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Acts 12:1-25

Outward Church: No King but Jesus

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When I was at my Doctorate of Ministry (D.Min) program in October, we talked about preaching. For one assignment we had to take one sermon we'd preached and preach it again in an entirely different form. Same message, different approach. Three of my classmates tried preaching first-person narratives. That's where you pretend to be a person from the Bible story and preach it from their point-of-view. My cohort mentor challenged us to try new ways of preaching, so today, I'm going to give first-person narrative a try. I'm going to say a prayer for our sermon, and when I finish my prayer, I'll be back not as Jonathan, but as a character from the Bible. Are you ready? Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, you tell us your word is "living and active" (Heb 4:12) and how it can change not only our minds, but our hearts as well. Lord, I pray that you would make your word come alive for us today and that our time in this story would change both our minds and our hearts. Amen.

[Look at the microphone confused, tap it. Play with face mask. Look around at congregation...]

You are a strange culture... My name is Cephas in Aramaic, but you look more like Greek-speakers so you can call me Peter. I'm one of Rabbi Jesus' twelve disciples. I don't know how I got here. My friend Philip told me one time he shared the gospel with an Ethiopian eunuch and the Holy Spirit suddenly carried him away. So maybe this is like that. Maybe the Spirit brought me here to share my story. I have lots of stories to tell, but today I want to tell you the time an angel of the Lord freed me from prison and struck down the king. It taught me there's...

No king but Jesus.

Maybe that's a lesson you could learn too. Sometimes earthly kings seem like the ones in charge. King Herod thought he was large and in charge. Ah, Herod Agrippa I. His grandpa was like that too. He was also a Herod, but called himself "Herod the Great," King of Judea. Herod the Great was pretty awful. A few years after my Rabbi Jesus was born, he tried to kill infant Jesus and ended up murdering a whole bunch of little boys (Matt 2:16-18). He was a bad man. Herod the Great's son, Herod Antipas (Herod Agrippa I's uncle), beheaded John the Baptist, Rabbi Jesus' cousin (Matt 14:1-12). I guess Herod Agrippa thought he had to live-up to the family name because one day he arrested my partner James and killed him.

I loved James. I owned a fishing partnership with the Zebedee boys, James and John. We loved the Sea of Galilee. It's a beautiful green-ish blue water surrounded by lush green trees and dusty brown hills. Sometimes wind comes gusting down those hills and stirs up the lake. James, John, and I had so many adventures on Galilee. I wish he wasn't gone, struck down too early, on fire for the Lord. Literally, I remember seeing fire floating over his head at Pentecost (Acts 2). He was going to do great things, but I guess Jesus had other plans. It doesn't make sense if I didn't believe God had a plan and could use it for good.

Have you ever had that happen? Something terrible happens, forces you can't control, and you're tempted to doubt God? You see the kings of this world do something and you're afraid? You're tempted to doubt Rabbi Jesus? I know I have. Like the time I tried to walk on water but doubted him and sank into the waves. So now I try not to doubt my Rabbi, even when earthly kings seem like they're the ones in charge. They're not. No king but Rabbi Jesus.

When Herod killed James, he saw that it made the Jewish authorities and religious leaders happy. Herod really cared about what they thought. He even became Jewish to win their favor. I thought he'd come for me. But really, what can Herod do? Crucify me? I would be honored to die like my Lord.

Well, turns out Herod threw me in jail. The week following Passover there's this 7-day feast called the Festival of Unleavened Bread. Such a great feast. Lots of soft flat bread, fish, fruit, vegetables, but no leaven. Who really wants leaven? The stuff makes you bloated. I love this feast. The fish are fresh and the wine is flowing. Right during the middle of this feast I'm eating my flat bread and Herod sends his soldiers to snatch and grab me. The real crime was not finishing my dinner.

They throw me in prison and Herod assigns sixteen guards to watch over me in teams of four. It's crazy! Me, little Peter, the fisherman from Galilee. It's like I'm a national security threat. Of course, an angel did break me out of prison once before, so you know, he should be worried (Acts 5:19). But that wasn't me. That was God. Sometimes earthly kings seem like the ones in charge, but not really. No matter how many soldiers or threats or powers they have, they don't have any authority unless God gives it to them. No king but Jesus.

So Herod threw me in prison, but I had a secret weapon... prayer. I prayed. My people prayed. The church prayed. They prayed "earnestly." They didn't pray little prayer. Everyone got together and they prayed for me every minute, every hour. Have you ever gotten your church together and just prayed for one person? Like if someone is really sick, you call a prayer meeting just to pray for them. You should try it sometime. They prayed continually for God to deliver me, which is a big request. No king but Jesus and...

