

Acts 12

7/31/2016

Keeping up with the Jameses

INTRODUCTION

1 Peter 2:13-17, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king."

How to Respond When the Church is Politically Discriminated Against by Civil Powers:

1. ADVANCE THE GOSPEL IN SPITE OF RESISTANCE (12:1-4)

- A. Herod Agrippa I (grandson of Herod the Great and nephew of Herod Antipas) persecutes the apostles in Jerusalem, namely James and Peter (v. 1).
- B. The Apostle James is beheaded by Herod, the first apostle to be martyred (v. 2).
 - The elder brother of the Apostle John, James was a disciple in the inner circle of Jesus, one of the "Sons of Thunder," and a passionate and zealous follower.
 - Interesting facts: 1) This is the only place in Scripture where James is mentioned alone, 2) James is the only apostle whose death is recorded in Scripture.
- C. Herod arrests Peter after seeing how the death of James pleased the Jews (vv. 3-4).
 - In the case of political discrimination on religious grounds, how should we respond? *Application: The apostles kept advancing the gospel, and so should we.*

2. PRAY FOR RELIEF WHILE SUBMITTING TO AUTHORITY (12:5-12)

- A. Peter is imprisoned, and the church prays fervently (v. 5).
- B. Peter, bound between two soldiers, is awoken by an angel of the Lord and led past the guards and out of the prison (vv. 6-10).
 - The formerly aggressive Peter (cf. John 18:10) seemingly submits to the authorities who have wrongfully imprisoned him (cf. 1 Peter 2:11-25). Likewise, there is not a hint of revolution on the part of the church. *Application: Without forsaking the advancement of the gospel, submit to governing authorities.*
- C. God answers the prayers of the church by sending forth an angel to rescue Peter from the persecuting hand of Herod and the influence of the Jews (vv. 11-12).
 - God intervenes to nullify Herod's political discrimination and persecution, which separated church from state and freed the gospel from being tied to the Jewish state (remember that Ancient Israel was set up by God as a theocracy).
 - This section, verses 5-12, begins and ends with prayer. The church, who likely prayed just as fervently for James, keeps praying in midst of persecution. *Application: When the church is under persecution, we must not cease to pray!*

3. REJOICE IN THE LORD'S HANDIWORK (12:13-17)

- A. Peter's arrival at the house of Mary (mother of Mark) causes great joy and amazement among his praying friends (vv. 13-16).
- B. Peter, likely still in danger, explains his divine rescue and had his friends pass on the news to James, the leader of the Jerusalem church and brother of Jesus (vv. 17).
 - When Barnabas and Paul meet with the "pillars" of the Jerusalem church (cf. Galatians 2:10), they meet with James, Peter, and John, listed in that order.

4. LEAVE THE JUDGMENT TO GOD (12:18-23)

- A. Peter's escape is discovered; Herod has the offending guards executed (vv. 18-19).
- B. Herod, who had persecuted the Lord's apostles and executed his own innocent guards, now arranges a way to impress the people during political negotiations, and receives the praise of men without giving God the glory (vv. 20-22).
- C. Herod receives a just divine judgment, who is eaten by worms and dies (v. 23).
 - God is the one who judges those who persecute the church. *Application: We need to leave the judgment to God; note that sometimes He has mercy instead.*

5. PARTICIPATE IN THE GOSPEL MISSION (12:24-25)

- A. Herod may have tried to erect an obstacle for the gospel by using his political power to discriminate against and persecute Christians, but the Word of the Lord continued to grow and multiply (v. 24).
- B. Barnabas and Saul had gone to Jerusalem in 11:30, and now they return in 12:25 to find Herod dead, only to be in Antioch again in 13:1. Mark, who was likely in Jerusalem in 12:12, goes on to accompany Barnabas and Saul in 13:5 (v. 25).
 - Barnabas and Saul, like the church in Jerusalem, did not stop advancing the gospel because of persecution and fulfilling their mission. In addition, they kept up with the church in Jerusalem and provided aid.
 - The Holy Spirit is on the move advancing the gospel, but He uses appointed instruments to carry the gospel from place to place and person to person. *Challenge: Be part of the gospel mission regardless of what civil authorities may do to try and slow it down.*

CONCLUSION

- A. The Word of God is our ultimate authority. In times of persecution, we are shown the example of the church in Acts. One on hand, we are always ready to submit, but on the other hand, we must keep advancing the gospel...together.
 - *"Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason — I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other — my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."*
— Martin Luther
- B. Often, the church in America needs to be reminded of what do with the freedom we still have. Ready to advance the gospel in spite of persecution? In freedom?
 - *"Don't ever give up in freedom what we would never have given up in persecution! That is our witness to the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ!"*
— Nik Ripken