You Cannot Fight God and Win

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[0:00] Good to see you all. A couple of announcements before we begin. First is just keep in mind that this Sunday we will not meet in the evening for church service.

We'll start Awana. We'll start youth groups. So the Wednesday night Bible study will move back down to the multi-purpose room. And Brother Lee will be leading that study through Habakkuk. So I encourage you to come and be a part of that.
And so tonight we're going to conclude Acts chapter 12 which will be a nice clean break until whenever it is the next time that I'm leading the Bible study and we'll be ready to pick up in Acts chapter 13.
So Acts chapter 12. Appreciate Dan stepping in last Wednesday and covering the first five verses of this chapter. I'm going to reach back and begin in verse 5 but we'll go through the entire chapter through verse 25.
So if you have your Bibles go ahead and turn there and if you want to follow along with me begin again reading in verse 5. So Peter was kept in prison but earnest prayer for him was made by the church.
[1:29] Now when Herod was about to bring him out on that very night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers bound with two chains and centuries before the door were guarding the prison.

And behold an angel of the Lord stood next to him and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him saying get up quickly. And the chains fell off his hands and the angel said to him dress yourself and put on your sandals.
And he did so. And he said to him wrap your cloak around you and follow me. And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real but thought he was seeing a vision.
When they had passed the first and the second guard they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord and they went out and went along one street and immediately the angel left him.
When Peter came to himself he said now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting. When he realized this he went to the house of Mary the mother of John whose other name was Mark.
[2:36] Where many were gathered together and were praying. And when he knocked at the door of the gateway a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. Recognizing Peter's voice and her joy she did not open the gate but ran and reported that Peter was standing at the gate.

They said to her you are out of your mind. But she kept insisting that it was so and they kept saying it is his angel. But Peter continued knocking and when they opened they saw him and were amazed.
But motioning to them with his hand to be silent he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said tell these things to James and to the brothers. Then he departed and went to another place.
Now when day came there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what became of Peter. And after Herod searched for him and did not find him he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death.
Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there. Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon and they came to him with one accord. And having persuaded Blastus the king's chamberlain they asked for peace because their country depended on the king's country for food.

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[3:46] On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes took his seat upon the throne and delivered an oration to them. And the people were shouting the voice of a God not of a man. Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down because he did not give God the glory.

And he was eaten by worms and breathed his last. But the word of God increased and multiplied and Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service.
Bringing with them John whose other name was Mark. I remember growing up in the 90's there were four phenomenal athletes that my friends and I admired.
Bo Jackson. Baseball and football player. It just so happened we were in Kansas City. Played for the Royals. So we loved him. Wayne Gretzky the hockey player. Michael Jordan the basketball player.
The other was Mike Tyson. Mike Tyson. There was a video game that we played. A Nintendo video game called Mike Tyson's Punch-Out. And me and my friend John we played that game all the time.
[4:50] And Mike Tyson was the last guy that you had to fight. And he was virtually impossible to defeat. And I remember that his older brother Matt beat him.

And instantly became the biggest hero in our neighborhood. Because he was the one who finally was able to bring down the great Mike Tyson. At least the video game version of Mike Tyson. Because truthfully none of us stood a chance against the real life Mike Tyson. Especially during the prime of his career. Tyson had the nickname of Iron Mike.
And later earned the moniker of the baddest man on the planet. Now we admired him for his athletic ability in the ring. But not for the kind of person that he was outside of it.
But again during that time in his prime in the ring. There was nobody who stood a match for him. He reigned as the undisputed world heavyweight champion from 1987 to 1990.
[5:55] He was the first heavyweight boxer to simultaneously hold the WBA, WBC, and IBF titles. As well as the only heavyweight to ever have successfully unified them.

Claiming his first championship at 20 years, 4 months, and 22 days of age. And still holds the record for the youngest boxer to ever win a heavyweight title.
Tyson won his first 19 professional fights by knockout. 12 of them. Knockouts in the first round. He had explosive punching power.
His opponents would come to the ring and they would touch gloves with him in the center of the ring before the bell. And they seemed to be confident in their ability to stand toe to toe with Iron Mike. But once they got hit, that confidence quickly dissipated. Mike Tyson was famously quoted as saying of those whom he fought, Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.
[6:59] They believe, in other words, he's saying, that they have a plan. That they think they can beat me, but they've never been hit by me. And once they get hit by me, they realize that they don't truly stand a chance.

