LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

Acts 12 :20-25

Our insatiable desire to be special

Pastor Paul LeBoutillier · April 18, 2026

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Acts chapter 12. We're just finishing the last part of the chapter. It's verse 20 through the end, so follow along with me. Acts 12, verse 20. Skip down.

Here we go. It says, Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord. And having persuaded Blastas, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace because their country depended on the king's country for food. On an appointed day, Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. And the people were shouting, The voice of a god and not 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, doesn't that sound fun, and breathed his last. But the word of God increased and multiplied, and Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, which was bringing resources to the church there, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark. Stop there. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we just kind of finish out these verses here in chapter 12, and as we open our hearts to what you want to say and what you are saying to us, we just really pray for your Holy Spirit to lead us, because Lord, through the ministry of your Spirit, we seek out truth and nourishment and understanding from the word that will equip us as we go forth. So use this, Lord, use this time, we pray. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Chapter 12 of Acts ends with just these specific comments about King Herod. And we talked about King Herod last week. This is Herod Agrippa I. He's the grandson of Herod the Great.

He was, you know, an interesting guy. He's the one who killed the Apostle James. He put Peter in prison with every intention to kill him. However, the Lord intervened. Peter escaped Herod's grasp.

We covered all that last week. If you missed it, you can go back and listen to that on our website. But in these last verses of Acts chapter 12, Luke just kind of gives us this little summary of these strange events, which seemingly have very little to do with the New Testament church, as it relates to Herod and the speech he makes to the people of Tyre and Sidon. These are not Israelites. And he basically tells us again on verse 21 that on the appointed day, he put on his royal robes.

And we're going to find out what those actually looked like here in just a moment. He took his seat upon the throne. That's always kind of a heady thing, you know, whenever you sit down on a throne. And he gives this speech to the people, after which they start hailing him as having the voice of a god, you know. So here he is in these wonderful royal robes.

He's sitting on this throne. He's given this speech, and the people are just shouting, It's the voice of a god! And it all goes to his head. And it says that because he didn't give God the glory, that he was struck down. So what's interesting about this is that there is a Jewish historian by the name of Josephus, who actually writes about this event.

And of course, you know, he tells some interesting insights and understanding from it. But I want to share it with you. I want you to see it on the screen as we kind of read it together. It says, Now when Agrippa had reigned three years over all Judea, he came to the city Caesarea, which was formerly called Stratos Tower. And there he exhibited shows in honor of Caesar, upon his being informed that there was a certain festival celebrated to make vows for his safety.

At which festival a great multitude was gotten together of the principal persons, and such as were of dignity through his province. It goes on to say, On the second day of which shows he put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theater early in the morning, at which time the silver of his garment, being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent, as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him. And presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place and one from another, though not for his good, that he was a god. And they added, Be thou merciful to us, for although we have hitherto reverenced thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature. Upon this the king did neither rebuke them nor reject their impious flattery.

But as he presently afterward looked up, he saw an owl sitting on a certain rope over his head, and immediately understood that this bird was the messenger of ill tidings. I have no idea what that's all about. As it had once been the messenger of good tidings to him, he fell into the deepest sorrow. A severe pain

also arose in his belly and began in a most violent manner. And when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life.

Cool, huh? Yuck. This is Josephus. By the way, this is something you can read. He's written these down in what he calls the Antiquities of the Jews.

That's from, as you saw, chapter 19 and chapter 8. There's different sections anyway. You basically have the same event related by two different people. Luke gives the Reader's Digest version of this event with not a whole lot of detail. But the lesson that we get from this particular passage of Scripture is really clear, and that is that Herod's pride was his downfall.

I mean, that's pretty simple. Pretty simple message. And although we recognize that this was a very foolish thing for Herod to let this all go to his head and not to give God the glory and so forth, we would be just as foolish to just quickly read past this section of Scripture and not learn from it the lessons that we need to understand from it as well. Because what Herod fell prey to in this passage is not something that's just limited to kings who wear resplendent clothing and have people hailing them as a god. In fact, what he fell to is something that inhabits all of us, every single one of us.

