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WARM UP

What three words would you want written about you on your tombstone?

WORD

Read **Acts 12:1-5, 20-25**

There are two deaths in one chapter of Acts. The first death is of James the disciple. His death is an honourable one of persecution because of his faith in Christ. The other death is of a Jewish king by the name of Herod, who lived his life constantly concerned about the opinions people had of him. Herod was struck down by an angel of the Lord.

NOTES

1 For the Right Reasons

¹About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. ²He killed James the brother of John with the sword, ³and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread.

Acts 12:1-3 (ESV)

As time goes by in the book of Acts, persecution grows heavier towards Christ's followers. Persecution is not only from the Roman authorities, but also from the Jewish installed king Herod, who saw the disciples of Christ as a threat to his desire to be the sole king of Israel. James is violently killed for his faith, and based on the pleasure this brought the Jews, Herod instigated further persecution by imprisoning Peter. It was clear that king Herod was living at any cost for the appeasement of people, which would eventually be his downfall.

- Has there ever been a time that you have felt pressured to do something that you didn't want to do? Did you do it anyway? What did you learn from the experience?

2 Who's Got the Power

⁴And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. ⁵So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. ⁶Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. ⁷And 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. ⁸And 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." ⁹And 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. ¹⁰When 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. ¹¹When 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."

Acts 12:4-11 (ESV)

Despite the possibility of persecution and the death of his beloved spiritual brother, James, Peter remains protected by an angel of the Lord, as he remained steadfast in his faith in God. Let us be encouraged that despite times of despair, God is ever with us, always protecting us, and giving us grace to endure and even thrive in every season.

- Has there ever been a time when the pressure of life has been so heavy, but you sensed God was there for you?

3 Downfall

²⁰Now 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. ²¹On an appointed day, Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. ²²And the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!" ²³Immediately 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. ²⁴But the word of God increased and multiplied.

Acts 12:20-24 (ESV)

In the scope of all things we might face, the Bible warns us throughout its pages that God despises the proud. Herod, being an example of pride at its utmost, is struck down in a most undignified fashion. Yet the word of God prevailed. Let us learn to live our lives with an eternal perspective with our eyes and hearts set on the glorification of the eternal One, Jesus Christ.

PRAYER

- Pray for God's perspective on life, that we will live with our eyes fixed on him.
- Pray for strength to endure and thrive wherever God has us now.
- Pray for the persecuted around the world.
- Pray for healing of any members within your group, whether it's relational rifts or physical ailments.