But as tough as Tyson was in the ring, none of his opponents gave up before the match started. They at least went out to the ring.
They at least answered the bell, at least in the first round. And they tried to fight him and beat him. He was a great boxer, but he wasn't flawless.
And he would be beaten. And he would later be beaten a lot at the end of his career. And I think he's trying to make a comeback, which is a really bad idea.
Unless he came back against somebody like me. Then, you know, he'd probably win that fight. Matthew 8, 28 and 34. Luke 8, 26 through 37.
[7:55] And Mark 5, 1 through 17. Record the moment when Jesus encountered someone whom the rest in that community were very afraid of.

Somebody whom they viewed as being a tough man because he was demon possessed. Mark and Luke reference only one of the men. Matthew's account is shorter, but mentions the fact that there were two of these men.
Mark and Luke mention only one, but not to state that only one was present. For their particular purposes, they chose to focus on the more dominant of the two demon-possessed men.
And from their accounts, we learn that these men lived in the tombs, which is scary enough. They lived in the cemeteries. We learn that one of them, maybe both of them, ran around unclothed, cutting themselves with sharp stones.

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And though the people, the townspeople, tried to bind him, at least one of them, with chains, he was able to break them. And God's Word tells us that nobody had the strength to subdue him.
[8:58] No doubt there were two frightening men, especially the stronger of the two, that the people were terrified of and felt that they were no match to be able to suppress the strength of these men who were possessed by other worldly powers.

However, Jesus arrives on the scene. And these powerful men realize that they are no match for Jesus.
They both, in fact, run to him and bow down to him, wanting to avoid any kind of matchup whatsoever. I want to read Mark's account in 5, chapter 5, verses 6 through 13.
It said, Now, again, Mike Tyson was a great boxer, a great fighter, a tough man.
But nobody ever conceded the match to him before it could even begin. But here we see these two men are powerful. One particularly so.
[10:40] And they realized that they were no match whatsoever for the Lord Jesus Christ. They knew what all people will one day realize. That everyone will bow the knee to Jesus.

That his purposes will be achieved. That his kingdom will never be overthrown. That there is no power able, capable of standing toe-to-toe with God.
But that doesn't stop many from trying, does it? In Acts, chapter 12, verses 5 through 25, Five, the lesson will be learned here again by those who seek to thwart the plans of God and those who attempt to suppress his church.
Those who seek to stand against God will be defeated. They will suffer defeat. You cannot fight God and win. So here's the main idea for our study tonight.
If you have your outline and are following along. Main idea. Those who oppose God will be defeated. Those who seek to frustrate his plans will be frustrated.
[11:53] In the end, those who fight God will fail because Christ and his church always have and will always prevail. Always have and will always prevail.

In Acts, chapter 12, verses 5 through 25, we are presented here with three reasons why fighting against God is a useless endeavor. Though the world continues to war against the church today, we know that the church should not grow weary.
We should not shrink away in fear from whatever the world might do to us because we know that we stand on the side of truth. We stand on the side of God and therefore we have nothing to fear. Nothing to fear. So the first reason why fighting against God is useless is that God's power cannot be matched. God's power cannot be matched.
That comes from verses 5 through 19. So again, while Peter was kept in prison, the church responded as they usually did by praying.
[13:00] So it said Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. Now, in some of your translations, that word earnest might be translated as fervent.

It's the Greek adverb ektinos. It's the same word that is used to describe our Lord's Prayer in Gethsemane, where in Luke 22, 44, it says, And being in agony, he prayed more earnestly, more fervently, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.
And so what we understand here is that the church is pouring out their maximum effort to pray for their brother Peter. They knew the truth that James would later express in chapter 5, verse 16, where he said the prayers of a righteous person accomplish much, and they had faith in that.
But Herod thought that he had the situation under control. James is out of the picture. Peter is soon to be out of the picture. But we see here that God had other plans.
In verse 6 again, it says, Now when Herod was about to bring him out on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers bound with two chains, and centuries before the door were guarding the prison.
[14:18] And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side, woke him, saying, Get up quickly, and the chains fell off his hands.

It's interesting here that if you've ever been in prison or in jail, you know that the situation, the circumstances aren't pleasant. It's not a pleasant atmosphere to be in.
Yet here we see Peter is fast asleep. Neither the presence of the guards, the hardness of the cell floor, the uncomfortableness of being locked in chains, the stench of the prison, nor the imminent threat of his execution disturbed his rest.