And it's one of the most dangerous and insidious things that can take hold of our lives, even as believers. Even as believers. And I think that's why the Holy Spirit moved upon Luke to actually include this in his account. Because it's one of those things you would normally read and just kind of go, Oh, wow. So that's how it ended for Herod.

Cool. And then just keep going. Chapter 13. Here we go. Without really stopping to pause and ask ourselves when we read this, Lord, what's here?

What are you saying? What do you want me to see in this? Well, when the Apostle John was writing his first epistle, he outlined the three basic temptations that befall all of mankind. Let me put this on the screen. You can see it.

1 John 2.16. Most of you know this. He writes, For all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life, he said, all these things are not from the Father, but they're from the world. So if we take these things out and just put them in bullet form, this is what we find. The desires, your Bible may say the lusts of the flesh, the desires or the lusts of the eyes and the pride of life.

And we've mentioned before that you can take any sin, I'm talking any sin, and they will fall under one of these three categories. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life. It's not hard to see

that Herod fell to the last one, the pride of life. The people hailed him as a god, and he not only liked it, he accepted it. He embraced it and thus brought about his own downfall.

Yeah, nothing surprising here. We don't read this passage and go, Why? There's nothing here that's surprising. I mean, God has given us so many warnings about this kind of stuff. Let me show you Proverbs 16.

He says, Pride goes before destruction. We know this. Usually people quote this as pride goes before the fall. It actually says pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. And then the proverb says, you know, it's better to be of a lowly spirit, in other words, humble, and to hang out with poor people than to divide the spoil and have all kinds of wealth and yet be among, you know, the proud.

Why? Because pride is dangerous. That's why. Pride is a very dangerous thing. Listen, it is the root of so much heartache, so much trouble, and I'll tell you, even as a believer, it can spoil your walk with the Lord.

You know, we learned that even Satan's downfall came through pride. You know, we like to blame Satan for all the temptations that go on in our lives, but even he fell because of pride. We have some prophetic insights into the fall of Satan. One of them is given to us in Isaiah 14. Up on the screen, it says, how you have fallen from heaven, O day star, son of dawn, how you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low.

You said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven above the stars of God. I will set my throne on high. I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will make myself like the most high.

And then the prophet Ezekiel adds some interesting insights concerning this. Thus says the Lord God, you were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God. Every precious stone was your covering. Sardius, topaz, diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle, and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings.

On the day that you were created, they were prepared. The Lord goes on to say you were a guardian cherub, anointed guardian cherub. I placed you. You were on the holy mountain of God. In the midst of the stones of fire, you walked.

You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till unrighteousness was found in you. In the abundance of your trade, you were filled with violence in your midst and you sinned. So I cast you

as a profane thing from the mountain of God and I destroyed you, oh guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire." Look at this. Your heart was proud because of your beauty. You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor.

I cast you to the ground. So it's all about pride. It's all about being proud and because of that, Satan was doomed from the beginning because as God said in Isaiah 48 11 on the screen, my glory I will not give to another. So there you go. But you know, the desire that Satan had for godhood was even rooted in the temptation that he brought to Adam and Eve.

You'll remember that when Satan tempted the woman concerning the fruit, what did he say? He said, God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you'll be like God and he doesn't want that, but I bet you would. And he tempted her accordingly and so you can see that this is at the root of so much good grief. Some of you guys even came out of Mormonism and you know now that one of the basic tenets of Mormonism is if you remain a Mormon in good standing with the church, you will become a god and populate your own planet one day. And they don't like to talk about it much in public, but it's still very much an element of Mormon doctrine and teaching.

So you know, are we surprised by any of this? No, I don't think so. But although you might be hearing all this, you might be saying to yourself, well you know, Pastor Paul, it's all good and fine, but I don't necessarily think of myself as someone who has delusions of godhood. I get it. Neither do I.

But we still have to acknowledge that this pride of life, this element of...I guess it's an issue that we deal with in our sinful nature that makes us vulnerable. It's a vulnerability. It dwells within us. It's there, and you can't ignore it just because you're not part of, you know, a church that happens to teach you you're going to become a god or just because you've never entertained ideas of godhood. That doesn't mean that you are not at risk.

