



**Fresh
Fire**

TITLE: FIRE STORM!

TEXT: *Acts 12: 19-25*

TOPIC: *DECEIT AND DEATH!*

TARGET: *Outreach Rallies are designed with two purposes in mind:*

1. To give students an event with which they feel comfortable enough to invite unchurched friends. An enjoyable "church" event in which the claims of Christ are presented in an unthreatening manner is a tool for your youth group to use evangelistically.

2. To illuminate Scripture by giving students a "taste" of Scriptural events which make the Bible "come alive!"

The purpose of this rally is to illustrate God's protection of His own, and His punishment of His enemies!

TOOLS: *This lesson is designed to be used in a Rally setting with all students.*

Team Time

(20 minutes in small groups)



1. Roll Call

Student sign-in sheets may be used to give points to teams for attendance. If so, give double points to guests. (This practice will help motivate your students to bring their friends!) Team leaders or student leaders whom they appoint should tally the points and turn them in to the point tabulators.

2. Get Acquainted Time

Once the "permanent" Teams are organized and assembled, the adult team leaders should move into small groups. Get acquainted by:

- a. Introducing yourself.*
- b. Describe reasons why you look forward to this study series and activities.*
- c. Use the Team Guide to establish the theme!*

3. Competition Rules Explanation

The team leaders should explain the competition, and lead the students to select competitors before the recreation time begins.

Points: Explain that the points are cumulative for all the heats per team. Highest total wins the competition.

Procedure: In the interest of time and effort, we recommend that you divide multiple numbers of teams into groups of 2 to 4 teams and rotate the groups through the entire competition described on the following pages

Team Competition

(20 minutes in small groups)



Competition #1 MISSING IN ACTION



Passage

Acts 12. Read the passage, then explain to your team that you are searching for Peter who is missing from prison.

Participants

All students in their assigned teams.

Place and Times

This game is best played throughout the community but can be modified to be played on the church grounds. It is very important to set boundaries for the students especially if playing in the community. Give them a time limit (1 hour) or the game could last all night. Also, if driving is involved, be sure that SAFETY COMES FIRST!

Preparation

Write the clues on posters to be placed in pre-designated (but secret) locations. Number the posters so the teams know if they found the right one. Provide teams with a marker to sign the posters when they find them. Make the clues as easy or hard as you want. Choose a leader to be Peter, whom the students are searching for. Adults may also be needed to drive the students. Some possible designated locations might include:

Jail or police station-v. 4 (Prison where Peter was held)

Hardware store-v. 6 (chains on Peter's hand)

A concrete building or slab (the chains were attached to a concrete block)

A clothes closet or clothing store-v. 8 (angel told him to get his clothes)

A specific spot on a road or street-v. 10 (Peter walked through the streets to get to John Mark's home)

Someone's front door-v. 12 (door of John Mark's home)

*A gate-v. 14 (Where Peter entered the home)
A cemetery-v. 19 (Herod killed the jailers after Peter's escape)
Town square, city hall, or any type of coliseum-v. 21 (when Herod spoke from his throne before his death)*

Procedure

For this scavenger hunt explain to the students that Peter has disappeared from prison and Herod is looking for him. It is the team's job to find him before Herod does. Give the students the boundaries and time limit (if a team does not finish the scavenger hunt by the designated time have them go straight back to the starting point.) Explain that they must sign the team name on each poster they find to get points. Designate a location (or phone number) that the teams can contact if they get stuck.

Option: For dramatic effect, enlist someone to rush in to give the first clue (after instructions have been given!) However, be sure the Team Leaders & adult drivers know what the first clue is and what's going to happen because the chaos may make it hard for the students to understand what's going on.

Points/Penalties

*10,000 points to the team that finds Peter first. 1500 points to every other team that finds Peter. 1000 points to every clue the teams find.
If no one finds Peter then give extra points to the team who found the most clues.*

Rally Devotion

(20 minutes in large group)

I. DISTURBANCE IN PRISON (Acts 12:18-19)

A. Peter's Escape

Explanation

Peter had just been found missing from his prison cell, a cell that had been guarded round the clock by armed guards. Can you imagine the consternation of these men? A prisoner was gone. The automatic consequences of such a disappearance was that "heads would roll." The authorities had to be alerted, including the King, Agrippa. And the king was not a happy camper. He was obviously enraged and embarrassed. How could this have happened? Probably, Peter was imprisoned in the Tower of Antonia which overlooked the Temple grounds. Herod's palace adjoined this fortress. The disturbance that day permeated the entire area, and swept everyone into its vortex, including Herod himself. Herod had the guards examined; in fact he questioned them himself. Don't you know that this was an intimidating and tense experience for those men. They knew that they were in big trouble. There was simply no answer to the mystery of Peter's absence.

