

The Word of God Increased

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 May 2026

Preacher: Greg Dirnberger

[0 : 00] Working through Chris, but I want to acknowledge that that is God's grace working through you! It's your giving permission, affirmation, blessing, sending Chris on trips to the Philippines a couple times a year probably.

You are having a massive impact globally because of the way you are releasing him. And he would not be able to be released were it not for faithful men and women here that just carry that on so that Chris can be involved in that way.

So I want to say thank you on behalf of Sovereign Grace Churches and all that we're involved in globally. It is a great gift that you are giving through giving your pastor away.

I do want to invite you to turn to the book of Acts in your Bibles or if your electronic devices or however you do that to Acts chapter 12. And it's fitting then to make a connection right into a portion of scripture that is so key in understanding the mission of Jesus in his church.

Before I look at Acts chapter 12, in Acts chapter 1 verses 7 and 8, the very last words of Jesus are recorded like this.

[1 : 21] It's not for you to know times or seasons the Father has fixed by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.

And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Those last words of Jesus summarize the message of the book of Acts.

One, God the Father has a purpose and that purpose is to make known in all the earth among all the peoples how great and glorious he is in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Secondly, God the Father also has a plan for accomplishing that purpose. His plan is his people. You and you and you and you and you and you and you and you and you all of you will be my witnesses.

And thirdly, since God the Father has designed each one of us with distinct and yet common weaknesses and deficiencies, and in order to amplify his goodness and greatness, he provides exactly what we all need.

[2 : 48] Through the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, God guarantees that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of his glory as the waters cover the sea.

And so those three things, God's purpose, God's plan, and God's promise to fulfill his purpose, they all cast a tint on everything that we see and then hear happening in the book of Acts.

Now, I want to draw your attention this morning to Acts chapter 12. And my aim, my aim in this sermon is to strengthen your confidence.

I want to strengthen your confidence, especially in unsettling times, that God's purpose and God's plan and God's promises to fulfill his purpose and plan simply cannot be thwarted.

And we can never hear that enough. So let me say it again. Nothing can thwart the power and the purpose of God and his word.

[3 : 56] So with that in view, I'd like to invite you to turn to Acts chapter 12, verses 1 through 24. I'm going to read, I'm going to skip through here and just read the high points of this passage and then we'll circle back and look at some of these verses again.

But give your mind's attention to hearing God's word. Acts chapter 12. About that time, Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.

He killed James, the brother of John, with a sword. And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.

Verse 5. So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. Now, when Herod was about to bring him out on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers bound with two chains.

[5 : 09] 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. Put on your sandals. Wrap your cloak around you. And follow me.

Verse 10. 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. Verse 11. When Peter came to himself, he said, Now I'm 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.

[6 : 22] 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, more than likely grieving, weeping over this great loss of John.

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.

And they said to her, You're out of your mind. But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, It's his angel.

But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed.

Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what 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.

[7 : 45] Verse 20, 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.

On appointed day, Herod put on his royal robes, he took his seat upon the throne, and he delivered an oration to them, 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, and he was eaten by worms, and breathed his last.

But the word of God increased and multiplied. This is the Lord's holy, and sufficient, and powerful, life-changing word.

Please pray with me. Lord, as we would meditate on, and give thought to the things that you have communicated, through this text, through this word, how we would ask, Lord, in Jesus' name, that you would speak to us, and make your word get things done in us, that we could not accomplish, in and of ourselves.

[9 : 31] We pray that your purpose for this word, for this group of people, on this day, would be fulfilled. We welcome you, Lord, by your spirit, to reveal your power, and your presence, for your glory, in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, I want to draw your attention, to three observations, from Acts chapter 12, verses 1 to 24, and then I'm going to illustrate, and reinforce, what I believe is the faith-strengthening truth, that I mentioned earlier, namely, that nothing, can thwart the power, and the purpose of God, and His word.

Let's say that again. Nothing can thwart the power, and the purpose of God, and His word. In fact, let's say that together. Nothing can thwart the power, and purpose of God, in His word.

Amen. That's the main point, of Acts chapter 12, I believe. Nothing. Nothing. No organized human opposition, no idiosyncratic weakness, no leftist political onslaught, no lapse of faith, lapse of courage, lapse of good judgment.

Not even the darkest sins within, or the fiercest forces of hell without, can prevail against God's purpose, to fill the earth with the knowledge of His glory, and people's pleasure in His glory, and people's praise to His glory.

[11 : 17] And so, notice first, God's purpose, this purpose of God, is under constant assault.

Assaults come against God's purpose, and His glory, every day. They are new, every morning. So, Acts chapter 12, verse 1 begins, about that time, about that time, Herod, the king, laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.