I mean, good grief. Who of us hasn't fantasized of something, you know, our life being very different than what it is? Who of us hasn't fantasized about coming out on top and being adored by the masses, you know, being the hero, being the one that shines above all of the others? It's very common. We don't like to admit it, but it's very common.

You know, TV shows like American Idol and even competitions that I love and watch every time they come on TV, like the Olympics, they all reinforce the idea that plays into our natural desire to want to be the best, to think about, you know, standing on that level of the platform that's a little bit higher than everybody else and having that gold medal around your neck and having them play your song, you know,

the song of your country as you stand there and just bask in the glory of what you have accomplished. It's fantastic. We love it. We love it. But we remember that in that opening passage that we looked at, John the Apostle said, all this stuff is from the world.

It's not from God. It's all from the world. So we know what the message of the world is. We know what the wisdom of the world is. It's all about, you know, be better, be popular, be adored, and seek after those things.

And people do. But what is the wisdom from heaven? Well, we start in James 4.10, up on the screen, humble yourselves before the Lord and He will exalt you. See, this is different. This is different.

You know, the kingdom of God has been called the upside down kingdom and for good reason. It's because the message of the kingdom of God's Word is the opposite. The way the world finds greatness is through achievement and being the best in the eyes of all. And God's Word says, no, humble yourself, in fact, even before the Lord, and then He will exalt you. And Jesus went on in Matthew 23 to say, whoever exalts himself is actually going to be humbled ultimately, but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

And even reminding His disciples of these things, you know, we read in the Gospels, the gravitational pull in the lives of those men that followed Jesus around for almost three years, that pull to be great was so strong, so powerful, you know, that we read passages like this in Mark chapter 9. It says, they came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house, He asked them, so what were you guys discussing on the way? But they kept silent for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. And He sat down, and He called the twelve, and He said to them, listen, guys, if anyone would be first, he must be last, last of all, and in fact, servant of all.

Well, there's that upside-down kingdom for you. Well, this doesn't come naturally to you and me. This whole idea of finding greatness in the kingdom of God, this is the opposite of what the world's been telling us all along. This is the opposite of what our own inclinations, desires, and things that we run after is all about, and so forth. But, you know, the disciples, one thing you got to appreciate about Jesus' disciples, they didn't hide it.

I mean, here in this passage that we were just reading, they were kind of embarrassed because they were talking about which of them was the greatest. But there were other times that they were actually kind of brazen about it. Let me show you this from Mark 10. This is interesting. It says, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and they said to him, teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.

And he said to them, what do you want me to do for you? And they said to him, grant us to sit one at your right hand and one at your left in your glory. I was like, wow, wow. Talk about a brazen request. You know, Lord, when you are sitting on your throne in glory and I mean in glory, we want to be right there.

We want to literally be right there. One on your right, one on your left, you decide. It's okay. But we want to be there. It just, you know, it's cringeworthy, isn't it?

I mean, it's so embarrassing, it's cringeworthy. Actually, there's another gospel account that says that James and John actually had their mother came and asked Jesus this question. So it's like, hey, mom, mom, go ask him. Go ask him that thing. That thing about the right and the left, go ask him.

And she did. Yeah. You know, but there was one man, well, there was more than one, but there's one particular man who understood in the Bible the danger of pride, and that was the Apostle Paul. I'm not saying he was immune when I say that he understood the danger. In fact, far from it.

I think he understood the danger of pride precisely because he was so susceptible to it. Because you see, the Apostle Paul was a man who had received visions from the Lord, incredible visions. He said he heard things that you can't repeat. He told us in the scripture, as we're reading in on his letter, you know, that he wrote to the Corinthians that he had been caught up to the third heaven. And he saw and heard amazing things, but what this all did was it made him liable and vulnerable to pride.

Because you see, God exalted him in ways that he doesn't exalt every man. I have never been taken up to the third heaven. God hasn't even explained to me what the third heaven is. And by the way, Paul didn't explain it either. So don't get into a debate with anybody on it.

