

# Clearing up the mess

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[ 0 : 00 ] So, as we've gone through the book of Esther, I've tried to indicate how, although it's a book of history, it also has connections with the wisdom books that follow on after Esther in our Bibles.

! And I thought it was worth quoting from one of these books, this is the book of Proverbs, which in Proverbs chapter 8 we find these words. Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice? By me kings reign, and rulers make laws that are just. By me princes govern, and all nobles who rule on earth.

Well, we'll see some of that wisdom as we go through this passage. We have another longish passage, as I've said, and although in a sense the culmination of the book, the height of the book, is the previous passage that we read, the victory over Haman.

There are loose ends to tie up. Haman has been removed, and as we see Xerxes gives his property to Esther and Mordecai.

But the task is not finished, but the task is not finished, and as is repeated here again, it had been issued in the name of the king and with the king's seal, and therefore it couldn't be revoked.

[ 1 : 35 ] This is not easily unwound, and it's clearly not a task that Xerxes wants himself, although you notice he's prepared to take the credit for it in chapter 9, verse 25.

But he hands the task over to Mordecai, the person to whom, of course, he's given the signet ring that he'd taken from Haman. And so what's Mordecai's solution?

Well, it may seem a little drastic, but at least it was simple. He was going to license a civil war, effectively. It's not a program that you can imagine any modern state doing, but they did things differently in those days, and that's what this amounts to.

As we go through the text, we'll have a look and see how that worked out. So the text fairly obviously divides into four sections.

Chapter 8, we have the edict as unwound. In chapter 9, the first part of chapter 9, we have what happened on that particular day, the day that the lot had been thrown on, or for.

[ 2 : 46 ] And then at the end of chapter 9, we have the Feast of Purim, which is instigated. And then at the end, we have these little few verses right at the end, which I cannot resist calling the happily ever after bit.

It's not quite that, of course, but it is the kind of, that sort of ending to this story, which is an interesting thing in itself, the way that this piece of history ends.

And we'll look at that as well, and then after that, I'd like to bring you some reflections, not so much on this last passage as the book as a whole, really.

So let's first of all look at the unwinding of Haman's edict. You don't need a PhD in critical theory to realise that chapter 8 deliberately mirrors chapter 3.

In chapter 3, we had the discussion of Haman's edict to kill the Jews on this certain day, how all the machinery of the civil service and the couriers were put into force to do it.

[ 3 : 59 ] And that edict's still in force. It was sealed with the king's seal. What is to be done? Well, as I said, Mordecai's solution is a simple one.

If a trifle drastic, he's actually going to licence, what it amounts to, is licensing a civil war. And in this chapter, we see all the words of chapter 3 are quite deliberately repeated.

So in chapter 3, we're reminded that there were 127 provinces. And we see that repeated here in verse 9. The phrase that what was to happen to the Jews was to destroy, kill and annihilate them is repeated here in verse 11, although in this case, of course, referring to the enemies of the Jews.

And just as in chapter 3, Haman had employed all the infrastructure of the empire to distribute his edict, so here, that infrastructure and civil service is employed to distribute the new edict.

But there are, of course, some differences. One thing, interestingly, is that there's actually more information about the courier's horses.

[ 5 : 20 ] You may wonder why that is. It seems a little odd. But the horses are almost emphasised in the text here. And the commentators tell us that the terms that are used, that are translated, things like swift horses and so on, are actually almost untranslatable.

Even the Hebrew text simply borrows the Persian technical terms for their particular types of courier horse. But the point that's being made here is that these mounts were especially bred for courier duty.

You can't run an empire without good communications. And, of course, in those days, they didn't have radios or the internet. They had couriers, these horses, these messengers.

These messengers were the internet of the empire, if you like. And it seems that they were, rather, the envy of other governments and other empires.

And here, they're particularly mentioned as being, they're going to be employed here to get the news out as quickly as is at all possible. There are two differences, however, between this edict and the one of Haman's.