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He was in such a deep slumber, in fact, that the angel had to nudge him awake. Wake up, Peter, right? Why was he able to sleep so soundly? Well, I think very simply because he trusted in God. Jesus had prepared him during his earthly ministry for what he was now enduring. Peter knew that he would be supplied by the Holy Spirit with words to give when he gave his defense, should God have put him in that place to do so.
[15:30] He also knew that death was not the end for him. He knew that God loved him and was always with him. He wasn't anxious about what would happen the next day because he knew that even in death, there is tremendous victory for the Christian to experience, to be in the presence of Christ forever.

Additionally, Jesus had told Peter that he would not die until he was advanced in age. If you go back and look at John 21, verse 18, he knew that Jesus fulfills his promises.
And since he was still of a younger age, he knew that he didn't need to fear. He didn't know what God would do, but he knew that God's promises were true, and that's all he needed, that God would prevail.
And later, Peter would encourage believers to do the same thing when he wrote in 1 Peter 5, 17, that we should cast all our anxieties on him because he cares for you.
However, we are tempted to often believe that the things that we are anxious about are greater than God's ability, or they cause us to cast doubt over his sovereignty.
[16:42] Right now, that anxiety for you could be over the pandemic, it could be over this coming election, or it could be over a myriad of other personal matters that you're experiencing right now.

But instead of trusting in God and fervently praying about those things, what we often do is we imagine the worst-case scenario, and then we act and we prepare as if that worst-case scenario is the most likely outcome that we will have to face.
But God's Word doesn't tell us to do that, right? He tells us not to worry. He tells us not to be anxious. He tells us repeatedly in His Word that we are not to be people who are fearful, but people who trust in Him, in His plan, in His sovereignty, in His ability.
Philippians 4, 4-7 is a great verse that gives us encouragement in time of stress, sorrow, or anxiety. It says there, Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice.
Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything. Anything. Anything. But in, yeah.
[17:59] But in everything. Everything. By prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the promise we have when we do that is that the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

So when you feel outmatched, the answer is to turn to God in prayer and seek solace in His Word.
Nevertheless, Herod felt that he had, again, the situation under control.
Again, he'd killed James. Peter was next on his list. And he must have thought that this Christ movement would soon come to an end at his hand.
But there was a fatal flaw in his plan, which was that he neglected to consider what God might do, how God might respond. God had more ministry for Peter to accomplish, therefore He sent an angel to deliver him from his imprisonment.
Look back at verses 8 through 11. And the angel said to him, Peter, dress yourself, put on your sandals. He did so. And he said to him, wrap your cloak around you and follow me.
[19:11] And he went out and followed him. He did not know what was being done by the angel or that he was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city.

It opened for them on its own accord. And when they went out and went along one street and immediately the angel left him, when Peter came to himself, he said, now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.
So I imagine, right, we know that Peter was in a deep sleep because the angel had to nudge him, right? And we know why he was able to sleep so well because of his trust in God.
And I think here he must have been still very groggy. This is a very miraculous event, wasn't it? And so he wasn't sure if he was dreaming still or maybe having another vision.
But once the angel leaves, having escorted him out of that highly secured prison, he came to his senses. He realizes that this actually happened. And then he made his way from there to the house

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of Mary, the mother of John Mark.
[20:19] Again, verses 12 through 15 says, When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer.

Recognizing Peter's voice in her joy, she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. They said to her, You are out of your mind. But she kept insisting that it was so.
And they kept saying, It is his angel. Though the believers gathered in Mary's house were fervent in prayer, they were still hesitant to believe that God had answered their prayers.
At least so soon. So quickly. So miraculously. They thought Rhoda had misunderstood that it wasn't Peter, it must have been his angel, which according to Jewish thought at the time, they believed that every person had a guardian angel who was able to take the form of the person that they were guarding.
Meanwhile, this is really a funny thing if you stop and really think about it. So here's Peter's delivered miraculously out of prison. He's eager to go rejoin his brothers and sisters in Christ and he knocks at the gate ready to be let in, right?
[21:35] Because he doesn't know. Are the guards aware now that I'm gone? Certainly, you know, alarm bells may go off. They'll be searching for me and he knocks. Let me in. Let me in.