He killed James, and then he proceeded to arrest Peter also. And the intention behind Peter's arrest, we might safely assume, is for the purpose of killing him, as James had been killed. And so, the text says, about that time. What do we know about that time? Well, it's not completely precise, but the context would suggest, that the events unfolding, now here, in Acts chapter 12, were taking place, about the same time, that a new church, was getting up and running, and gaining some traction, in the city of Antioch, of Syria.

And so, at least, 300 miles, north, of Jerusalem, the hand of the Lord, had come upon his, displaced, scattered people, and now through their witness, according to Acts chapter 11, verse 21, a great number, who believed, turned to the Lord.

[13:04] And the presence, and the power of God, was visible, the presence, and power of God, was discernible, and as God intends, when people are saved, and disciples are multiplied, and they gather, and they form churches.

And the Antioch church, took hold, as a strategic, and influential, new congregation. But, assaults on the purpose of God, are new, every morning.

And just what it looks like, there's some traction, to God's plan, there is a, a new headache. And this headache, has a name, Herod.

Call him, Herod the headache. And in, one swift act, James, one of Jesus' inner circle, perhaps you know, he's one of the sons of thunder, Peter, he is a brutally, eliminated.

And almost immediately, Herod then, lands, an even bigger fish. You see, taking Peter down, would both make a statement, and cause a significant setback, to the momentum, of the cause of Christ.

[14:21] You cut off, the head, of the, the snake, you kill the snake. And you see, Herod, he's on a mission. He's on a mission, of his own, namely, a mission, to put an end, to God's purpose, by striking hard, and fast, at the tip of the spear, of God's plan, and purpose, by doing violence, to God's people.

Take down Peter, you take down, the whole thing. And so, Luke is clearly, emphasizing the drama, that this is. It looks so, grim.

Whatever gains, the word of God, had made in Antioch, would now be negated, by crippling the church, back in Jerusalem. So, it's like one step forward, two, maybe like, three steps back.

But isn't that, the way it always is? Just when it feels like, there's a little margin. Just when it, it seems like, there's some tangible evidence, of grace, and growth, or some encouraging signs, of progress.

Up to the surface, emerges a new heritage. It's always something. Somebody's feelings, get hurt. Some individual, or some faction, is pushing a distracting agenda.

[15:44] There's a leadership, failure. Somebody moves away. Some strategic leader. Somebody dies. I mean, it just, it just never ends.

It's like, as somebody said, like putting an octopus, to bed. You know, you just get one, quivering appendage, tucked under the covers, and out pops another one. But see friends, listen, this is normal life, in the kingdom of God.

in a broken world. It's normal life, in a fallen, and broken world. The purpose of God, to fill the earth, with knowledge of his glory, and pleasure in his glory, praise to his glory, is under constant, assault. And not only in terms of how it affects, the mission, the greater mission of the church, God's purpose is under constant, assault, in our individual lives as well.

Every day, every day God invites us, trust me, I'm a good shepherd. In knowing me, in drawing near to me, in obeying me, is fullness of joy.

[16:57] Just, just let me lead you. Trust me. But then, stuff happens. Disappointment, a devastating loss, a heartbreaking ending, a frustrating obstacle, something hard, maybe it's something very hurtful.

You did not ask for it, nor did you plan for it. You did not see it coming. And now there's, now there's question marks. Is God for me?

Is God really good? Is God like me? Those are, there are hard thoughts, when our confidence in God erodes.

Can God really be trusted? And because God's purpose of revealing His glory, listen, when, when God's purpose of revealing His glory is most powerfully accomplished, when our hearts and souls are most satisfied in Him, than, than, than, than, than, anything, anything, that in any way, tempts, or challenges, or diminishes, our joy, in God, and confidence, in His goodness.

Listen, that is a direct assault, in God's purpose, in your life. So, is it fair to say, we can all, personally, attest to the fact, that assaults against God's purpose, are relentless, and new, every morning?

[18 : 46] Second observation, God turns every assault against His purpose, into, a servant, to fulfill His purpose.

Let me say that again. It's counterintuitive. Here it is. God turns every assault against His purpose, into a servant, to fulfill His purpose. And what I mean is, is that, God makes every assault against His purpose, an occasion, to, to further magnify, and to amplify, His glory.

Listen, God, takes, weapons, that are intended to undermine, and to challenge, our confidence, in His, in His goodness, and greatness, and He turns them, into tools, to unearth, even more spectacular, treasures, of His majesty, and beauty.

In Acts chapter 12, against, a backdrop, of, of circumstances, it just looks as, about as dark, and as hopeless as could be, God breaks in.

Or, or maybe we, would more accurately say, He breaks out. Look at verses 6 and 7. Now, when, Herod was about to bring, him out, bring Peter 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, and he struck Peter, on the side, and he awoke him, saying, get up, quickly.

[20 : 47] And, the chains, fell off his hands. Verses 9 and 10. And he went out, and followed him.