Application

The world demands logical answers to every problem. People who reject the reality of God and the supernatural have no access to His power, and thus are left with no resources at all! Their only recourse is human logic and reason, which are inadequate to explain every human circumstance! This leaves them without answers, which is also unacceptable.

B. Herod's Escapism

1. Escapism from Responsibility for His Actions

Explanation

Herod's rage was expressed in at least two ways: First, escape responsibility by blaming others. Someone had to pay for the embarrassment of facing the Jewish authorities to explain that the prisoner upon whose death they had placed such importance was now missing. When powerful but selfish men are embarrassed, you may be sure that someone else will take the brunt of their anger. In this case, Herod ordered that the soldiers involved in the incident were to be executed. They probably knew that the unexplainable had happened. But Herod did not want them left alive to describe the amazing circumstances to anyone. With the soldiers directly involved dead, there would be no one to point fingers at anyone or anything but at the soldiers themselves. Herod probably thought that he had solved the problem, or at least fixed the blame on the soldiers. Then he got rid of the "evidence" to the contrary.

2. Escapism from Results of His Actions

Explanation

Herod's second measure of dealing with his problem was "escape." The last part of verse 19 says, "*Then Herod went...*" As soon as he could, Herod escaped the situation. He apparently wanted to escape the embarrassment and the quizzing by the Jewish leaders who were so keenly interested in having Peter dead. Herod not only escaped Jerusalem, he stayed away! He did not intend to be the "fall guy" for this embarrassing incident!

Additionally, Herod escaped the squeamish mess of getting rid of the soldiers who had become his "fall guys." He "*ordered that they be executed*" implying that someone else actually had to carry out the unfair and unfortunate execution. All of this was brought about by Herod's own self-centered desire to use other human beings' lives (like James' and Peter's) to advance his own status.

Application

Self-protection runs very deep in all of us. But following Christ means that we rely solely upon His protection rather than being manipulative with other people just to "save our own necks." We must not divert blame to others for our own

failures, ever! We have to confess our faults and own up to our responsibility! God honors only *that* kind of spirit.

II. DEATH IN THE PALACE (*Acts 12:20-23*)

A. Disagreement (*Acts 12:20*)

Explanation

Herod had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon. So, duh. What is new about that? With whom did Herod not have a quarrel? The issue here was food. These coastal cities were dependent upon imports for their grain and produce. The area had been hard hit by famine. (*See Acts 11:27-28*) Herod, who in his characteristic manner always played hard ball with other people's vulnerabilities, had been withholding food supplies. So the people of the area requested a meeting with Herod. They were at a disadvantage—Herod had the power.

Application

Men and women who live only for the benefits of this life will often do anything necessary to gain an advantage over others. They enjoy having power to judge others. But this advantage is as short-lived as life. Eventually, we will all stand before another judge who will mete out benefits in eternity, just as Herod gave out food to those who pleased him. This a very good reason for us to obey the golden rule, "*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*" (*Luke 6:31*) Otherwise, when the shoe is on the other foot, we might discover too late, that we should have been far more generous to others when we could!

B. Deception (*Acts 12:21-22*)

1. By the People

Explanation

The historian Josephus describes the events recorded in this passage. He wrote that Herod held a meeting with representatives from Tyre and Sidon in the Roman amphitheater during the morning hours. While Herod made a speech, the morning sun peeked over the back rim of the amphitheater and shone onto the platform while the crowd remained shrouded in the shadow. Herod wore a robe which had silver thread and bits of shiny metal woven into it. The reflections of the robe suddenly caught the sun's rays and threw a multitude of starry beams of light into the audience. They were dazzled. Whether by the brilliance of this spectacle or by the brilliance of the speech we are unsure, but we do know the response of the people was to shout in chorus, "*This is the voice of a god, not of a man.*" (*Acts 12:22*) Of course, this was also a not-so-subtle attempt to gain Herod's favor. They had come as the underdogs into this meeting. Here was an opportunity to assuage the ego of an obviously egotistical man. It is not likely that the people in that audience that day had any illusions that Herod was anything other than a

mere man, and a very vain one at that. Their praise was nothing more than a deceitful means of winning his approval and getting what they wanted. They must have thought, “what will a little false praise harm with this guy?”