Rhoda hears his voice. Instead of opening it up, she runs back in and I think Peter's here and then they doubt and here's the whole time he's just standing there waiting to get in. You know, somebody let me in.
So with no other option, he did what? He continued to knock, though I think it was probably more of like a quiet, steady, wrapping knock, hoping not to attract attention to himself, but hoping that they would come back and let him inside.
Verse 16 and 17, again, it said Peter continued knocking and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. But motioning them with his hands to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison and he said, tell these things to James and to the brothers.
Then he departed and went to another place. So they were excited and understandably so, but again, you know, covert operation, I guess.
[22:38] Let's keep it quiet. Let's all enjoy this, but we know that they're going to come out not doubting God's sovereignty, but being responsible. And so Peter retold them the events that had just taken place.

He instructed them to go share this news with James, with the church, that they would rejoice in what God has done as well. Again, because he knew that Herod would soon be looking for him and so he departs, though Luke doesn't tell us exactly where he goes.
But regardless of where he went, he does fade here from the scene as far as the records of Acts is concerned. He'll appear back in Acts chapter 15 at the Jerusalem Council, but this is really the last that we see Peter in Acts.
From here on out, the story then focuses on Paul and his ministry. Let's look at verses 18 and 19 again. It says, Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers who had, who, of what, over what, excuse me, had become of Peter.
And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea and he spent time there.
[23:51] So again, Peter's sudden mysterious disappearance from this highly secured prison cell caused an uproar among the guards. They frantically turned the cell that he was in upside down searching for him since they knew what kind of fate awaited them for having lost such a prisoner who their leader, their ruler, desperately wanted to put to death.

And so they knew that in losing him, they would meet the same demise. They would take the place of Peter. And that's what Herod did, still doubting God's ability, perhaps even thinking that he himself was still on the side of God.
He grew suspicious of those guards and forced their execution. Then being the great leader that he is, he, you know, washes his hands of it and he decides, I need to go on vacation.
And so he goes on vacation and I'm joking there, he was not a great leader, right? He leaves. I'm tired, this is an embarrassment for me and instead of facing the music, I'm just going to hightail it,

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I'm going to get out of town, I'm going to go on vacation.
Again, to distance himself from the embarrassment, but still failing to realize that he could not fight God and win. Could not fight God and win. God's power cannot be matched.
[25:16] Herod would also learn that he could not escape God's punishment for his attempts to persecute his church. So the second reason why we realize you cannot fight God and win, why you shouldn't fight God, is that God's wrath cannot be evaded.

It cannot be evaded. Verses 20 through 23. Several months now had passed since Peter has escaped for reasons and went to places that we're not sure, but again, for reasons unknown to us according to verse 20.
Herod was angry as he was prone to be. This time his anger was directed at the people of Tyre and Sidon and they came together in one accord having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, and they asked for peace because their country depended on the king's country for food.
So again, here Tyre and Sidon were, these cities were outside of Herod's jurisdiction, but since Old Testament times, their country had been fed and depended upon food by the region that Herod ruled over.
And so realizing that Herod had a short fuse, they appealed to Blastus, who was his treasurer or his household manager, to make peace between them and Herod and to do so quickly.
[26:39] Herod seems to have agreed to their terms, but wanted to further demonstrate his authority and superiority over them, so he subjected the ambassadors of those two cities to a spectacle.

According to the Jewish historian, Josephus, the spectacle was a feast in honor of Herod's patron, who was the Roman emperor Claudius. Verse 21 says, On an appointed day, Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them.
So here they meet in the amphitheater that Herod Agrippa, that's this Herod, but the one that Herod the Great, his grandfather, had built. Josephus, the Jewish historian, recorded that event that day in his writings.
This is what he said, Herod put on a garment, a garment made holy of silver and a contexture truly wonderful and came into the theater early in the morning, at which time the silver of his garment, illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner.
So, not a good guy, we know that, very full of himself, very arrogant. He thinks, you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to have a garment of silver made for me.
[28:03] I'm going to force everybody to wake up early in the morning and come in this amphitheater so they can see me shining brightly in all of my splendor. And so that's what he does.

He's really dolled himself up. He clothes himself in a way that reflects the high level of the arrogance that he had, how high he viewed himself. He thought he was a mighty and powerful man. And the people who had gathered were either overwhelmed by his splendor or more likely they wanted to flatter him because they knew his temperament. And so with one accord in verse 22, it says that they began shouting the voice of a God and not of a man.
Josephus notes that Herod did neither rebuke them nor reject their pious flattery. And then we see that God's response was swift. Verse 23, Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down because he did not give God the glory and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.
The phrase eaten of worms in Greek is skolakobrotus. I'm not going to say it again, okay? But the word, the root word skolaks, I can say that, means a specific head structure of a tapeworm.
[29:19] Gross, right? Since the word skolaks, plural, which is skolisis, is applied to the head of tapeworms, Herod's death was almost certainly due to the rupture of a cyst formed by a tapeworm in his body.