[ 6 : 39 ] First of all, we're told in verse 14 that this message went out marked top priority. This message was marked here in verse 14 of chapter 8 as being, well, you know how it works.

Drop everything. Just do this. It's the top priority there. And the other difference, of course, you may have noticed, was the address list. In this case, the Jews, in verse 9, are included in the list of people to whom the edict was addressed.

Haman, of course, had deliberately left them out. You'll notice, however, that there is another difference with this edict and that it's not the blanket permission for genocide that Haman had given. The Jews were only allowed to defend themselves if they were attacked. It did seem to allow the killing of women and children, although some translations say that means the Jews or the Jewish women and children could be defended.

But most commentators do actually take it to mean that it did allow the killing of women and children, mirroring chapter 3, verse 13, but only insofar as the women and children were associated with the competence.

[ 8 : 11 ] So it wasn't a blanket license for genocide that Haman had issued. It was only a license for the Jews to defend themselves. It also allowed plunder, again mirroring the edict that Haman had issued, although interestingly enough, as we read on, we see that the Jews apparently didn't avail themselves of this.

The report specifically says they didn't take plunder. What this edict did allow them to do was arm themselves and to effectively assemble in military groups, in verse 11.

It doesn't exactly tell us how they did that. Whether they simply went along to their friendly neighborhood armor and brought shields and spears and swords and things, I don't know.

Or perhaps they borrowed them from sympathetic neighbors. That's kind of hinted at in the text, that many of the neighbors actually helped the Jews. Perhaps they helped them by lending them arms. But of course this was going to be a civil war. It wasn't going to be a high-tech war with heavy cavalry and chariots and vast armies.

[ 9 : 29 ] Civil wars, as you can see by looking at almost any period of history, civil wars are the most vicious. Civil wars are where you get hand-to-hand fighting in the streets and houses.

And this was going to be that sort of war. And you'll notice another difference too to Haman's edict. If you look back in chapter 3, verse 15, we read the reaction of the city of Susa, effectively the civil service and the political elite there.

They were bewildered by Haman's edict. This made no sense at all. And yet in chapter 8, verse 15, we see that there was rejoicing in the city of Susa.

This seemed to make much more sense to the politicians and the civil servants there. There was a celebration in Susa.

Even though it was going to be a fight, it was actually a return to political sanity in which Mordecai was obviously regarded as a much stronger, much better governor, leader, prime minister, or whatever you want to call him, than Haman had been.

[ 10 : 40 ] He was obviously quite popular. And we notice also from verse 17 the way in which the people, both the ordinary people and the administrators and governors in the provinces could see from this second edict which way the wind was blowing.

And you notice that some of them were quite keen to say, what, an armed force attacking the Jews? No, nothing to do with us, not me.

They would say, we're on the side of the Jews now. So actually, if you think about it, this was an opportunity for the enemies of the Jews to back down.

They were only to be killed if they actually attacked the Jews. And probably the meaning of those last few verses in chapter 8 is that some of them did. They probably decided, no, this is not a good plan after all.

But nonetheless, when the day arrived, it turns out Haman's auspicious day for which he had thrown the lots, we might have inspected that Haman's conspirators and allies would melt away quickly and just say, well, never mind, we'll forget about it.

[12:02] But it seems not. It seems they decided to go and press the attack anyway. Perhaps because that ancient enmity between Jew and the Amalekite was still hot.

But now, as we're saying, we can see that the administration now was on the Jews' side. They could say where this was going and which way the wind was blowing.

And yet the enemies of the Jews did press the attack. And so all over the empire, this licensed war, civil war, is engaged. And then there's a remarkable change of style, of story style here.

We're all up, aren't we, for hearing great tales of valor and battle, of details of what happened in Sousa or in other places.

But suddenly, our master storyteller, his story goes flat, doesn't it? We just get recited lists and statistics.

