

The contrasting worlds: Christian and heathen

Acts 12-13:1-3.

Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's country.

So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died.

But the word of God grew and multiplied.

And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, having fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

Herod here, as we learned last week was not the Herod of the Gospels. We learn that Herod the king is Herod Agrippa I, the nephew of Herod Antipas who murdered John the Baptist, and the grandson of Herod the Great who had the children of Bethlehem put to death in his search for Jesus. Herod was not a Jew but an Edomite. The Jews resented this fact, and Herod knew it. James was the first of the Twelve to die for the sake of the gospel, and the only one whose death is recorded in the New Testament. Being put to death with the sword meant being beheaded. Jesus had told both James and his brother John that they would drink the same cup of suffering He did (see Matt. 20:20-23). For James, this suffering was execution. For John, it was exile. The killing of James by Herod was an attempt to win the favour of the Jewish leaders.¹

As we see, violence runs in the family. But God allowed these men - the Herods to do these murderous things to His servants. God's ways are just, He had His reasons, we do not question them. Today we see other actions of God, again, all just, all fair, His way.

Herod had a small problem. It was where he focused his attention. He focused it on himself. This inward looking problem is completely opposite to Scriptural instruction: Proverbs 3 tells us (6-8) *In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones.* Herod was filled with pride, and that was a pride of the heart, he loved himself. He failed to acknowledge God, his aim was power, yet he

¹ The NKJV Study Bible: formerly titled *The Nelson Study Bible New King James Version: The Olive Tree, Bible* + 1998-2013

hankered after the approval of the Jews in whose land he was reigning - therefore the execution of James to show the Jews he was with them on this issue of Christianity.

We see in the opening passage that he was angry '*with the people of Tyre and Sidon*'. This was a problem with those towns for they relied on the area ruled by Herod for food. The people could not afford to have the king offside. Interestingly, they did not approach the king directly. They made friends with the king's personal aide, and he calmed the waters for them, he made it possible for the anger to be appeased. Does this remind you of something? I heard this when reading and listening to others about this passage. It strangely fits, though the context is so wrong. We the people had a wrathful God. We make friends with Jesus, God's own Son who is seated at the right hand of God, who is the '*one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all*'. Neat! We love a mediator, and we see the same in this worldly setting, and here we see God using His Word to show us His ways, in the most unlikely places, the shadow of Christ in the servant of the wicked King Herod.

Herod, his wrath appeased goes to give an oration to the people. The people, full of nervous energy, for the crisis is over, food is back in the markets are foolish, they praise the man who had just made their lives miserable, probably in an act of self-preservation, though I am making a supposition with that thought. Does Herod say - God is in control. I rule according to His plan, I am nothing without Him? The next few verses tells us the answer to these questions is a resounding 'NO' - '*he did not give glory to God*'. God's own anger was not appeased - Herod did not claim eternal life through the saving grace of the Lord Jesus, He followed Jewish customs, but did not know their God, so did not know the Son of God, and because he took God's glory for his own, he was struck down, and died what seems to be a pretty horrible death.

Is this reasonable? After all he was a heathen king, and Edomite, did not know God, and acted as many did. In fact, the Caesars took their role to be that of a god, as did the pharaohs. They were not struck down with worms. However, as an Edomite, he matches Obadiah's descriptor - *Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom... You shall be greatly despised. The pride of your heart has deceived you... You who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground? ' Though you ascend as high as the eagle, and though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,' says the Lord.* (1-4) Was not Herod displaying that which Edom had been criticised. If he was so 'Jewish' he would have known this passage, and amended his ways. But no, this had not occurred. We are fortunate that God will make some an example for others, rather than strike us all down when we fail. Herod is one in a long line of problem characters that God has included in Scripture to show us the sin of pride, and what it can do to us - quite literally in this case, eat us away. Herod though lived amongst the Jews, was not blind to the religion of the people, nor ignorant of God, after all, why kill James if he was not that aware of the difference between the Jewish religion, and the newly emerged Christianity. But that is just an excuse. Pride is never good, and brings many a person down, in the secular as well as non-secular worlds.