No prayer too big.

Herod planned to execute me the next day and I feel asleep in my cell, chained to two guards. You may be wondering how in the world I was able to sleep like that? I mean, the place smelled really bad. The stone we were sitting on was not comfortable, and my wrists are sore just thinking about those chains. I'll tell you the secret of good sleep. Two ingredients: 1) gifting; and 2) faith.

Gifting—you probably have this in your own life, someone you know who is just gifted in sleeping. Whose head hits the hay and their sun sets. I'm that guy. I remember this one time when Rabbi Jesus took James, John, and I up a mountain. Apparently Moses and Elijah appeared to Rabbi Jesus and spoke to him for a while. I'm not sure for how long because I was asleep (Luke 9:32). When I did wake up I saw them and kind of embarrassed myself, but that's a different story. I also fell asleep the night Rabbi Jesus needed me the most, the night before he was crucified (Matt 26:40-45). I should have been awake. I should have been praying. I'm so grateful my people prayed for me when I needed it most.

Do you believe in prayer? Or do you sleep? Do you believe there's no prayer too big for God to answer? It's taken me time to learn there's no prayer too big. There's no prayer too big because there's no king but Jesus.

I can sleep because I'm gifted in sleep, but also because of faith. **Faith**—when people ask me how I could be sleeping the night before my execution, I tell them, "It's because I have faith in my Rabbi." After Rabbi Jesus rose from the grave (which was amazing!) he appeared to me to forgive me for denying him three times. When I saw him he asked me to serve him and he told me how I was going to die. I can still hear Rabbi Jesus saying it like it was yesterday, "...when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." (John 21:18b) Key words, "When you are old..." I wasn't old yet, so I wasn't afraid. I had faith.

I have faith that I am in Jesus' hands, not a king's hands. Faith will help you sleep at night. I had peace. But even if my Rabbi hadn't told me when I would die, I still would have had faith. There's no king but Jesus. If he wanted me to die, I would. How do you feel about death? If you walked out of here and got trampled by a

camel, would you go to be with Rabbi Jesus? Or would you go to Sheol, the land of the dead? “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Confess your sin and come to Rabbi Jesus. He will save you.

Back to the cell. So I’m sitting there between two guards asleep when an angel of the Lord shows up. He shined this bright light in my cell, but actually, that didn’t wake me up. It was kind of like how I slept through half of the Jesus, Moses, and Elijah party on a mountain top. So the angel nudged me in the side. It was a pretty hard nudge (rubs side). The angel told me to get up, get dressed, and put on my sandals. He was a very thoughtful angel. I think it shows God cares about our everyday needs.

I didn’t even realize what was happening at the time. I thought it was a vision. The angel opened my cell door. I thought for sure the creaking of the hinges would alert the first sentry outside the door, but it was like he couldn’t see me when I walked right in front of him. It was like I wasn’t there. The angel led me past the second guard and out into the cool night air. It was so good to see the stars. He opened this big heavy iron gate. It made so much noise I thought we were going to wake up the whole neighborhood. Then we walked out into the street, and the angel disappeared.

That’s when it hit me this wasn’t a vision. I said, “Now I get it. The Lord sent his angel to rescue me from the hand of Herod and what the Jewish people were trying to do.” And then I got out of there. I ran to Mary’s house, Mary the mother of John Mark (different John that Zebedee). I was so excited. No king but Jesus. No prayer too big.

There’s nothing God can’t do.

He’d just sent his angel to deliver me from prison. I was so excited to tell the other followers of Rabbi Jesus. I knew they were inside praying at Mary’s house. We always gathered there to pray. It’s so important to pray as a church family. When I knocked, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. Precious Rhoda, she’s excitable. When she heard my voice, she didn’t open the gate. Instead, she ran and told everyone I was outside. Later they told me they were like, “What!? Are you out of your mind! It must be an angel.”

Now, if it was me, and I heard thought there was an angel outside, I would have run and seen that angel! So I kept on knocking and they finally opened the door. They were ecstatic! They could hardly believe the Lord had delivered me, which is funny because I thought that’s why they were praying. I think they were praying, but not really believing. Have you ever done that? Maybe you’ve prayed without faith but God answered anyways. Isn’t God good? There’s nothing God can’t do. That’s why we pray. No prayer too big.

