**Kingdom, Power & Glory**

Acts 12:18-25

***Herod Agrippa*** the first is our cautionary tale for today. Notice the frame of Acts chapter 12:

“**Herod the king** laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church… Because he did not give God the glory, he was **eaten by worms** and breathed his last.” Acts 12:2,23

The one introduced in verse 2 as “the king” is struck dead in verse 23. As we saw last week, the lesson of Acts 12 is that there is only **One True King** - the Lord Jesus Christ. All human authorities and even spiritual authorities are inconsequential next to King Jesus.

So today let’s learn from ***Herod’s negative example*** **what NOT to do** and then draw inspiration from **Barnabas** as a positive example of what TO do. You can see the vivid contrast in the outline:

|  |  |
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| **Herod** | **Barnabas** |
| My kingdom | Your kingdom |
| My power | Your power |
| My glory | Your glory |

It’s one thing to recite the traditional ending of the Lord’s prayer - ***“Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever,”*** - but it is another thing to live throughout the day devoted to His kingdom, relying on His power and pursuing His glory rather than our own.

**Herod Agrippa** was the grandson of Herod the Great. This family was like the Roman dynasty in Jerusalem - the Caesar lineage of Judea. And Agrippa, it turned out, was raised in Rome and very friendly with the Caesars.

The Herodian dynasty was a lot like the Caesars in Rome. Agrippa’s father was executed by Herod the Great due to the paranoia of the aging ruler - always expecting conspiracy and intrigue against him, keeping a guard of 2,000 soldiers.

**Herod the Great** made sure his legacy in Jerusalem and the surrounding region would last a long time - and, indeed, it has. You can still see the fruit of his construction projects all over the holy land. The western wall of the temple mount, the mountain fortress of Masada, the port and fortress at Caesarea by the sea are just a few examples of Herod’s projects. They were political initiatives, to win favor from the Jews and also self-promoting efforts, to make a name for Herod. He made sure his name in history would be, “Herod the Great.”

That was Agrippa’s family legacy. And he followed directly in Grampa’s footsteps. Look back at verse 2.

**Herod Agrippa - My Kingdom**

“He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that ***it pleased the Jews***, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.” Acts 12:2-3

It was the ancient ***game of Roman and Jewish politics*** - a dangerous, high stakes game. This was Herod “the king” seeking to establish his own kingdom. His daily pursuit was “MY kingdom come. MY will be done” - my kingdom, my power, my glory. So he is a clear example of a ***self-focused life***.

The self-focused life seeks to built its own kingdom. Instead of staying to God “YOUR kingdom come,” it says, “MY kingdom come.” Herod was building a literal kingdom for himself. But if we’re honest, don’t we all do the same things?

* Aren’t we committed to our own comforts and pleasures?
* Don’t we work hard to improve our own “palaces”?
* Don’t we play politics to help ourselves advance in the business world, the relationships world or (in my case) the church world?

Herod was trying to please the Jews in his region and to impress the Romans he reported to. Who are you trying to please? Who are you trying to impress right now? How are you tempted to advance your own kingdom, your own interests and desires?

We saw last week that while Herod bore the title “king” in the region, Acts 12 makes it clear that **Jesus was the true king**, easily rescuing Peter from Herod’s fortified prison. You’d think Herod might have learned from that experience but it we see in verse 19 it just made him mad.

**Herod Agrippa - My Power**

“After Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death.” Acts 12:19

***Frustrated*** by his lack of control of the situation with Peter, Herod ordered the death of the prison guards, not knowing that the next documented death in this story would be his own. Acts 12 is all about King Herod flexing his muscle. We see his ***political power*** in pleasing the Jews. We see his ***military power*** in having Peter confined in a fortified prison with squads of soldiers guarding him. We see his ***economic power*** then in verse 20.

**Herod Agrippa - My Power**

“Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon and they came to him with one accord… asking for peace, because their country depended on the king’s country for food.” Acts 12:20

This was the position Herod wanted to be in - ***the guy in charge***; the one in control. That’s why Peter’s escape was so irksome to him - it showed him he *wasn’t* in control; there was a higher power involved. That was troubling.

Herod knew about **the power of Rome** - he was committed to playing the political games to increase his own access to that power. But in the region, he wanted to be the main player - the go to guy.