A good example of this can be found in Leviticus. Aaron, the brother of Moses, had two sons who failed to glorify God. Scripture does not say so, but in the context of all of Scripture, one can see that these two must have thought themselves greater than others, after all their Dad was Aaron, their uncle Moses, they were priests, and they went off the rails:

Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. And Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified. '" So Aaron held his peace. Leviticus 10: 1-3

There is only one God, and he is holy. God cannot be ignored, as with Herod, or worshipped in whatever way we may think up. That is why God gave us the Scriptures - so we know who God is, and how we need to live before God. This is why God gave us a mediator, to assist us when we fail - at the throne of God himself, for this is where Jesus is seated, and the Holy Spirit, dwelling within us, to convict us, and teach us all things. Sure the examples are different, yet they are both the same. The three men (Herod, and Aaron's sons) failed to acknowledge God as holy, to be glorified. Revelations tells us: *You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.*" (4:11) No-one else is worthy, certainly not man, even if he is king.

So why do we all fall into the trap of exalting ourselves rather than God? Proverbs 18:12 tells us this: *Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, and before honour is humility.* Here we have the contrast, haughty and humility. Unfortunately, the real nature of man is always the former, never the latter; the natural state is haughty, or proud, vain, arrogant, conceited, snobbish, stuck-up, pompous, self-important, superior, egotistical, supercilious, condescending, lofty, patronizing, smug, scornful, contemptuous, disdainful, overweening, overbearing, imperious, lordly, cavalier, high-handed and so on. How can we test this in ourselves? We may deny that any of these words match our temperament, but try this for a test - *Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?* (1 Corinthians 6:7) Why not let yourself be cheated when someone is trying to gain something from you unfairly? Just let it go, walk away from the \$1000 owed, or the bad land deal, or whatever it is. Can you do it? How easy is it? For me, so hard. After all, fair should be fair. But Paul says no. Walk away. Maybe this is just the toughness of Paul? After all it is just one verse amongst thousands.

However, James tells us:

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. (James 4:1-3)

What about our Saviour, the Lord Jesus. He set the tone: *But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.* (Matthew 5:39-42) Now, look again at the list. What do we do? Maybe the words that describe haughty do not match the ability to give away, walk, and loose, rather than fight to win. Here is another test then. Suppose you do turn your cheek, hand over the cloak as well. How do you feel - worshiping God? Or "I did good, I followed Matthew! God see that - I did it!. Oops, now, do we meet haughty? This is the opposite to the other way of being

proud. This is spiritual pride, taking the glory for your own action rather than giving that glory to God.

Daniel 4 tells us the story of what I am seeing here in the Proverb, which we see as being Herod's problem

The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honour of my majesty?" While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! (30-31) Seven years later, Nebuchadnezzar has learned the lesson that Herod never learned, and this saved himself from his own worms - And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honoured Him who lives forever:

For His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
And His kingdom is from generation to generation.
All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing;
He does according to His will in the army of heaven
And among the inhabitants of the earth.
No one can restrain His hand
Or say to Him, "What have You done?" (Daniel 4:34-35)

Pride is such a destructive force. It comes from wanting something that is not yours, or wanting fairness in this world when our rewards are not within this world, or it is doing what God wants, but forgetting that He gets ALL the glory when we succeed. It is thinking that what we have achieved, whether it is a kingdom as a heathen king, or a great job, or a great family, is because of our hard work not the work of God - whether we believe in God or not as with both Herod and Nebuchadnezzar.

Each angle is different, but the sin is the same. It is a lack of contentment, and striving for something else, because we think we deserve it, and running over whatever is in our way to get there, whether in a bad way, or in a way that on the surface appears godly like lots of prayer, Scriptural study and meditation, to reach spiritual greatness, yet forgetting God on the way. Some great modern evangelists started well, got a following, built grand churches, spoke to thousands of people at any single given time, built grand homes, and live luxurious lifestyles, and the conversion rate slid, their churches are shrinking, they no longer glow spiritually, and pride is destroying their very existence, not even mentioning their once close bonds to the One who saved them and gave them the gift to use in the first place. On the surface they sound good, they still preach the Word, yet the inside, the heart, has lost the connection with God. On a lesser scale, but still within the context of serving God, but forgetting to look towards God for what is happening at home, there is an entire book in the Bible on this very subject. I have found though, that few see, and study this book, for it seems to be a statement on God and Satan having some weird and wacky competition, with a poor human as their fodder. Not so, God had more than one purpose, the message is multi-layered as is most of God's Word. Scripture is for reading, understanding, studying and understanding even more, and studying, and understanding even more than more and so on. As we age, God ensures His book has something new for us every day. But I digress!

This book has a number of layers, and a number of topics being taught, but the underlying them has pride as a core issue. So to the book of Job!