I told my church family to hush because I didn’t want guards to come running. I told them to tell James, Jesus’ brother and a church leader, that an angel had broken me out, and to tell the other disciples too. Then I got out of there. I didn’t want to test God. He’d rescued me and I was grateful. I’d be back.

There’s nothing God can’t do. Do you believe that? What do you need God to do in your life? What do you need God to do for your church? Pray about it. But don’t just pray to get something out of God. Pray to know God for who he is. Pray to know Rabbi Jesus. Offer your needs before him. Maybe he wants to get you out of your prison; or, maybe he wants you to stay there to minister to share him with your guards. You may be surprised by what he wants you to do. There’s nothing God can’t do.

Remember Herod? My story doesn’t end here, well, because...

No king but Jesus.

My story starts with Herod taking James’s life but ends with the Lord taking Herod’s life. Herod thought he was a big man, but Rabbi Jesus knocked him down—all the way down.

Herod tried to be Jewish but must have got tired of it because he left Jerusalem and moved to Caesarea, which is like the Greek Capital of Judea. It's no surprise but he got in an argument with some northern cities. When he successfully strong-armed them by threatening their food supply, he celebrated with a dress-up party and a speech. He put on his royal robes, which were covered in what I can only describe as silver-feathers. When he came into the theater in the morning wearing his silver dress, he reflected that early morning sun and people thought he looked like a god. I thought he looked like a silver chicken.

The crowds shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." Herod loved it. He lapped it up. People were finally telling him how big and important he was. So the Lord struck him down. A worm ate his insides and he died a horrible, painful, death. I wish he had repented when he had time. I hope you repent while you still have time.

You ever act like you're a god? You act like the king of your life? Well, you're not. No king but Jesus. If you keep acting that way, one day the Lord God will strike you down like he did Herod. Pretty scary, right? But here's the thing. Rabbi Jesus is a really good king. You can trust him. He'll take care of you. He took care of me. He gave me far more than I ever deserved, eternal life, knowing him.

After the Herod incident, myself and others kept preaching the gospel and people came to faith. Christianity spread and flourished. It was beautiful. No king but Jesus. No prayer too big. There's nothing God can't do.

So will you come to Jesus?

Will you confess your sins and be forgiven? Maybe you're like I was. You're sitting in a spiritual cell chained to your addictions and sins. The execution is coming tomorrow and you need someone to deliver you. You need an angel to fill your cell with the blinding light of God's mercy and grace. I know I did.

Do you know that when Herod Agrippa found out I had escaped, he executed my guards? I wish he hadn't, but he did. That's the rule for Roman soldiers. If you let a captive go, your life is forfeit. I don't know why God allowed those men to die in my place so that I could go free. But it reminds me of how my Rabbi Jesus also died in my place so that I could go free.

My Rabbi, Rabbi Jesus, died on the cross to set me free from sin and death. He died a terrible death on a cross to forgive me for not being with him when he died. He died for me to forgive me for not praying when I should. He died to save me from my doubt. He died for my sin, all of it. He died to set me free from my prison cell so that I can walk out into the night sky and enjoy the stars for all eternity.

Rabbi Jesus didn't stay dead. Three days later he rose from the grave and now anyone who turns from their sin and believes in Jesus can be set free too. Will you do that? Will you say yes to Jesus? It's time to say yes to the king. No king but Jesus. No prayer too big, especially the prayer of salvation. Will you come to him?

It's been wonderful, getting to meet you all, but it's time for me to go now. I'm sure we'll talk further when you die. I look forward to that day. May Rabbi Jesus bless you. Your pastor will pray for you now.

Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this first-person narrative sermon on Peter at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references. You can also listen on [Apple podcasts](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

Discussion Questions

1. What did you think of the form of the first-person narrative sermon on Peter? Did it distract you or help you learn?

2. What does “No king but Jesus” mean? How does it help us see our Government and kings through the lens of faith and hope?
3. What does “No prayer too big” mean? What sorts of things do you pray for? What are you inspired to pray for?
4. Do you believe “There’s nothing God can’t do”? How would you like to see him work in your life?
5. Will you say yes to Jesus? Will you repent of your sins and turn to him? If so, please find a local church and get connected.

Sources

Arnold, Clinton E.. Acts (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary) (p. 115). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition. *Herod’s shiny silver robes.

I found Skip Heitzig’s sermon on Acts 12 to be very helpful, especially drawing out the interesting them of Peter’s odd ability to sleep. Check it out here: [Acts 12 - Skip Heitzig - Jan 18, 2018](#).