And again, ***aren’t we all guilty*** of this same kind of pursuit? We don’t like to depend on anyone else. We would much rather be the one GIVING a loan instead of receiving one. We want plenty of financial buffer. We want secure investments and retirement lined up until age 100 or so.

* **Money** is probably the main way this pursuit rears its idolatrous head, but it’s not the only way.
* **Relationships** and influence are like this. Some churches have deeply rooted power politics games. I’m very thankful to say that is not the case at Oakwood. But many churches get infected with that cancer as parties war against each other and different leaders move against each other related to big decisions.
* **Health** is one more way we see this. And illness is a way God reminds us we don’t have much power anyway, so we are way better off depending on Him.

The real test of whose power we rely on, of course, is **PRAYER**. A prayerless life is a self-reliant life. I wish I could say I’ve solved this one and totally obey Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths.” Oh, how often we trust in OURSELVES with all of our hearts; how often we lean on our own understanding. How often we acknowledge our own desires in all of our ways and direct our own steps…

Which way do you tend to go? MINE is the kingdom and the power and the glory… or THINE is the kingdom and the power and the glory? Herod shows us his third defining pursuit:

**Herod Agrippa - My Glory**

“On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them.” Acts 12:21

**To showcase this encounter** with the people of Tyre and Sidon, Herod got all dressed up and prepared an inspiring speech. This was an ideal moment for this power and glory-hungry king. A mass of people from the region were coming to beg him for food. They needed him. They depended on him. He had the power. His kingdom had the resources. He WAS the KING. He was supremely self-focused, he was profoundly self-reliant and third, he was totally self-exalting. He was all about amassing for himself optimal comfort, influence and prestige.

**Herod Agrippa - My Glory**

“On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them.” Acts 12:21

Herod literally put himself **on a pedestal**. He decked himself out in his most impressive and expensive robes and gave the speech of a lifetime. Josephus, the Jewish historian, documented this moment very carefully.

“At this festival a great number were gathered together of the principal persons of dignity of his province. On the second day of the spectacles he put on a garment made wholly of silver, of a truly wonderful texture, and came into the theater early in the morning. There the silver of his garment, being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays, shone out in a wonderful manner, and was so resplendent as to spread awe over those that looked intently upon him.” Josephus, *Antiquities*

Herod designed this moment to dazzle and amaze. And it succeeded.

“Presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another, (though not for his good) that he was a god; and they added, ‘Be thou merciful to us.’” Josephus, *Antiquities*

Isn’t it amazing how a secular historian confirms in detail ***the accuracy of Luke’s account*** here in Acts 12? Now look at the resolution…

**Herod Agrippa - My Glory**

“And the people were shouting, ‘The voice of a god, and not of a man!’ Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory.” Acts 12:22-23

Luke shows us **Herod’s true motives** - to bring glory to himself. Even when the crowd affirmed him as divine, still this local ruler (and not even a particularly significant one), did not give God the credit for being God. Instead, Herod tried to take that glory for himself. And that was it. The true God was fed up.

“You attack my church, my people. You kill James, you lock up Peter. You think you have all the power. That’s enough. You’re done.”

**Herod Agrippa - My Glory**

“An angel of the Lord struck him down… and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.” Acts 12:23

At first reading this may sound like ***a mistake in terms of the order.*** Wouldn’t you die first and be eaten by worms later? Not if the worms are the thing that kills you! Again, Josephus confirms the details.

“A severe pain arose in his belly, striking with a most violent intensity… And when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life, being in the fifty-fourth year of his age and in the seventh year of his reign.” Josephus, *Antiquities*

What a sobering and graphic lesson in the deadly consequences of pride. That is the outcome for the person who consistently says, “Mine is the kingdom, mine is the power, mine is the glory.”

The outcome is very similar to that of Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel. That great king had a similar experience, looking out on the great empire around his palace and saying to himself, “Look at this great Babylon that I have built!”

**My Kingdom, Power and Glory**

“‘Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?’ While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven.” Daniel 4:30-31

He had already been warned that he was ***a tree about to be chopped down***, but one year to the day after that warning, he claimed all the credit for his power and glory, and the Lord zapped him right there on his balcony.