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil. (1:1) So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did regularly. (Job 1:5)

If this was how God saw Job, how could I even introduce him as an example that can be mentioned when talking of someone so bad as Herod. Well, we need to remember that in chapter 42 we read: *Then Job answered the Lord and said: "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, 'I will question you, and you shall answer Me.' "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."* (1-6) How do we get to understand what God is saying here? It begins at the opening verse with an upright and blameless man, one who sacrificed even for those sins that may have been committed by his sons. We need to stop for a moment and acknowledge that the book of Job is not about God beating and punishing Job for the sin of pride. Absolutely not! But pride is a subject and focus. The pain and suffering was to teach Job that God was still on his side, despite his circumstance. God wanted Job to recognise Him as the justifier, that such suffering was still just. Job takes so many chapters to reach the repentance, because it takes that many chapters of bad advice, and failure to look outward, towards God.

Spiritual pride will do this, working hard at justifying oneself before God, and failing to look towards God and glorifying His name, and giving Him the worship due for the work Christ did on the cross to bring us to this point in our Christian walk. That is the crux. Sure, Hebrews 12:6 tells us that *"For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."* But this is not in judgement, but in refining us to be better for Himself, for the judgement has gone elsewhere (a process that had not actually occurred in Job's time, though pointed towards throughout all the Old Testament): *being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.* (Romans 3:24-26) Therefore, because of this, 1 Peter 1 stands so true: *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,* (6-7) which is really just a New Testament expression of the Old Testament's Zechariah 13:9: *I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, "This is My people"; And each one will say, 'The Lord is my God.'*" The book of Job takes us through to this understanding, and shows us the bad advice given (God is punishing you for...), Elihu coming as the shadow of a mediator to come, and Job turning from his great spiritual life of sacrifice focusing on his own works for God (not bad in itself, for look again at verse 1...), to outward looking, and seeing God as He truly is, the just and holy justifier of the one who believes in Him,

and so Job repents of the pride that blinded his eyes to this. He too saved himself from the worms, and was restored, twice over.

We can recognise these themes within Job by verses such as: *So I have been allotted months of futility, and wearisome nights have been appointed to me. When I lie down, I say, 'When shall I arise, and the night be ended?'* (7:3-4) When do we think God has allocated to us futility? Does God allocate futility? 2 Corinthians 4:8 tells us: *We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair.* Job further says: *I will say to God, "Do not condemn me; show me why You contend with me. Does it seem good to You that You should oppress, that You should despise the work of Your hands* (10:2-3) yet we see in 2 Corinthians 6:9-10 *and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.* Job is inward looking, he cannot see beyond his own self, his own misery, from a life that was spectacularly successful to one of personal suffering, loss, grief, and a body that is falling apart. Paul tells us that despite this we should be always rejoicing. What a lesson is this!!

Paul records this thus and brings us to the pinnacle of this lesson: *I speak as a fool—I am more: in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.* 2 Corinthians 11:23-28

Job cannot see God past what he sees in his own misery. He was one with God, verse 1 of the book tells us his standing with God' *blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil'* yet, as I said previously, failed to give all the glory to God. Unlike Herod, he was not taking the glory for himself, otherwise God would not call him blameless and upright, however, Job needed to learn the lesson that we all have to learn in our journey here. We need to learn that no matter the circumstance, glory, praise, worship must still spring forth from our mouths. We need to always have before us that God is on our side, He is for us, He is just, He is faithful. We must always remember that we have an advocate in Jesus Christ. We must acknowledge that all things are for a purpose - the way of God, be it correction or pure refinement, to bring us closer to our God and Father, to make us more useful for God, humbly, with all grace, and Christlikeness.

This may seem like a digression, but each part of the book of Acts takes us to what can become a problem in the church, even if the example is from someone who was not a Christian, in this case Herod. Herod gave a great oration, and failed to recognise where that gift came from. He took glory that should have been God's for himself, the act of a proud man. However, we have also learned that omission in giving glory, has the same problem as we saw with Job, where the moment things started to go bad, Job felt that God had left him in futility, with no purpose. I may stand and preach here today, and this may be a good sermon; it will be if the Holy Spirit has led it, and God wills it, it won't if God has not willed it. So the second I believe that this is my work, the worms are already

starting on the inside, and I lose that which I had for Christ, and add to the pain and suffering the Lord suffered for me.

My sin is that I am failing to give to God, the glory and worship that is His only to receive. It is such an easy trap to slide into. We all like praise. We all like to be told that we are doing a good job. However, that praise is often not good for the ego, unless we are deeply in Christ, rooted in His suffering, immersed in the cross that He carried, and live with a humble spirit of servanthood for Him. It is undoubtedly not a description of me. Praise the Lord though that all things are possible through Him, and we are all works in progress. The take home lesson therefore, is that spiritual pride is just as bad as the pride of Herod, the pride of Nebuchadnezzar, and others as exemplified throughout Scripture.