I don't even know what Paul's talking about, let alone experience the things that he experienced. But, you know, talk about some very potentially head enlarging events in your life, to be able to be exalted by God to the third heaven, to hear things that God would say to you, you can't tell anybody this, you know? And so what Paul did, instead of bragging about it, he wrote to the Corinthians and to you and me in the scripture about his potential to be prideful. Look what he said in 2 Corinthians 12. He said, to keep me from becoming conceited.

In other words, puffed up, filled with pride. Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. So he says twice in that passage, here's what happened and here's why it happened. At the very beginning and at the very end, it was to keep me from being prideful. In other words, guys, to keep my feet on the ground, God allowed Paul to suffer in his flesh as a reminder that he was just a man.

You with me? So God allowed suffering in Paul's life to remind him, you're not a God, buddy, you're just a man. And here's what he said about it. He goes on, he says this. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.

He said, God, I don't want this. I promise, I'll be humble without it. But he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Oh, there's something to meditate on. Therefore, Paul said, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

For the sake of Christ, then, I'm even gonna be content with weakness and with insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. Here's the kicker right here. For when I am weak, then I'm strong. That's it, you guys. This is so powerful.

You cannot, we cannot afford to miss it. Paul is saying that in our smallness and the understanding of our weakness, that's where we're gonna truly begin to experience God's power. So it's not what the world tells you. It's what God tells you. And you know, none of us should be surprised because frankly, this is what Jesus came to exemplify for us, you know?

Jesus came, and though he came as God in human flesh, he bore a weakness that resembled humankind. He came to exemplify our weakness, but listen to what he wrote to the Philippians. Up on the screen, chapter two. He said, have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, he did not account equality with God, a thing to be grasped or clung to, but rather emptied himself by taking the form of a servant. That means he came to look just like you and me, being born in the likeness of man and being found in human form.

Look at this. He humbled himself. Okay, that's the example he came to show us by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. But I want you to see what the result of that self-humility was. Therefore, and that word means because of that, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.

There you go. See, Jesus came as our example to show us how true greatness is achieved. It's not the way the world says. It's the opposite of what the world says. You become the least.

You become the servant. You know, you humble yourself in the sight of God. And that's why when you read through the letters in the Bible, whether it's Paul, James, John, whoever, there's these constant reminders to you and me about this issue of pride and how we need to understand who we really are and see ourselves as we really are. Here's an example from Romans chapter 12. I love this one.

Paul writes and says, for by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. And what he's basically saying there is, don't make the same mistake Herod made. Don't let people pump you up and fill your head with all kinds of foolish ideas and make you think that you're something that you're not. Instead, see yourself as you are. You know, the world, again, the world, we can't expect the world to get it right.

And that's why the world comes up with emphases that don't serve Christians well. And one of those is the whole self-esteem movement and I'll tell you a lot of Christians bought into that one hook, line, and sinker. I got low self-esteem. So I just, that's one of the reasons why I am the way I am. And he has low self-esteem, she has low self-esteem and we need to just build people up and you know, that sort of thing.

And what we found out, much to our chagrin, is that when you build people up, all they end up doing is just feeling really good about their sin and then you start having pride parades. We're going to be proud of ourselves and we're going to show everybody that we're proud to live the way we live. It doesn't matter. You know, self-esteem doesn't teach people about sin or right and wrong. It just basically makes sure that they're going to feel good about whatever they do.

If I divorce my wife, at least I'm going to feel good about it. You know, if I smack my kids around, I'm going to at least feel good about it. Because I've built myself up with my self-esteem. It's a big, fat, worldly lie. But it's all the world has.

We can't expect them to get things right. It plays into simply the pride of life. It basically just takes a sinful element of our nature and humps it up. That's all. And as Christians, we got duped, thinking that that was maybe a real answer.

Instead of telling people they needed to see themselves as Jesus sees them. Listen, that's all the esteem you need. It's to understand yourself through the eyes of the Lord. You know, on the night that Jesus was arrested, the Lord allowed Peter... We've talked about this many times.

