health, than jobs, than money, and even than family. These things are all on loan to us. God is serious about His glory.

There was an atheist who once said to a group of people, “If there is a God, may He prove himself by striking me dead right now.” A few moments passed and nothing happened so he concluded, “You see, there is no God!” At that point someone wisely responded to him, “You have not disproved God. You have only proved that He is a gracious God.” God will deal with those who rob Him of His glory, it is only a matter of time. And so, what we see here with Herod only points to what will happen to the coming, final world ruler and all those who follow him. The Bible teaches that the Antichrist, like Herod, will persecute God’s people. He also will set himself up as God and demand the worship of the world. And he will have his brief moment of fame, but like Herod, it will end suddenly when Jesus returns and cuts him down along with all who follow him (Revelation 19:11-21). Yes, God will humble those who exalt themselves. This brings us to the second point that we find in verses 24-25...

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II. God will exalt the humble (24-25).

24 But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied. 25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.

The truth that God exalts those who are humble of heart and spirit is taught throughout the Bible. In James 4:10 we read, “**Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.**” And in Psalm 147:6, reading from the ESV, we learn, **The LORD lifts up the humble; he casts the wicked to the ground.** The point is that God exalts the humble, those who know and acknowledge their dependence upon Him. And this is what we see happening in our text. As Herod, the rich and powerful and wicked is brought down to the grave, we see the humble church pressing on to accomplish in a mighty fashion the purpose of God. Luke records how the church was pressing on in two ways.

First, the Word of God spread. This is what was recorded in verse 24. The word of God was growing and multiplying. This stands in contrast to the beginning of the chapter. Acts 12 starts with Herod on a rampage, arresting and persecuting the church leaders and ends with him being struck down and dying. The passage progresses, starting with James dead, Peter in prison and Herod standing in triumph. But it closes with Herod dead, Peter released and the Word of God triumphing. Throughout the book of Acts, the early church takes on much hostility; and yet in humble dependence upon God, God uses the church to spread His word.

But not only did the Word of God spread, but **second**, the Mission of God succeeded. Verse 25 records this and serves as a link between the end of chapter 11 with the beginning of chapter 13. We last left Barnabas and Saul heading to Jerusalem with a gift for the church there. Here in Acts 12, they made it to Jerusalem and from this point on in the book of Acts, the focus will be on the final phase of the church’s mission, *reaching the Gentiles*. As Acts 12 comes to a close, God was placing His people where He wanted in order to launch the most aggressive, far-reaching aspect of the church’s mission. Judea and Samaria have been reached, and even little sprinkles of other places, but now it is God’s time to reach the uttermost part of the earth!

As Acts 12 closes, let us note another thing, while James died at the beginning of the chapter, and the end we see another man, John Mark, step forward. John Mark was the cousin of Barnabas according to Colossians 4:10. He is also the next link in the chain of God’s servants who will be a part of the first missionary journey to the Gentiles. This all reminds us of some important truths.

For one thing, let us remember that no one is indispensable in the church. James was killed, but God raised up Mark and countless others to carry on the work. And so, we can be assured that God’s work will always continue because ultimate God’s work does not man, but on God. To be sure, God uses people, but the outcome of God’s plan is certain because it does not depend upon men. God will prevail. And we can be assured of this because God is *serious about His glory*. He will humble the proud and he will exalt the humble. It will be on His one time table, but it will happen because God is serious about His glory. But the question for us as we close is this, are we serious about God’s glory. Would you be honest with yourself in answering this question, “Are you living for the glory of God in every area of your life or are you living for some lesser pursuit?” May you do not know how to tell if your life is bringing glory to God. Let me give you four questions by which you can assess that greater question.

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1. Are you trusting in His Son?

The truth is, you cannot bring glory to God on our own. We are sinners and sinners, by their nature, do not want to live for God’s glory. Rather, they want to do their *own thing*. The problem is that doing your own thing brings judgment and death, but the Jesus thing, where He died in our place on the cross, taking our punishment, and then rising again to set us free from living self-centered lives, that is what we need to believe to bring glory to God. If you desire to live for the glory of God, this is where you start; you must *trust in the work God’s Son accomplished for you on the cross*. When we do this, not only will He forgive you of your sins, but He will give you a new heart, one that wants to and is enabled to give God glory. So then, are you trusting in Jesus?

2. Am you living for the things that matter to Jesus?

Do you know what matters to Jesus? Do you know He told us what matters to Him? In Matthew 6:33 He said, **“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”** In Colossians 3:1 we read, **“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.”** And in Romans 12:1 we read, **“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God...”**

Living for Jesus is not that complicated to know. Answer the question this moment, “Are you living for God, or for yourself?” Remember that every day is filled with choices and the question is are you choosing more and more those things that please Him or those things that please yourself? Let me ask you another probing question,

3. Are you using your time in a way that will matter 100 years from now?

Is that too big? Is that too broad? Could what I do on any given day, or in any given moment matter a hundred years from now? Tell that to Edward Kimball. Do you know who Edward Kimball is? I doubt most of you do, but something he did in just one moment of his day mattered a 100 years later and more. On April 21, 1855, Kimball visited the Holton Shoe Store and found a young man in a stockroom. There Kimball spoke to him of the love of Christ. Shortly thereafter this young man received Christ and devoted his life to serving God. Who was that man? The great preacher and evangelist, D.L. Moody. Beloved, each of us are given 24 hours in day and the question is will we use them for God’s agenda or our own. Will your choices matter 100 years from now? And finally...

4. Are you giving God the credit for what He does in your life?

People who are living for God’s glory give Him the credit for everything, big and small. Does this describe you? Are you known as a person who gives the credit to God? Let us not rob God of His glory, let us give Him the glory for all things!

Soli Deo Gloria

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