[13:10] This chapter has all the passion of a military status report and that's probably, in fact, what it is. This is the report from the military intelligence.

We could sort of bring language up to date. It says, yes, sir, I can report there are widespread Jewish victories. There's about 500 casualties in Sousa.

Yes, ma'am, I can confirm that the primary targets have been detained. We have arrested Haman's sons. Here's their list of names. Verse 6.

And then Esther comes back and says, you have permission for them to be hanged. The report comes back again. Well, they're still fighting in the city. Do we have permission to continue the action for another day?

Verse 13. What do you think, Esther? Yes, please give them another day. And so the action in Sousa continues for another day.

[14:15] And other than that, all we get is statistics. Numbers. The commentators do argue over the numbers. Presumably, the Jews also took some losses, but these are not reported at all.

Some consider the 800 casualties reported in the capital, Sousa, to be excessive, but is it really? In the, it's not an unreasonable number for a force that was assembled for a pogrom in the city. 800 enemies does not seem an unreasonable number at all to me. The 75,000 in the provinces perhaps is a bit more problematic.

It does seem large, but as we'll say, not inconceivably so. The Septuagint actually says 15,000. And we might have except this figure, except, as I said, the Septuagint text.

It's rather dubious in Esther, so generally the tendency is not to accept the Septuagint's text here. Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, if you're not familiar with the term.

[15:34] There are other possibilities. The Hebrew word *elef*, which is translated a thousand, can also mean a military company, so it could possibly mean that it meant there were 75 separate forces that attacked the Jews.

But actually, 75,000, even if we take that as the correct figure, is far from impossible. If you look on Wikipedia, and again, I wouldn't trust Wikipedia for historical information totally, but according to Wikipedia, the population of the Persian Empire at its height has been estimated at between 17 and 35 million.

That's a lot of people. Certainly there was a lot of people out of the population of the earth in those days. And so if you do the math, then 75,000 is less than 1% of the population.

It's not an inconceivable figure by any means. So let's not get hung up over the number. This is a military report. They're just telling us, almost as I say in a very flat way, that there was a great victory for the Jews.

The point is that the Jews were everywhere successful. So we're not told why they refused to take the plunder, but it's probably a response to Samuel's words at the time of King Saul, where he says,

Samuel had said, now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them.

[17:04] Do not spare them. Put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camel and donkeys. In other words, they weren't to take plunder in Saul's day. And possibly the Jews had that in mind and that was why they didn't take plunder, but we don't know, we're not for sure.

But it seems that although they were given permission to plunder their enemies, they decided not to do so. But this is the day of destruction. At last, Moses' ancient curse had run its course, as it were, and not the Jews who were blotted from history, blotted from memory, but the Amalekites.

And it seems that after that there is little talk in history of the Amalekites. So we get this description of that day, the day that Haman had thrown lots and seemed a propitious day for him.

It turned out instead to be a propitious day for the Jews. And therefore we have this instigation of the feast of Purim, which we could roughly translate as the feast of lots or the feast of dice.

Seems a slightly odd name for a feast, but that's what they decided to call it. And the Jews, of course, still celebrate it today. It was the only major Jewish feast which was not taken from the law of Moses.

[18:38] All the other Jewish feasts are found in the law of Moses. This was the exception. And that perhaps explains the narrator's emphasis to root the celebration in the theology of Exodus.

And to, as the Jews do still to this day, to attach this story to that curse of Moses on the Amalekites in Exodus.

But the name has a significance, doesn't it, Purim? The day the lot was thrown on, the day that the lot said, this is the propitious day. But who was it propitious for?

Haman thought it was a propitious day to exterminate the Jews. But the name reminds us that ultimately the world is not ruled by foreign gods and superstitions.

It is the hidden God of the Jews who rules over the affairs of men. This feast is a great celebration of God delivering his people from their enemies.

[19:40] again, the God that strangely in this book is never named and yet is everywhere present. The God who delivers the people from their enemies, not the gods of Haman and the pagans but the god of the Jews.