**My Kingdom, Power and Glory**

“O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you,and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox.” Daniel 4:31-32

For seven years the great king of Babylon crawled around on his hands and knees, chewing grass like a wild animal. His finger nails and hair grew long and out of control. He was a mindless, disgusting creature. When the seven years were up the Lord restored Nebuchadnezzar’s mind and here was his revelation:

**Yours is the Kingdom, Power and Glory**

“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.” Daniel 4:37

Herod did not get another chance. Nebuchadnezzar did. And he immediately acknowledged that there is a true, divine King who rules over all earthly kings - over everything and everyone. **All of us today also have a second chance** - a fresh opportunity to humble ourselves before the true king - and to turn away from our self-focus, self-reliance and self-exaltation to instead say “YOURS is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen.”

Let’s look at **the example of Barnabas** for inspiration in how to live a God-focused, God-reliant and God-glorifying life!

**Barnabas - Your Kingdom**

“Barnabas (which means son of encouragement)... sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.” Acts 4:36-37

When we first met Barnabas back here in Acts 4 we learned that his given name was Joseph but the nickname “Barnabas” had caught on because he was such a recognized **encourager**. It’s not surprising, then, when the first thing he does in Acts is sell a field and give all of the proceeds to the apostles to meet the needs of the believers in Jerusalem.

***What a contrast to King Herod!*** Barnabas was not trying to build up his own property and enhance his portfolio. He joyfully **sold a field** and gave the money away. He heard there were people in need and he used some of his resources to help meet that need. Instead of saying “MINE is the kingdom,” Barnabas said, “YOURS is the kingdom.” He was more interested in building up GOD’s kingdom than His own. He was dedicated to God’s will, not his own desires and comforts.

Herod was not about giving anything away, he was about taking things from others - through taxes and tributes. Anything Herod did for the Jewish people was intended to get something in return. But not Barnabas. Barnabas gave without any expectation of getting anything in return - no personal advantage, no political advantage. Just real generosity.

What about you? **Are you a giver or a taker?**

* In your **marriage**, are you more about what you can GIVE, or what you can GET? Are you more about your own desires and preferences or about your spouse’s desires and preferences?
* In your **relationships**, do you tend to talk about whatever is on YOUR mind or do you LISTEN well, tuning in to the interests and needs of the people around you?
* In your **work**, are you about your own advancement? Are you trying to build your own kingdom? Or are you about serving others; giving and helping?

This is a real **heart check** for all of us. Do we tend to say MINE is the kingdom or THINE is the kingdom? MY will be done or THY will be done? Are we self-focused or God-focused and others-focused? Where is your heart today? Barnabas shows us what a God-focused life looks like. Secondly, he shows us what a God-reliant life looks like.

**Barnabas - Your Power**

“And when [Saul] had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.” Acts 9:26

This is a sad indictment of the church in Jerusalem. **Saul had just been converted** - but the believers didn’t yet believe it. They had known him for a long time as the great enemy of the church - hunting down believers to arrest them, throw them in prison and many times have them executed. No doubt many in the church knew people personally that Saul had arrested or killed. You don’t just get over that real quickly.

It was reasonable for the church to be cautious with Saul. But the fact that ALL of them were afraid and unwilling to check things out with Saul must have been disappointing for the new Christ follower. Enter Barnabas, the son of encouragement.

**Barnabas - Your Power**

“But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord… and how he had preached boldly.” Acts 9:27

When no one else would go near Saul because they were afraid, Barnabas quickly came alongside the young zealot and brought him straight to the apostles. Think about the courage and faith it took to take this step. No doubt Barnabas knew the same facts as everyone else. He knew how dangerous Saul had been. He knew that in going to Saul he was **risking his life**. Could the whole thing be a ruse? Was Saul just trying to act like a convert to get inside, to expose the leadership team of the early church?

But Barnabas would not let fear control him. He stepped out in faith, trusting God to protect him, one way or another.

***How are you doing with fear right now?*** When we give in to fear and worry it shows we are trusting in our own strength, rather than God’s power. Barnabas knew the Almighty God of heaven was with him - what could a mortal man, like Saul, do to him?

* Has **COVID-19** come to control your life? Is the fear of getting sick, the fear of exposure, the fear of death dictating all of the terms of your existence?
* There is a place for caution and common sense. ***But fear should not be the governing position for the Christian.*** When fear is in the driver’s seat it means Jesus isn’t. “Perfect love casts out fear.”