2. By the Ruler

Explanation

And how did Herod respond to this god-worship of him? He received it. Verse 23 says that he did nothing to turn away this praise.

Illustration

Most of us blush when we receive praise. We like to be acknowledged for accomplishments, but when people praise us in public, we begin to squirm and feel uncomfortable. When people make a big “to-do” about a person’s skills or talents, that is hard enough to take. But to call a person a “god?” Few people would actually accept that kind of praise seriously. That is over-kill to the extreme!

Application

We should not be too quick to condemn Herod. After all, how often have we been tempted to receive praise, even when we know that it is not deserved? Herod, an ungodly man with nothing to look forward to but *this* life, was prone to grab every pleasure and vanity that might present itself.

C. Death

Explanation

Verse 23 says that the judgment of God was quick and sure. An angel of God struck down Herod. Five days later, he was dead. Herod’s time was up. He had been given plenty of occasions to turn from his evil ways and respond to the Gospel. Certainly he was not unaware or even uneducated about the simple truths of the Gospel, for everyone in Jerusalem had heard of the incredible resurrection of Christ and the awesome growth of the church there. But, Herod steadfastly refused to accept it. And now he was even accepting worship as though he himself were a god. There would be no more chances for salvation for him. Scripture says that God’s spirit will not always strive with man. (*Gen. 6:3*) There comes a time when time is up!

Illustration

Apparently, for Herod, that time had come! Historian Josephus says that Herod doubled over even while the applause was showered upon him. He was carried out of the amphitheater to his nearby palace. An infestation of worms bloated his belly and filled his throat. Before his death, the larvae

were foaming from his mouth, even coming out of the pores of his skin. It was a grotesque sight, as well as a smelly one. His attendants could hardly bear to be in his presence because of the horrible sight and smell. Herod died a terrible death.

Application

Judgment upon every human being's life is reserved until this life is over. Hebrews 9:27 says that man is "*destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.*" God never judges man while he yet lives. How can He, when the sum of one's life lies yet before him, however brief it may be? Indeed, there is no human punishment worthy enough for one who rejects the substitutionary death of Christ for our sins. This must be reserved for eternity, for rejecting the prospect of spending eternity with Christ must necessarily result in eternal consequences, namely separation from Him. This of course, also involves separation from Love itself, for God is Love. All that is left for those who reject love is its opposite: Hate, Self, Greed, Avarice, and all the things that we think of as hell. No mere disease of the body could ever be punishment enough for the rejection of the sacrifice of the Son of God.

The good news is that, on the other hand, God by his grace and mercy has also determined that our *reward* will not be limited to what we might receive while in our finite bodies here on earth, either! We could not hope that our mere mortal acts of service to Christ should add up to heaven; indeed, we are reminded by Paul's admonition to Timothy that we should do nothing less than endure hardship because we are soldiers in Christ's army. We are only doing what we should when we serve Christ out of a heart of gratitude and love for him. Yet, Christ repays us for our labor of love in ETERNAL—not mere earthly—rewards! God is good!

III. DESTINY OF THE CHURCH (*Acts 12:24-25*)

Explanation

Acts 12 ends with this epitaph in verse 24: "*But the word of God continued to increase and spread.*" The word "*but*" at the beginning of the verse implies a contrast. What was it? Herod died but the gospel he tried to kill lived on and flourished.

Illustration

During the height of French Renaissance Voltaire, the infidel philosopher who died in 1778 said that Christianity would be swept away within 100 years. But only 50 years after his death, his own former press and his house was being used by the Geneva Bible Society as its print shop and headquarters, churning out thousands of copies of God's Word!

Application

It is dangerous to oppose that which is eternal. It is even more dangerous to try to escape God's truth! You cannot escape the reality of life, nor can you escape the reality that you are responsible for your decisions, the most important of which is the decision to accept or reject Christ. Jesus said, "*he who is not with me is against me.*" Not to decide is to decide to rebel against Christ!

God WILL bless His Church, and not even the gates of hell, says Jesus, will be able to stand against its advance! Which side of God's blessings are you on? Do you stand in its way by your lifestyle, or do you flow with it to complete its task, taking the gospel to the globe? Is it possible that you are trying to escape reality by not choosing which side you are on?

Close with prayer. This would be a great time to talk with your students about their need to be sure of their salvation! Invite them to talk with you privately about this if they have any questions.