Now a good storyteller knows how to end a story. And our narrator perhaps comes as close to saying they all lived happily ever after as the constraints of historical and theological truth would let him.

It's actually quite strange this passage, this last few verses, these last three verses in chapter 10.

All this history in the court of Xerxes is actually going on during that 50 years war between the Greek states and the Persian Empire.

that war that, well, the first major action was the defeat of Xerxes' father Darius I at the famous Battle of Marathon.

And really for 50 years, while these events are happening in the Empire, the Persians and the Greeks are at war. And this war raged throughout Xerxes' reign and continued more or less until both sides just ran out of steam, basically.

[21:10] Neither side could gain the total upper hand and so eventually the thing just ran out of steam. The narrator chooses not to mention this at all.

Instead, he presents Mordecai, doesn't he, as the epitome of a wise and incorruptible administration, contrasting him with Haman, who just was after his own glory and his own power. You may wonder why we got this bit at the beginning about Xerxes' imposing taxes. But the point of this, I think, is that what was being put in place was a proper system of taxation, a fair system, rather than the bribes and manipulations of the Haman era. You run an empire that size and you did need an army, there was a war going on, you needed a fair system of tax and an open system, a public system, a system that is seen to be fair rather than the bribes that Haman was offering. And we read of Mordecai that he promised peace, promoted peace. And it says particularly for the Jews, but surely the implication is he promoted peace for the empire as a whole.

[22:45] But it is quite different, this ending, from the ending of most of the historical books, particularly the later ones.

For instance, if you look at the end of the book of Nehemiah, they go more for sort of gritty realism. The end of Nehemiah mentions that there are still problems with the Jews taking foreign wives and

Nehemiah's prayer is effectively, if you read it, it's just, well, I've done the best I could, Lord, remember me.

And most of the, actually, the later historical books end on quite a downbeat note. But Esther ends in this way, with this discussion of Mordecai and the peace in the empire.

And actually, that is itself a link to the wisdom books. Most of the wisdom books end on a positive note. Even Ecclesiastes, which is, if you're familiar with it, you'll realise is the darkest, really, of the wisdom books, finishes by emphasising the benefits of wisdom.

And Job, which follows Esther in our Bibles, actually has a quite similar ending to Esther in many ways. Not in its details, but in the spirit behind it.

[ 24 : 17 ] Let me just read you some few verses from the last chapter of Job. You needn't look it up unless you want to. The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first.

He had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 donkeys. And he also had seven sons and three daughters. The first daughter he named Jemima, the second Keziah, and the third Kerenhapuk.

Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters. And their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers. Interesting ending to Job.

This is the only place I know where the daughters are listed and the sons aren't. God and how he comments on them being the beauty of Job's daughters, just as the narrator in Esther comments on Esther's beauty early on in the book.

And it is this ending, this type of ending that you find in the wisdom books, which is there to promote the value of wisdom, to say that if you have wisdom, it is likely to produce a good output, a good ending, I think.

[ 25 : 36 ] But of course it must be spiritual wisdom. And of course they didn't really live happily ever after. And in a sense this is only, this few verses are just a foretaste really of the true time when there will really be a reign of peace, under the rule of the Prince of Peace.

But still, in actually ending in this way, the narrator is promoting to us the value of wisdom and sound government. He's in a sense commenting on that proverb that by wisdom kings rule and make sound judgments.

And of course the narrator, as I say, is not suggesting really that they lived happily ever after. In fact, Xerxes would in a few years fall victim to a palace plot rather similar to the one that Mordecai had foiled earlier.

And the original readers of the book probably knew this. And exhausted by the Greek wars, the Persian empire actually went into a slow decline.

And we read, don't we, in the prophecy of Daniel, that the time that was coming was the time of the Greeks then, the Macedonians, and after them, the Romans. And of course the Persian empire was hardly the kingdom of God anyway, even with Mordecai running it.

