

Title: **Tales from the Crypt: Learning from the Deaths of James & Herod**  
Text: **Acts 12:1-5, 20-24**  
Date: **January 19, 2025**

Find the sermon manuscript to follow along with online at [mercyhillchurch.org](http://mercyhillchurch.org).



## Big Idea

On the surface of this text, it looks at first like James is losing big and Herod is winning out. But we soon realize things are not what they seem. In God's economy, the losers win in the end, and the winners lose. And it's all ultimately determined by what we do with Jesus and his word.

### 1. The Losers Win (i.e. the Death of James)

Upon first read, it looks like James is the big loser in this story, right? Not just in relation to Herod, who beheads him with seemingly no resistance whatsoever. But also in relation to Peter. Perhaps that's even the more painful comparison. Because God rescues Peter. But, James, he just lets die. It's always messed with me a bit. And it leads us to a question I wanted to put before you this morning: Who got the better deal here—James or Peter? The way we are first inclined to answer this question says a lot about our understanding of God and Christianity and what we value and have our hope set on.

**Lesson #1: God Is Never Doing Less, But Always More**

**Lesson #2: Don't Look at Others, Look at Him**

**Lesson #3: Hope in Heaven for Peace on Earth**

### 2. The Winners Lose (i.e. the Death of Herod)

I think we have here an illustration of what happens when desire runs amok in the human heart. Herod's story is a picture of the insatiable desire, the blackhole appetite that we're swallowed up in when we refuse to find our joy in God. In all of your eating, you get eaten. The

more you try to fill, the emptier you become. You think you're consuming. All the while, you're being consumed. Sin is like a tapeworm of the soul. You may eat and eat but you come to find you're just feeding this thing that's ultimately eating you, from the inside-out.

"Hell begins with a grumbling mood, always complaining, always blaming others . . . but you are still distinct from it. You may even criticize it in yourself and wish you could stop it. But there may come a day when you can no longer. Then there will be no you left to criticize the mood or even to enjoy it, but just the grumble itself, going on forever like a machine. It is not a question of God 'sending us' to hell. In each of us there is something growing, which will BE hell unless it is nipped in the bud" (C.S. Lewis as quoted by Tim Keller in *The Reason for God*, 81).

### 3. The Word of God Always Prevails!

Jesus said: "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). "I'm going to win. Every time." On the surface, it's an audacious assertion, but it's one that he proved he could make good on with his triumph at the cross. As he hung on that wood, it looked like hell was having its way with him . . . until it wasn't. If, on the cross, Jesus becomes the worm (Ps. 22:6), in his resurrection, he stomps on it! When he rises up from the grave, he overcomes Satan, sin, and death, not merely for himself, but for you and I, for his church—so he could forgive us our sin; so he could bring us back to God and satisfy us in the deepest places; so he could build his church on the foundation of his work and word, the gospel . . . so not even the gates of hell could stop us now because he's already torn them down!



## Reflection Questions

- On the surface it looks like James lost but he wins big in the end. On the surface it looks like Herod's won, but he loses big in the end. And the difference is determined by what each of them are doing with the Jesus and his word. James held to it. Herod spurned it. So what are you going to do with it?
- Do you have any "hotspots" in your heart? What are they? What can you do? How can Jesus help?

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## Our Mission & Values

*Mercy Hill Church exists to help restore us to God, neighbor, and city through the good news of Jesus Christ.*

**FAITH:** The Way Back to God | We are redeemed to enjoy intimate presses our church *upwards* in love

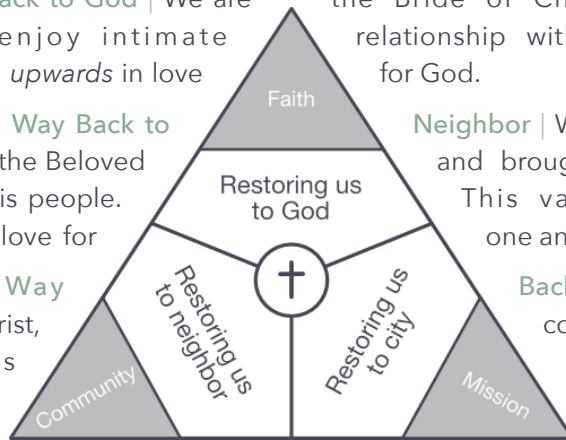
the Bride of Christ, created and relationship with him. This value for God.

**COMMUNITY:** The Way Back to Christ, adopted in the Beloved relationship with his people. church *inwards* in love for

**Neighbor** | We are the Family of and brought into covenantal This value presses our one another.

**MISSION:** The Way the Embassy of Christ, Savior to be his value presses our in love for the

**Back to City** | We are commissioned by the ambassadors. This church *outwards* unbelieving.



## Your Next Steps

When approaching the Christian faith and life, it can be confusing to know where to even begin. Come find us at the Next Steps Table after the service—it would be our joy to help you along in the journey! And if you're a visitor, we have a special gift bag for you. Don't miss it!



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Welcome to Mercy Hill Church.  
We are so glad you've joined us today!

## Announcement Spotlight

### Short-Term Missions Trips Interest Meeting(s)

We will be holding two (identical) information sessions for those who are interested in learning more about several possible short-term trips upcoming in 2025 to partner and serve with some ministries Mercy Hill Church supports:

- January 19th (TODAY!) 12:00pm-1:00pm\* (in person) at Steinbeck after the service
- January 26th (Sunday) 7:15-8:15pm\* (Zoom/online) on Sunday evening (find link by scanning the QR code below).

\* The first half of the meeting will be sharing information from the GO! Team, and the second half will be Q&A.

For more information, please contact Joey at [joey@mercyhillchurch.org](mailto:joey@mercyhillchurch.org).

**All Church Prayer - Today!**

**Kids Ministry Volunteer Training - Next Sunday!**

Scan the QR code below for more info!

For clickable content and more announcements,



scan this code to head to our Communications Hub!

Or find it online at [mercyhillchurch.org/communications-hub](https://mercyhillchurch.org/communications-hub).