What then is our lesson in overcoming? Paul tells us that he himself: *'...for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content* (Philippians 4:11) How do we do this? What is it we must do to be content, when life can be such a struggle? Perhaps if we read more of Scripture, pray more, meditate more we can be like this. The answer is yes, and no. Yes we must forever more do these things, absorb ourselves in the things of Christ. But, we must allow the Holy Spirit to do His work in us: *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.* 2 Corinthians 3:18 let us not be like the Galatians, who went the opposite way:

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? (Galatians 3:1-5)

So where to from here? Why has God placed this passage about Herod against the very next paragraph? Let us look at those next words in verse 24: *But the word of God grew and multiplied.* If we live a life opposite to that of Herod, if we act, live, and be as we have just seen, wholly for Christ, knowing that He is for us, nothing can be against us, even when in the depths of pain and suffering, languishing in a jail, facing execution for our faith, then the *'but'* happens. How? There is a neat verse in Matthew that tells us:

Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; a bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; and in his name the Gentiles will hope. Matthew 12:18-21

My beloved in whom my soul is well pleased today? Is just as applicable to us today? Is this why we are not a Christian nation anymore? How many Christians can God say of them - "my soul is well pleased"? Who can proclaim justice to the Gentiles? We had a sad time with a couple the other day. They like what the Bible has to say, but all they could see is what so called 'Christians' have done over the centuries - wars in the name of our 'religion', persecution, fights, quarrels - they just could not see the advantage of being part of this organisation called the church if that is how we act. What a sad indictment on the church?

So, we need to move forward as time runs out. What happens after the ‘*but*’? And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

So we see in verse 24 the word ‘*But*’. It does remind us that all things are possible with Christ. His people may be making deals with the enemy - that is Herod. They may be glorifying Herod instead of God - their sin was just as great, but God has a purpose. He has men ready for a mission, including a man who had grown up with Herod - name Manaen (Acts 13:1). These people obviously needed further teaching. Stephen had been here, and people like Lucius had heard this message it is purported through Stephen. But there is work to be done, the story before has shown this, and the Holy Spirit is working in these men listed here, and the time has come for some serious evangelism further afield. We see in this introduction to the next phase of Acts, the appearance of Saul, yet to be called Paul, Barnabas and John Mark. These names pop up again, Lucius has one further mention, though Manaen is not mentioned.

What can these lines tell us - the contrast I mentioned at the very beginning? We have seen the effects of sin on a person. Now we see the effects of the Holy Spirit on a group of people. They are within the church at Antioch, and amongst them are these prophets and teachers. This is where their gifts lay. Not all are called to be prophets and teachers, and in fact, we see in Scripture that prophecy was going to be around for only a little while. But these men are named, and with a few words we see some of the attributes of such people, and how the Lord worked with men who did these things. We must be cautious here, for this is the expressions of faith, not the aforementioned self-learning packages of Bible knowledge, in the more legalistic sense. This is the work of the Holy Spirit creating the living and breathing workers for the Lord - with all their humanness - they were the same as us, and in fact we see the example in where ‘*Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia*’ (Acts 15:37-38) Disagreement was present, they eventually sort themselves out, but not until later. Even Paul and Barnabas could not always keep it together, and John Mark in his first mission trip found it too hard, yet came back on board later and was a faithful servant.

Let us move back to the text. These men ministered to the Lord and fasted (Act 13:2). Note the phrase ministered to the Lord. How do we minister to the Lord? This is where the comparison comes in, and why we need to fully understand the first part of this morning’s sermon, for it demonstrates the opposite to a ministry to the Lord. Watchman Nee states: *Work for the Lord undoubtedly has its attractions for the flesh. You may be thrilled when crowds gather to hear you preach, and when numbers of souls are saved.*² However, the Greek word here is the word to do a public office, serving the Lord, Strong’s tells us: the

² Watchman Nee - Sermon:

<http://www.sermonindex.net/modules/articles/index.php?view=article&aid=6923> (Accessed 31 March 2014)

words refer to the priestly-ministering they give to God - a public servant to the Lord. Because each believer is an official priest of God, their ministering to the Lord is equally profound with every "living sacrifice" offered up in faith³ Romans 12:1-2 tells us exactly how this should be: *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.* The first focus is God, not man, the second focus is doing the will of God, the third is doing it in worship, as a priest would serve the Lord, and to do this we will have the Lord central and in complete focus, with a heart for the Lord that would meet words such as: honour, respect, devotion, reverence, veneration, adoration or admiration.