[ 27 : 05 ] But it is a picture there of wise rule. And I think that's why the book ends in this way. The narrator wants us to remind us that when God's rule is obeyed, then there will be peace and rejoicing.

So that's perhaps why the book ends like this. But what is the message of this book? Perhaps it's worth thinking not so much just about the message of these last few chapters, but the book as a whole.

And I'd like to bring to you three key words here we might think about. We might think it's about remembrance, it's about wisdom, and it's about faith.

Why do we have feasts like Purim? Why do we celebrate Christmas and Easter? Esther is in seeing in the people a sense of ongoing history and their part in it.

If you remember what God has done in the past and that will help you to understand what he's doing today, history teaches us nothing.

[ 28 : 26 ] But divine history does teach us something. It helps us to understand the way God works and what God is doing today.

So first of all, Esther's a book about remembering, remembering the past, celebrating the past, faith to encourage faith today.

We learn from the experience of others and as we learn from the experience of others, we experience grace for ourselves. But we might say more specifically, what is it the book is encouraging us to remember?

And I would suggest that actually it's illustrated an important spiritual principle, that principle that Jesus himself gave us in the words, blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. face value, it's the story of the victory of a hard-working civil servant and a young girl ready to take advice over the arrogance and self-seeking of Haman and his crew, isn't it?

[ 29 : 41 ] It teaches us that meekness is not lacking the strength to act, it's lacking the sense to seek advice and not to believe, not to be arrogant.

meekness isn't lacking the strength to act, lacking the strength to act is cowardice. Esther and Mordecai use the resources that God gave them and they certainly put those resources to use in an intelligent way.

It's a book about wisdom and about faith and the interplay between the two of them. Xerxes shows us what can go wrong when kings do not use wisdom to rule.

In the arrogance of Haman and perhaps even to some extent in Vashti, we are pointed at what goes wrong if you're not meek and if you're not wise.

and then again we get Memekan don't we in chapter one who in a sense was a wise man, the one who suggested getting rid of Vashti and holding this beauty contest to get a new queen.

[ 31 : 01 ] He had a form of wisdom, didn't he? But perhaps it's the wisdom that Paul calls the wisdom of this world because even then it is based on self-interest and the sort of arrogant view that one knows all one needs to know.

This isn't the sort of wisdom that the Bible encourages, the word of God encourages because the wisdom that Esther and Mordecai display are of a different order.

It actually has a certain caution to it. It acknowledges that the consequences of any given action may be far from clear. It may be clear to God but they're not always clear to us.

So how can we act at all? It knows there are always more things to learn, more things to find out. There are mistakes to be avoided next time.

But in the end it is the superior political intelligence and insight of Mordecai and Esther which win out over the ignorant bullying Haman. and so the narrator wants to tell us that the plots of the wisdom of this world can weave can be unwoven by a deeper wisdom and that's why we have the comparison there of chapter 8 to chapter 3.

[ 32 : 26 ] Chapter 3 is the wisdom of this world. Chapter 8 although it's formulated in very much the same terms is spiritual wisdom. So actually wisdom teaches us caution and yet that caution is founded in faith.

For Mordecai and Esther it was founded in the conviction that salvation will come from another place. Chapter 4 verse 14 The conviction is that God is at work even if we can't easily see his hand. So it's a book about remembrance it's a book about wisdom and I would suggest that above all it's a book actually about faith. Interestingly Chris read this very referred to this very chapter of Hebrews chapter 11 in our prayer meeting just before the meeting this evening.

Beginning of chapter 11 we read that faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. And then in chapter 11 of Hebrews the writer goes on to list some of those Old Testament believers who lived by this hope.

And as such the book of Esther in actually refusing to name the name of God has much to teach us about faith. Because first of all there are two things that faith is not and then in contrast we can see two things that faith is.