He, he did not know, that what was being done, by the angel, was real. But thought he was, seeing a vision. And when they had passed, the first, and second guard, they came to, and, to the, iron gate, leading into the city.

It, opened for them, of its own accord, and they went out. And when Peter, came to himself, he said, now I'm 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, things were looking, so, they were just looking up. So promising. Purpose of God, is gaining momentum, a strong home-based church, in Jerusalem, a new church, and a dynamic outpost, on the edge of Syria.

And then this. One, high value leader, is taken out, and another, is on death row. It's the, 11th hour.

[22 : 11] And, what, is Peter doing? Like, preparing for some, Jason Bourne-like, breakout?

What's he doing? Just moments, before his execution. According to verse 6, he's sleeping. And, what's the church doing?

Setting up some, covert, extraction, with, steely-eyed operators, of seal team 6? Not according to verse 5.

So, Peter was kept in prison, but, earnest, prayer for him, was made to God, by the church.

When he realized this, realized, like, it wasn't a dream, he went to the house of Mary, where many were gathered together, and, what were they doing?

[23 : 21] They're praying. They're praying. Praying. Praying. That's what the church was doing.

You know, that's going to be a hot extract. No, they were praying. According to Psalm 50, verse 15, God says, call on me, and the day of trouble, I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.

So, who sent that angel, to tap Peter on the shoulder? God did. Who turned the lights on, in that dark dungeon?

God did. Who unlocked the chains? They just fell off. God did. Who put the prison guards, to sleep? God did.

Who opened the iron gate, leading out of the prison? God did. And, why does Luke, paint such a hopeless picture?

Make sure that we know, that Peter was sleeping. And, he makes sure, that we know, that the church was, was praying. And, that it was God, who was doing, all the heavy lifting.

[24 : 29] Why? It's so that God, would get all the glory. John Newton, who is, well known for, authoring, famous hymn, amazing grace.

He writes, thus, afflictions, give occasion, for our knowing, and noticing, more of the Lord's wisdom, power, and goodness, in supporting, and relieving, than we should, otherwise, have known.

And, and so God, God turns an, all out, assault, on his purpose, into an occasion, for all out, fulfillment, of his purpose.

And friends, he does the same, for you and me. Our troubles, our troubles, every day, there are troubles, they are not a hindrance, to God's wise, and loving purpose.

Oh no. Troubles, headaches, heartaches, afflictions, are the very occasion, when and by which, God's purpose, to reveal his glory, is fulfilled.

[25 : 49] And you know, God even uses, the selfish ambition, and the power, of a, of a narcissistic, political maniac, to accomplish his purpose, and put his greatness, and goodness, on his display.

You see, it was not, the first time, that martyrdom, was part of the plan. Without the murder, of Stephen, in Acts chapter 7, we would, we would know, we would not likely, see the glory of God, and the conversion of Saul, in Acts chapter 9.

And without the, onslaught, of violence, against God's people, in Acts chapter 8, we would not, behold the sovereignty, of God, in spreading, his word, through those very same refugees, into Phoenicia, Cyprus, and yes, Antioch of Syria.

Acts chapter 11. Seriously, apart, apart from the, pervasive, and, relentless, opposition, to the purpose of God, a dynamic church, might never have been, birthed, on the farthest border, of Syria. And that's because, God turns, every assault, against his purpose, into a servant, to fulfill his purpose.

[27 : 07] And it seems like, you know, that's really the entire message, of the book of Acts. Luke never gets tired, of repeating the same theme, through story, after story. And he knows, that we need to hear it.

We need to hear it, again and again. We need to keep hearing it, because we, experience, new assaults, on God's purpose, every morning.

And we forget, that God is greater. And we, can be tempted, to lose heart. And we need to be, reminded that God, has made, infallible gospel promises, to fulfill, his glorious gospel purpose. Remember those promises, you will receive power. You will be my witness. And the word of God, will bear the sweet fruit, of disciple making, and multiplying, disciples of Jesus, in Jerusalem, in Algeia, Samaria, Lenexa, among all the people groups, dispersed in Kansas, Missouri, upper Midwest, Northwest, and to the ends of the earth.

Now, before we, we consider the, the third observation, I just want to, I want to linger here, just a little bit longer, you see, it's my conviction that, from the, from God's word, that, that trouble, listen, trouble, is a, transformational, tool of God, to draw us, deeper, into God.

[28 : 45] Sorrow, is meant, to take us, deeper into God. heartache, is meant, to take us, deeper into God.

Painful things, they're meant, to take us, deeper into God. Loss, grief, are meant, to take us, deeper into God, because you see, you see, the, the end, of, trouble, for the heart, of a praying, Christian, is more, and more, and more, of God.

Listen to John Newton, again. He says, by, affliction, prayer, is quickened. That is, it, gets energized, gets fired up, fueled.

