

Life Group Discussion Guide

Against All Odds: How the Name of Jesus Spreads
Week 2: Whose Kingdom Come? • Acts 12:1-5

For Christians, we can live as if the most important thing is our personal piety—the things we should and shouldn't do as followers of Jesus. This week, Pastor Jon challenged us to broaden our perspective:

"When we read the Bible, we read of nations. We read of councils in heaven and kings on earth. We read of battles and ultimate confrontations. We read of the fate of billions upon billions of people. A lot more is going on in addition to our personal piety—a clash of kingdoms."

This reality points to our Big Idea: God's kingdom clashes with the world's power structures.

- In what ways have you witnessed a clash between God's kingdom and the world's power structures?

In the great battle against the power structures of our world, how does God's kingdom advance? Through the proclamation of a message: Jesus was crucified for us. As that message is proclaimed, God's kingdom is established. This is what the book of Acts is all about.

This week, our study of Acts 12:1-5 exposed three truths about the establishment of God's kingdom:

1. It infuriates those in power

While wonderful things are happening for the name of Jesus in Antioch (as we saw last week), horrible things begin to happen for His people in Jerusalem. As chapter 12 begins, we learn, "It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them" (v. 1).

Do you see the clash of kingdoms? While God's hand is actively bringing people to the name of Christ in Antioch, King Herod is laying his hands on some from the church to harm them. Why would Herod do this? Ever since the resurrection of Christ (over a decade ago at this point), Christians had been making a very unsettling claim—asserting that Jesus is the true king, not only of the Jews, but of the whole earth.

"The power structures of any day and any culture are threatened by the one who says, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.' He is establishing his kingdom all over the earth, and that kingdom clashes with those who love power."

- Consider the following quote from this week's message: "You can't have two kings. One must be in service of the other. You can't have two centers of power. One must bow to the other. You can't have two visions of how the world works. One is right. The other one is wrong." If

you take an honest look at your own life, who or what is enthroned as the king of your heart and mind?

- What are the symptoms of a life spent serving the powers of this world?
- What is the fruit of a life spent in service of God's kingdom?

2. It puts God's people at risk

Why does the establishment of God's kingdom put His own people at risk? Because we follow a rejected king.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus prepared His disciples for this harsh reality: "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you" (15:18–19).

It's easy to see this reality playing out in our own day. As Pastor Jon put it:

"There's a lot of social pressure on Christians today to remain silent. To be liked. Whole generations are being brainwashed today to crave likes. Likes. Likes. Likes. The result of this pressure is silence. We're quiet about Jesus because we want to be liked."

- How have social pressures influenced your witness for Christ?
- What is the antidote to the fear-driven silence many Christians have succumbed to?
- If you've allowed social pressures to silence your witness, pray now for God's forgiveness and the grace to move forward in advancing His kingdom with boldness and urgency.
- How can you come alongside one another to advance God's kingdom in our day?

3. It calls for earnest prayer

In this week's Scripture passage, we not only see the power structures of the world raging against God's kingdom, but the followers of Christ fighting back. Their weapon of choice? Prayer: "So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him (12:5)."

What does it say about God's kingdom that the main weapon He gives His followers is prayer? It says that our power doesn't come from us.

"We don't command our God. We entreat Him. We come to him as dearly loved children, tugging at His shirt. Earnestly we ask, but answering remains the Lord's prerogative. The power remains with Him. That's what makes it His kingdom."

- What role does prayer play in advancing God's kingdom on earth?
- What would it look like for you to place a greater emphasis on prayer in your own life? What do you think will change when you do?

- As you seek the establishment of God's kingdom against the power structures of our world, what will you pray together now?

"We speak His name, and His kingdom comes."