[ 34 : 05 ] So first of all faith is not an excuse for ignorance and folly. Too often it's presented as that, it's nearly always presented as that by the world isn't it, by Dawkins and his allies.

Faith is believing six impossible things before breakfast sort of thing. That's not faith at all. unfortunately too often even within the ranks of Christianity the faith is presented as if it's somehow spiritual to be ignorant and unintelligent.

We live don't we in the days of Google and Wikipedia where you can get information instantly but you don't actually have to digest it and unfortunately some of that thinking seems to have permeated the church and so some people take the Holy Spirit as a sort of celestial Google that's a sort of heavenly Wikipedia for any instant spiritual information you might require but Esther tells us that is not the way the spirit works yes the spirit gives wisdom to all who ask scripture certainly says that but Esther reminds us that that wisdom doesn't come spoon fed it has to be worked at sometimes it has to be fought for again as the book of Proverbs says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise wisdom and discipline we shouldn't read that as saying

the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge therefore we don't need wisdom and discipline and study it says exactly the opposite the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise wisdom and discipline and the second thing it tells us that faith is not is that faith isn't an excuse or inaction faith isn't faithfulness there's no let God let go and let God hear

Mordecai's words are quite interesting he says well yeah Esther if you don't do it salvation will come from somewhere else but somebody's going to have to do it and what about you Esther that was his challenge to Esther wasn't it is your faith up for it faith on the contrary always requires action and again Chris was reminding us of this just before the in our prayer meeting before the service that's exactly what those Old Testament heroes that are listed in Hebrews 11 did wasn't it they couldn't see the immediate consequences of their actions often they didn't even know where they were going exactly but they set out anyway because what they could see and what they were confident of was the purposes of God and the promises of God faith always requires action Esther found herself in the firing line and she was meek ready to take advice but her faith gave her the courage to act excuse me about this cough so let's look at this from the other side if that's what faith is not what can we say positively about faith from the book of Esther well in fact that faith is both the spur and the guide to action why did Esther act because she knew that God planned salvation for her for his people she knew that by acting she was acting according to

God's purposes so that was the spur but it was also her guide wasn't it she didn't see she didn't know the immediate consequence of what she was about to do she actually says doesn't she if I perish I perish I don't know how the king's going to jump but what I can do is act in accordance with the purposes that God has revealed Esther knew that God's purpose was to save his people and that knowledge required her to act but it also indicated what action to take didn't it she thought it through it wasn't she didn't wait for some illumination from heaven that's not the way it's presented to her she thought it through I've got to take action if I am the queen for such a time as this as Mordecai says that means

[ 39 : 16 ] I must act as a queen what would a queen do in this circumstance well the queen must go and see the king and then she follows on from that says well how can I make that work then how can I go and see the king and that's that's her spare to action that's her guide to action isn't it her path becomes clear because she acts according to faith she can see which way to go like as pilgrim in the story acts faith in the fact that the two lions are actually chained and that there is a safe path to walk between them Esther wasn't even sure that it was a safe path but she knew that it was the path that she had to take because it is the path that God had led her to as I say it wasn't that she just took a sort of random choice in the sense it was Haman who took a random choice Esther thought it through how am I going to work this what do I need to do and so that's what she did there were some things she did not and could not know she didn't know how the king was going to respond she didn't know about the events of that crucial night although somehow she knew that she shouldn't put her plea at the first feast when the first king first came to her feast something told her we don't know what that this wasn't the moment but she could not possibly have known what was going to happen that night when king

Xerxes would discover that he had failed to honour Mordecai for foiling the plot she could not possibly have known that but that didn't stop her acting she did what she could with what she had with the wisdom that she had been given and God supplied the victory you know most of us are not queens and we're not royalty or politicians but we all have that same responsibility and hence we have the parable of the talents and I thought I would read we've had some long scripture readings but I think it's a good thing to just read scripture sometimes so I want to conclude actually by reading a couple of passages of scripture first of all I'll read the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 which is starting at verse 14 of Matthew 25 which is on page 994 in the church bibles so these are the parables of the kingdom of heaven and again it would be like a man going on a journey who called his servants and entrusted his property to them to one he gave five talents of money to another two talents and to another one talent each according to his ability then he went on his journey the man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more so also the one with the two talents gained two more but the man who had received the one talent went off dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money after a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them the man who had received the five talents brought the other five master he said you entrusted me with five talents see