There are several kinds of tapeworms. And this is the great thing about Bible study. We learn about all kinds of things in here, don't we? So now we're going to learn a little bit about tapeworms. One of the most common ones found in that area in sheep-growing countries is the dog tape.
Anybody ever heard of the dog tape? Okay. The heaviest infections come from areas where sheep and cattle are raised. Sheep and cattle serve as intermediate hosts for parasites.
The dogs eat the infected meat. The man gets the eggs from the dog usually in gross ways that I won't go into detail about.
It's just gross. The whole thing is. But, you know, he's getting what he deserves, right? According to Josephus, again, Herod lingered on after that for five days in terrible pain.

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[30:31] Amid all his pomp and majesty, he suffered a shameful death, a most shameful death. And so ended the reign and life of the man who dared to touch two of God's apostles.

His crimes for which he was executed was that he did not give God the glory. The very crime for which all the unregenerate who reject God will be condemned.
Before I move on to point three, I want to say God's wrath cannot be evaded and we can put there next to that unless you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior who has taken God's wrath away from you.
Third, God's plans cannot be frustrated. God's plans cannot be frustrated. Verses 24 and 25. But the word of God increased and multiplied and Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John whose other name was Mark.
And so here Luke finishes this portion of Acts by reporting that despite the opposition of men to the church, the church just kept on growing, kept on increasing, kept on multiplying.
[31:51] In fact, the persecution of the church accomplished the opposite of what the persecutors hoped to accomplish. They hoped to put an end to a church, but instead their persecution led to it exploding in growth.

And then Luke concludes by giving the example of man's inability to frustrate God's plan by telling about the work of Barnabas and Saul who had returned from Jerusalem having fulfilled their mission.
Herod died persecuting the church while the church he persecuted continued to live on. And such has been the case throughout the history of the world, throughout the history of the church, and will continue to be the case until the Lord returns.
The church of Jesus Christ has always and will always prevail. Again, verses 24 and 25 mark an important transition in Acts.
We're there. They reintroduce us to Paul and will begin to cover the rest of his ministry. But you know, in conclusion, I know that right now you've heard of what's gone on, especially in California and some other states in our country where churches are being persecuted for meeting and you know what's happening with Dr. MacArthur's church and now that is going to, going through the court system and eventually they'll have a trial date.
[33:17] But you know, in all of it, the church will prevail. We'll prevail through this pandemic. We'll prevail through whatever persecution. Not because of who we are but because of who Christ is.

And so right now we are living in a country, living in a world where a lot of people are afraid and we need to be like Peter. We don't know what tomorrow will bring but we know that the Lord will still reign, that the Lord is still sovereign, that his plans cannot be frustrated and so we're people who live by faith and we know that God is good, that God will answer all of his promises, he will fulfill, I should say, all of his promises, the Lord will return and we will be with him eternally.
And so we, of all people, have no reason to fear and every reason to hope because of Christ, who he is and what he's done for us.
Let's pray. Lord God, thank you for this time that we've had to spend tonight in worship of you in study of your word. God, we know from this chapter and from the whole entire Bible that there is no one who can match your power, there is no one, Lord, who is able to dethrone you, there is no power who can even come close to that.
Lord, you are great, you are awesome, you are mighty, you are sovereign, you are in control, you are gracious and merciful and loving. And so we're so thankful, Lord, to know that being in Christ means that we are on your side and like Peter and like so many others, Lord, who have come before and after him, that whatever situation we're experiencing in life, that we have reason to be faithful, we have reason not to fear.
[35:09] So help us to live that way and in so doing, Lord, that we would give people an opportunity to hear the gospel, that we would share it with them and we would tell them that the wrath of God can only be evaded through the cross of Jesus Christ, through placing your trust in Christ and his death, his resurrection.

So, Lord, we pray for those Christians who are facing persecution right now and we pray that they'd be comforted by your word and by your promises that no matter what happens, the plans, Lord, of you can never be thwarted, can never be frustrated.
Your church will always prevail until that day we are gathered collectively with you in your kingdom before your throne worshiping the Lamb of God who came to take away our sins.

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We love you and we give you all the glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.

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