For our prayers, are very apt, to grow languid, and formal, that's, you know, they just get blah, nothing, in time, of ease.

You see, that means, that, every, Herod, every, Herod, is a tool, of God, to draw us, into a vitalized, communion, with him.

[30 : 08] Every, Herod, is a, transformational, window, to lead us, further, into the glories, of God's, undeserved mercies, revealed most, profoundly, in the person, and saving work, of Jesus Christ.

You see, the first disciples, prayed like this, in Acts chapter 4, truly in this city, were gathered together, against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod, Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles, people of Israel, to do whatever your hand, and your plan, had predestined, to take place.

And what, and what was, God's plan, that he had predestined, to take place? The plan for Herod, for Pontius Pilate, Gentiles, people of Israel? Well, they were, they were God's, appointed means, to fulfill, what God had purposed, all along.

In Isaiah 53, 10, it says, it was the will of the Lord, to crush him. He has put him to grief. Second Corinthians 5, 21, for our sake, God, made him, to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him, we might become, the righteousness of God.

So you see, the most, dramatic assault, in all history, against the purpose of God, was turned, into this supreme, servant, to accomplish, the most, decisive, turning point, in the ultimate purpose of

God, namely, this, great, salvation, we enjoy, in and through, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[31 : 51] Yes, there are, and there will, continue to be, new assaults, on God's purpose, every day. But God is greater, and he turns them all, into servants, to fulfill his purpose.

And that's because, and this is the third observation now, God alone, is God. God alone, is ultimate. And I get this from Acts chapter 12, verses 20 through 24, where, Luke draws this narrative, now to a close, with, I mean, he just puts an exclamation point, on it.

Herod here, is presented to us, as this, this, this formidable threat. He is a bad man. And the heart, driving his, badness, is revealed, so poignantly, in verses 21 to 24, follow along.

On an appointed day, Herod put on his royal robes, he took his seat, upon the throne, delivered an ornate, oration to them, and the people are shouting, the voice, of a God, not of a man.

[33 : 02] And immediately, an angel of the Lord, struck him down. And this is the heart, of this bad man. It's 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.

So, there's, there's no doubt, in human terms, Herod was a powerful person. He commanded the death of James, commanded the arrest, and imprisonment of Peter.

He controlled the supply, and distribution of food, according to this, last portion, of the narrative. He had his minions, blastus, who served him, and mediated his policies.

He was able to govern the calendar, and appointed times, when he would communicate his will.

But, in the end, in the end, he died, a, disgusting, and inglorious death, consumed, from the inside, by worms.

[34 : 22] all, because, because, he did not see, he did not love, he did not esteem, he did not exult, in the glory, of the one who rules, and reigns over all.

Only God is God. Only Christ is Lord. And according to, Colossians chapter 1, verse 16, where the apostle Paul writes, it is by him, it's by him, that all things were created, in heaven, and on earth, visible, and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or rulers, or authorities, all things were created, through him, and, maybe most importantly, for him.

Power of prepositions. You see, whether the problem, is a Herod, or some other, nut job, or Satan himself, all of these, all of these, only exist, because, they were created, by Jesus, they were created, through Jesus, in order to serve, the purpose, of Jesus.

And so, in the midst, of all the drama, all the distress, every destructive, distraction, in this, portion of, redemptive history, the word of God, increased, and multiplied.

God's word, prevails, because, the work of God, through the word of God, is to reveal, the glory of God. That's the main point, of Acts, chapter 12.

[36 : 09] Nothing can thwart, the power, and purpose, of God, and his word. The word of God, increased, and multiplied. It's just, that's just such, a dynamic phrase.

Luke has obviously, landed there, drawing the focus, of this attention, the focus, of this narrative there. And so, what does that even mean? Right? He's used the phrase before, used it in Acts, chapter 6, verse 7, where it says, the word of God, continued to increase, the number of disciples, multiplied greatly.

He uses it again, in Acts 13, verse 49, the word of the Lord, was spreading, throughout the whole region. Uses it again, in Acts chapter 19, verse 20, so the word of the Lord, continued to increase, and prevail mightily.

Fundamentally, it just simply means, that the gospel, was proclaimed, and more and more people, believed, and turned, and entrusted themselves, to the Lord.

And that's because, the promises of God, in the word of God, create, the people of God. That's why we, we love the Bible. That's why we, read the Bible.

[37 : 19] That's why we, preach the Bible. That's why we, pray the Bible. That's why we, sing the Bible. One more, gospel connection, I want to make, I want you to see here.

And then we will, remember, this great purpose, in Jesus' death. Friends, the worst Herod, the worst Herod, is not, the one, outside of us.

Listen, the worst Herod, the most dangerous Herod, is the Herod, who is inside, each and every one of us.

It's the self-reliant Herod. It's the self-serving Herod. It's the self-exalting Herod.