I've gained five more his master replied well done good and faithful servant you have been faithful with a few things I will put you in charge of many things come and share your master's happiness the man with the two talents also came master he said you entrusted me with two talents see I have gained two more and his master replied well done good and faithful servant you have been faithful with a few things I will put you in charge of many things come and share your master's happiness the man who had received the one talent came master he said I know that you are a hard man harvesting where you've not sown gathering where you've not scattered seed so I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground see here what belongs to you what's the master's response to this his master replied you wicked lazy servant so you knew that I harvest where I've not sown and gather where

I've not scattered seed well then you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents for everyone who has will be given more and he will have in abundance whoever does not have even what he has will be taken from him and throw that worthless servant outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth Esther might have been one who had in a sense five talents she was put into a royal position but having put in that position she did what the master commanded her it is the one who does nothing with what we have been given is the wicked and lazy servant so that's the first thing that this tells us about faith this book tells us about faith that faith is both a spur and a guide to action and the second thing I'd like to suggest and I mentioned this a bit last week but it's worth thinking about again that faith is transformational faith changes people as we are challenged and changed by God's word wisdom comes and the fear of the Lord is the beginning and the origin of wisdom but again it doesn't mean I think that only spiritual knowledge in a narrow sense is worth having Esther learned a lot about being a queen and Mordecai learned about how to run an empire it's not only I think saying that very sort of limited range of knowledge is to be had I think wisdom literature encourages to have a whole range of knowledge but faith takes us somewhere in Hebrews 11 it took people literally from one place to another on very many occasions but faith always takes us somewhere spiritually it transforms us it makes us see things and think things differently as we read when Esther changed her changed her mind and she started in that crucial chapter she started just trying to ignore bury her head in the sand as we say and hope the problem would go away but when she acted in faith then her whole life was changed and acting in faith always changes lives and again let's probably know where I'm going with this and I put it up on the screen there anyway but let's finish with those words from Romans chapter 12 and this is an exhortation this is

[ 46 : 56 ] Paul writing of course Romans chapter 12 on page 1139 in the church bibles this is about the transforming nature of faith and illustrates is illustrated by the life of Esther Paul writes this therefore I urge you brothers in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God that is your spiritual act to worship do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is his good pleasing and perfect will for by the grace given me I say to every one of you do not think of yourselves more highly than you ought but rather think of yourselves with sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you just as each of us has one body with many members and these members do not all have the same function so in

Christ we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others we have different gifts according to the grace given us the man's gift is prophesying let him use it in proportion to his faith if it is serving let him serve if it is teaching let him teach if it is encouraging let him encourage if it is contributing to the needs of others let him give generously if it is leadership let him govern diligently if it is showing mercy let him do it cheerfully it's hard to have a better commentary on on the book of Esther Esther put her faith in the God of Israel and it transformed her life her gift as it were was being queen being put in the palace at that crucial time that won't be the gift of most of us but whatever the gift is whatever the talent that God has given us we need to be using it for his service as Esther did so let's share the faith of Esther and say not many of us are going to be queen but we can all act share in Esther's faith and her commitment to the to her people and to the work of the kingdom of God and we can all seek wisdom as

Mordecai did so I said that's been a gallop through the book of Esther but I think it's it's quite it's worth in many ways doing it in in that way because it is such a story of such pace and we can look over it and see what it is that the that the narrator wants us to see and one thing he certainly wants

us to see is that God's people have a sovereign protector so I thought we would conclude with hymn number 774 774