

Herod Attacks the Church

Text: Acts 12:1-4

Introduction:

Many wonderful things have been happening in the life of the early church. Even on the heels of a great persecution, the Gospel has spread throughout all of Judea and Samaria, Saul was converted, a vibrant church was planted and growing in Antioch...indeed, all in all, Christ was building His church, and the gates of hell could not prevail against it! His sheep were hearing His voice, and they were following Him!

But in all of this, Luke continues to expose the often painful and difficult realities, which the church faces, as well. Two good reasons for this are: To remind the church of all times, that persecution, oppression and suffering are a critical part of the church's lot, and to reveal how even by means of the church's sufferings, God unfolds His will, and proves His sovereignty over all matters. This is not our home, brethren. Indeed, we will suffer here, but an eternal rest is on its way! And furthermore, we know that "All things" work together for the good of God's people, for all who love Him, and have experienced the blessedness of His effectual call! And so, we will often sow with tears, here, within this earthly veil, but we will reap eternal joy, just beyond the veil of this world! We have been given this glorious assurance in our Lord Jesus Christ!

This morning, we come upon one of those difficult and painful challenges, which the early church had faced. Indeed, along with the general persecutions and sufferings that have come already (in various forms), we have also witnessed the death and martyrdom of the faithful and beloved deacon, Stephen. Certainly, this brought sorrow to the hearts of the brethren, but it did not break their faith. In fact, the enemies blow, in this regard, along with the great persecution that followed, merely pushed the Gospel outward, into all of Judea and Samaria! It were as if, God were flaunting His sovereignty before His enemies, by advancing His Kingdom, even through their sword! But, this morning, we come now to witness the death and martyrdom of an apostle; and not merely an apostle, but one of the inner circle, who found himself often present with His Lord, even when the others were not. Our text brings us to the murder and

martyrdom of John's brother, James, who along with Peter and John, made up the "inner three" closest of the Lord's disciples.

King Herod, in order to win the favor of the Jews, will turn his face against the church. And, in doing so, James will be martyred, and Peter will be imprisoned, standing on the brink of his own execution, as well.

I. Herod Attacks the Church

"Now about that time [when the church at Antioch was sending relief to Judea, because of the imminent famine] Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church" (vs. 1).

The enemy had tried to put out the Gospel flame, by means of the religious leaders of the Jews, and the fire only spread. Now, he will try through King Herod. At this point, it was becoming more and more obvious to those in power, that the "Christians," were not only not to be identified with the Judaizers, but furthermore, they were opposed by them. And Herod, seeing this as an opportunity to win favor with the Jews, who were not at all overly thrilled to be subject to his rule, began to harass some from the church. By opposing the Christians, he might just win the favor of the Jews, and relieve a bit of the tension that existed, because he was a servant of Rome and not of Jewish descent.

"Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword" (vs. 2).

Indeed, the Lord had promised beforehand that these things would happen. Those who follow Him, could expect suffering, persecution, trial, and even death. And not only were the apostles, no exception to this rule, but, in many ways, they would lead the way. And here, the first one to cross that threshold is James, the brother of John, reminding them all, that this was their lot. In their faithfulness, they would eventually meet martyrdom. When, where and how, were in the Lord's hands, but the assurance of the sovereignty of God over all things, and their safe passage to glory, would keep them going.

And brethren, I think we need to be reminded by these realities (the sufferings of the church, the martyrdom of Stephen and now James...etc), that, while the faithful church can expect great prosperity and blessing, that such things often come with and by great suffering. When you look at the two faithful churches (Smyrna and Philadelphia), out of the seven listed in Revelation 2-3, you will notice that suffering and persecution are prevalent in both of them. And

the call there, is to remain faithful; to persevere, even unto death, keeping your eyes on the real prize in glory!

I fear that there are many here, in our church, who are not ready to face such times of trial, should God soon pull out the carpet from underneath our feet, as a country, and as a church. When we are in the wilderness, without food and water, waiting for God to lead us to the next daily supply of manna; when some of us have faced martyrdom; when the rubber meets the road for our theology to become realized in a very practical way, how will we stand, unless we are daily walking closely to the Lord, with His people. How will we handle providential tragedy, when it strikes? [Consider the example of the family in SC, whose home burnt down---only two alive remaining] [Again, compare to "health and wealth" heresy]

And so, here, King Herod turns against the church, and in doing so, he has James, the apostle, thrust through with the sword, unto death. In God's good providence, He chose to bring James home, right here, at this point, and by these means.