Maybe it’s not COVID-19 for you - maybe it’s another illness or the fear of it. Maybe it’s your career path. Maybe your job is in danger. Maybe you’ve lost your job for some reason. Maybe it’s a relationship you fear losing or have already lost.

Remember, ***“Fear is a liar.”*** Fear plays up all the negative possibilities and ignores all the positive possibilities. Fear focuses on this world, faith focuses on the kingdom of God. Fear dwells on what YOU can do. Faith dwells on what GOD can do.

I have been so impressed with the Oakwood church family through the pandemic. Some of you are more cautious and others more “assertive.” But there has been a wonderful sense of unity and compassion for one another - and a wonderful, ***overriding spirit of FAITH*** - knowing that God is in control and, whatever happens, He will bring us through this.

And trust me, COVID-19 may go away, but there is ***more serious and dangerous stuff coming*** - and possibly coming soon. So we all need to get this straight in terms of how we handle fear.

Will we focus on our own abilities and resources or on GOD’s abilities and resources? Will we say, “MINE is the power,” or “THINE is the power?” Insisting on our own plans and power will always produce anxiety. ***Resting in God’s plans and power is the pathway to peace.***

That is what Barnabas did.

The way **Barnabas came alongside Saul** and stayed with him for a couple of years illustrates all three of these positive attributes. Barnabas was focused on God’s kingdom, dependent on God’s power and pursuing God’s glory. Had Barnabas only been about his own kingdom and comfort, he would not have gone out of his way to find Saul. Had Barnabas only been about his own abilities and power he would have hung back in fear like the others. Had Barnabas been only about his own reputation and advancement he would not have brought Saul directly to the apostles nor would he have supported Saul and helped him develop as a leader. That’s our third attribute.

**Barnabas - Your Glory**

“The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to… Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas.” Acts 11:21-22

A couple of weeks ago we heard how the gospel reached Antioch - through “some men of Cyprus and Cyrene.” How encouraging to see the way ***the Lord uses ordinary, everyday believers*** to accomplish key strategic advances for the gospel.

When the apostles heard about a dramatic work of God in Antioch, they didn’t move to suppress it, **they sent Barnabas to encourage it**. They knew Barnabas would not seek to draw attention to himself but that he would support the local leaders, strengthen them in the faith and prepare them for the next step in their ministry.

**Barnabas - Your Glory**

“When he came and saw the grace of God, ***he was glad*** and exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.” Acts 11:23

**The test of humility** is being able to ***celebrate the success of others***. Pride is always irritated when others succeed, especially if they get a lot of recognition. Pride wants the spotlight, the applause. Humility rejoices when others succeed, when they get the spotlight. And above all, Christian humility wants God to get all the credit anyway.

As far as we can tell in Scripture, Barnabas started out as an encourager and finished his life and ministry as an encourager. He gave away a field to help the believers. He helped Saul get started in ministry. He supported the work of God in Antioch and celebrated what God was doing in and through them. Then Barnabas went with Paul on his first missionary journey. There is a subtle but significant change that takes place on this mission.

**Barnabas - Your Glory**

“Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul… they proclaimed the word of God… Now Paul and his companions set sail…” Acts 13:2,5,13

In the list of leaders in the church at Antioch, **Barnabas was FIRST**, Saul was last. When the Spirit called them to the mission, Barnabas was again the primary and Saul secondary. When they arrive at their first stop they are preaching the word together. But when they leave for their second destination the leadership structure has already changed. Now it is PAUL and Barnabas rather than Barnabas and Paul.

Barnabas took the approach of John the Baptist - saying, “I must become less, he must become more.” Barnabas was a true empowering leader - investing in Paul and rejoicing when the apprentice became the master.

How inspiring to see ***the example of Barnabas!***

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| **Herod** | **Barnabas** |
| My kingdom - self-focused | Your kingdom - God-focused |
| My power - self-reliant | Your power - God-reliant |
| My glory - self-exalting | Your glory - God-exalting |

King Herod provides a serious warning for us about the dangers of a self-focused life. Barnabas shows us the better way. May we not fall into the trap of saying “Mine is the kingdom and the power and the glory,” but may we instead pray and live, “YOURS is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.”

Let’s pray the Lord’s prayer together.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory

forever. Amen.

Let’s pray.