These men were serious about serving the Lord. They were not out there to serve man, man was not the focus of the work, though to bring souls into the saving grace of God's presence was the job as it were, the Holy Spirit doing the convicting - remember that we plant the seed and water, God brings the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6). How were they showing that conviction to do the work - ministering to the Lord. They followed a couple of precepts mentioned a number of times in the Bible - fasting (one google search says the word occurs 48 times in the Bible) and prayer (pray - at least 511 times). Fasting seems to have lost favour with the Christian. Scripture mentions it often as mentioned. There are no verses that says that after 1941 fasting is no longer a requirement of the church, or any other year! It needs to be done with the right heart and mind, as already discussed in depth. In this context it needs to be done worshipfully - as part of adoring, or honouring, or respecting God for who He is.

Fasting goes with prayer. It is part of the prayer action. One fasts and prays. One fasts for the Lord, not for piety. Matthew tells us (6:17-18): *But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.* Paul says in Acts 27:33 *Paul implored them all to take food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing.* This tells us there is a place and time - Paul knew that the prayers were answered, therefore the time for fasting was at an end.

Finally we can take a lesson from Ezra, who needed to ensure his people had a clear journey from Babylon to Jerusalem so: *Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions.* (8:23) Prayer and fasting are for specific purposes. We do not fast for our own person spiritual growth as such, as I looked at verses related to fasting and prayer they all seem to be about beseeching the Lord for the needs of others, not personally.

So we see, when they had made inquiry of the Lord, they did it in the framework of fasting. We see that when they were in the Lord's presence, the Holy Spirit spoke, and separated out three people to go and evangelise to the Gentiles. We shall see that first mission trip in part next time we look at Acts, Lord willing. What can we learn though from this portion of Scripture? There was a group. Only three were sent. Not all are called to go into every part of the world. Some are called to take care of the flock at home. Some are

³ Strong's 3008. Leitourgeó.

called to be fund raisers, some to care for the widows and poor. Some to preach and teach locally. Each has a purpose, and no purpose is better than another. Note Paul:

Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way. We also know that earlier in this chapter we read (17-18): If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. 1 Corinthians 12:29-31

There we have it: two scenarios. One not of God, the other of God. One where the glory that should be God's is taken by man - and he is eaten by worms, the other are a group of men, ministering to the Lord, and they are sent into the furthest corners of the earth to preach the gospel. One group of men seek advocacy with a man, the others seek communion with God through prayer and fasting. In one God is glorified, in the other man dies for failing to glorify God. Where do we sit? How does each of us react and respond to God, live for Him.

In summary we have seen that the pride of man is a serious thing. We have seen in the example of Job that pride exists in all of us. We note that it was not for Job's pride that he suffered, but that the pride within focused his attention to his own misery, and he thought himself to be abandoned by God when things went pear shaped. However, he repented - a key for all sin of the godly man, and God blesses him double that which he had before. Herod failed to repent and died an ugly death. We see that in King Nebuchadnezzar, a pagan king, a Babylonian, brought to his knees before God, eating grass of the field and being seen as crazy for 7 whole years, repents, and one finds it hard to refute those who say we will see him in heaven. We see Aaron who lost his sons to the wrath of God accept the punishment of God, for the sin of his sons. God continually gives us both sides of the coin. He shows us how we should be, and what we should not be. His demands of us are great, but we should be, in all things content, as with the apostle Paul. We also need to remember that Paul also notes in 1 Corinthians 15: *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.* Reliance should be on the grace of God for all things, never our work, even if we do work hard (we should always work hard for God).

Let us finish with Scripture and a song:

Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Revelation 3:10-13

And the song:

How can I say thanks
for the things You have done for me?
Things so undeserved,
yet You gave to prove Your love for me;
the voices of a million angels
could not express my gratitude.
All that I am and ever hope to be,
I owe it all to Thee.

To God be the glory,
to God be the glory,
to God be the glory
for the things He has done.

With His blood He has saved me,
with His power He has raised me;
to God be the glory
for the things He has done.

Just let me live my life,
let it pleasing, Lord to Thee,
and if I gain any praise,
let it go to Calvary.

Andraé Crouch (1971) Lyrics from <http://www.elyrics.net> (eLyrics.net) Accessed 31 March 2014

Stephen B Simon (CCC 15 December 2013)
\\Acts\\Acts 12 The contrasting worlds of Christian and heathen (SBS)