"And because [Herod] saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also" (vs. 3a).

The Jews were more than happy to have Herod do their dirty work, and Herod, looking to win the favor of the Jews, over whom he ruled, took advantage of this, and arrested Peter (another pillar of the church) as well. James is gone, Peter is in custody, what would the church do? Well, Lord willing, we will find, next time, that they take the best and most appropriate action, something that will be absolutely critical for us to take note of.

"Now it was during the days of unleavened bread" (vs. 3b). In God's providence, the Passover, and the feast of unleavened bread were taking place during this time. And so, since Herod wanted to bring Peter before the Jews to gain their attentive favor, he decided to wait until after the days of unleavened bread were past, before proceeding with his wicked designs. And in this sense, he could avoid defiling the commemorative feast, as well. That said, he took great pains to ensure that Peter was well guarded, especially since he had probably heard of Peter's earlier, unexplained escape from the prison of the Sanhedrin (while awaiting trial, Acts 5:17-21).

"So when [Herod] had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover" (vs. 4).

Obviously, anxious to ensure that Peter remains in custody until after the Passover, Herod has him guarded by four squads ("tetrads"- squads of four). This would ensure that Peter was

guarded by four soldiers at a time, around the clock, on a rotating shift (four fours). If James had met his demise, surely Peter was right behind him. How could he possibly escape Herod's grasp? Well, again, next time, Lord willing, we will see how the church takes action, and we will furthermore, be reassured of God's sovereign hand over the deaths and deliverances of His people!

Amen!!!

Mother, 8 Children Killed In Greenville House Fire

Story posted: 15 hours, 13 minutes ago

GREENVILLE, Ky. – Officials said the bodies of nine people have been recovered in a house fire in Muhlenberg County, Kentucky, including those of eight children. Two other people escaped the fire with serious injuries.

The fire was reported around 2 a.m. Thursday at a home at 3749 Motes Lane off Highway 62 in the Depoy community, about 4 miles northwest of Greenville.

Officials said it appeared the fire started accidentally when combustible material brushed against an electric baseboard heater in one of the bedrooms.

There were 11 people inside the home when the fire broke out.

"I saw the house engulfed in flames, and I knew 11 people were in there and to myself, I knew they weren't getting out," said neighbor Clarence Humphrey. "I don't really know how to act or how to feel. You're just numb to it and paralyzed knowing there's nothing you can do to help them."

Muhlenburg County Coroner Tony Armour told CNN the fire occurred at the home of 36-year-old Chad Watson and 35-year-old LaRea Nicole "Nikki" Watson. He said the couple had 9 children ranging from ages 4 to 15.

Nikki Watson and eight of the children were killed.

"I do have children and whenever you have a loss of life, young or old, it's a tragedy," said with Stu Recke with the Kentucky State Police.

Chad Watson and 11-year-old Kylie Watson survived the blaze and were being treated for severe burns and smoke inhalation. Both were transported by LifeFlight medical helicopter to Vanderbilt University Medical Center's trauma center in Nashville.

Both were transported in critical condition. Chad Watson's condition has since been upgraded to critical but stable condition. Kylie Watson was upgraded to stable condition.

In addition to Nikki Watson, the other victims were identified as 15-year-old Madison Watson, 14-year-old Kaitlyn Watson, 13-year-old Morgan Watson, 9-year-old Emily Watson, 8-year-old Samuel Watson, 6-year-old Raegan Watson and 4-year-old twin brothers Mark and Nathaniel Watson.

Watson told first responders his wife and other children were still inside the home. Officials said the heat was so intense, emergency crews could not get inside to rescue the victims.

The victims' bodies were expected to be sent to a forensic pathologist in Madisonville, Kentucky. The house was a total loss. One entire section of the home was gone, with part of the roof caved in. The rest of the house appeared to be gutted. Much of the ground near the house was charred black.

Chief Darren Harvey with the Greenville Fire Department said multiple fire crews on the scene. Crews from the Graham and Central City volunteer fire departments were also called to help. Officials from the Kentucky State Police were on scene investigating. They were treating the fire as a crime scene, but said that was standard procedure.

Crime scene tape was put up, surrounding the entire home.

Investigators set up a temporary command post as they worked to determine exactly what happened.