The Lord allowed Peter to see himself as he really was. Because, you know, Peter was a guy who had really good self-esteem. And he would brag about who he thought he was. During the Last Supper, when Jesus told all the disciples that they would desert him that very night, Peter said, no, no, no, not me. You guys probably remember this.

He said, Lord, I'm ready to go with you. Prison? Fine. I'll go. Death?

Sure. I'm right there with you. You guys remember that, right? He was very quick to express his high self-esteem. Problem was, he didn't know himself at all.

And that very night, instead of proving himself a man of strength and courage, Peter found out that he was a man who was willing to hide in the shadows. In fact, he found out that he was someone who was capable of not once but three times denying loudly with cursings that he had never met anybody named Jesus of Nazareth. And that was the real Peter. That was the real Peter. He didn't want to see it.

But Jesus forced him to see it. And the sheer force of that revelation broke him into pieces. He became a weeping, blubbering mess for the next several hours. Just the sheer weight of understanding who he really, truly was. But I'll tell you something.

I'll tell you something else. He might have been a big, fat, emotional mess for a while, but he emerged from that night of failure far more useful to the Lord than he ever had been before. And he truly became a pillar in the church. But only after he saw who he really was. You see, Peter didn't heed the statement, humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up.

He didn't heed that. And so, because he didn't heed it, the Lord had to exalt him, or rather, humble him, so that he could later exalt him to the place that he was. And the Lord will do that. You know, sometime in the mid-1800s, a woman by the name of Annie Sherwood Hawks and a man by the name of Robert Lowry wrote a song that expressed an understanding like the one Paul talked about in 2 Corinthians where he said, when I'm weak, then I'm strong. And the lyrics to that song go like this.

I'll put a portion up on the screen. You guys know this. I need thee every hour, most gracious Lord. No tender voice like thine can peace afford. I need thee, oh, I need thee.

Every hour, I need thee. Oh, bless me now, my Savior. I come to thee. One of the most beautiful hymns in all of hymnen. But it expresses what we've been talking about this whole time.

It comes from the heart of someone who's had the revelation that Peter got that night when Jesus was arrested. But it comes to the heart of anyone who has received that revelation of their smallness, their weakness, and their need for Jesus. As simple as that. I need you. I need you, Lord.

Every hour, I need you. Every minute of every hour, Lord, I need you. I end with one final passage from 1 Corinthians 1. I know I've given you a lot of scripture today, but that's all right. Paul writes and he says, consider your calling.

Brothers, not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. He says, I want you to understand something. God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even the things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are. And this is it. So that no human might boast in the presence of God. There's no boasting in the presence.

It starts with our salvation and it goes on in our Christian lives. Right? I mean, isn't that, you know, when we read about our salvation, what do we read? You know, we've been saved by grace through faith. It's not of ourselves.

It is the gift of God. Why? Lest anyone should boast. So it starts right there. It starts with salvation.

There's no boasting. There's nothing I can boast in. But it goes on from there. It goes on through the rest of my Christian life. There's no boasting.

There's nothing I can point to and go, whoa, that was great. Look at me. Nothing. Instead, there's just that simple refrain playing over and over in our hearts. I need thee every hour.

I need thee every hour. Amen? Let's stand together. We'll close in prayer. If there is some need that's going on in your life that requires some prayer, we'd be more than happy to pray with you.

Up front here, we'll have some folks to help do that. So here we are. Here we are. Standing in our need. Right?

Our utter need. Dependent on him for every breath. So be it. Father, thank you so much for just the simple reminder that I need you every hour. Every minute of every hour.

I need you. I depend on you for every breath, every beat of my heart. It is in your hands. And I trust in you. And my hope is in you.

And my life is in you. Father, help me day by day to walk in the humility that only comes through you as I come and seek your face, Lord. Help me to see myself as I truly am. Help me to understand the person I truly am so that I can come to you always and rely on you utterly. We love you.

We praise you. We worship you as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And we commit our hearts to you. In the name of Jesus Christ and all God's people said together, Amen. God bless you.

Have a good rest of your Sunday. Amen.