

Deliverance

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[0 : 00] Well, I love reading murder mysteries. When I'm reading a book, I always read the last page first, so I can feel superior all the way through knowing what the answer is.

But when you're watching a DVD or watching it on TV, of course, it isn't quite as easy as that. And one of my favourite detectives is May Gray, who solves one of his cases by pointing out at the beginning of a particular crook that his fingerprints are all over this crime.

Well, God's fingerprints are all over the Bible. And God's fingerprints are all over our world. And God's fingerprints are clearly all over the book of Esther.

There was obviously great hatred for God's people within the Persian Empire. It was about to break out at some time. We learn later in the book that there were 810 people in the citadel of Susa who were enemies of the Jews and 75,000 scattered through the rest of the empire.

But just see how the fingerprints of God are seen in the remarkable coincidence of the book. Esther just happened to be beautiful. It doesn't always happen.

[1 : 28] Esther just happened to be related to Mordecai. Esther just happened to please King Xerxes and be chosen as queen.

Mordecai just happened to overhear the plot to kill King Xerxes. And Mordecai's act just happened to be recorded in the chronicles of the kings.

And when Haman cast the lot for the destruction of the Jews, it just happened to be a full 11 months away. Plenty of time for the second plan to be hatched and implemented.

And King Xerxes just happened to welcome Esther when she approached him. And King Xerxes just happened not to be able to sleep one night and thought, well, a great soporific is the chronicles of my reign.

He didn't have any sermons available. So he had to listen to the chronicles of his reign. And they didn't put him to sleep this time. He suddenly realized, he's a bit of a thicky, he suddenly realized that Mordecai had saved his life and he'd never thanked him or honored him.

[2 : 49] And that was a rule of the monarchy that Persian kings had to honor those who saved their lives. And in the dreadful scene of this second banquet of Esther, Xerxes just happened to come into the room as Haman fell on Esther's couch.

Well, the king knows exactly what that means. As someone has written, a coincidence is a miracle in which God chooses to remain anonymous.

And it's so exciting to read through the book of Esther and see the extraordinary coincidence that occur. And we can see the fingerprints of God all over the book.

And we may occasionally reflect on our own past lives and see some coincidences which afterwards we can look back and say, well, yes, obviously that was the work of God.

But friends, we don't want to get so excited about coincidences that we think that God only works in coincidences and isn't at work all the time.

[4 : 01] For God is all the time ruling this world in his sovereign power, grace and compassion and justice. God is all the time sustaining the life of the universe.

God is all the time sustaining your life and my life. So coincidences are just one insight into God's rule.

One reminder, one sign of God's rule. But think, God also points to his rule by doing miracles, the mighty miracles that Jesus did or the mighty miracles of the Exodus.

But God also points to his mighty rule by explaining it in words, pointing out his rule by his teaching to us in the scriptures.

But most of all, of course, God points to his mighty rule in sending his son to live, to teach, to do miracles, to die and rise again.

[5 : 03] There is the most convincing sign of the power and wisdom of God. In fact, as we read in Psalm 19, the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows his handiwork.

All the time, the glory and power of God is being revealed. If only we will open our eyes to see it. The world is charged with the glory of God, not just in coincidences, but in everyday life and, in fact, every moment of every day.

If you are still alive now, it's because God has kept you alive. And if you're alive at the end of my talk, a greater miracle, that will be because God has kept you alive.

Alive. As Paul says in Colossians, all things hold together in Christ. And if Christ or God lost attention for a moment, the universe would disintegrate.

There would be nothing left. No, we can see signs of God's care in the everyday, not just the miracles, not just the coincidences.

[6 : 18] And what the coincidences in Esther do is to point us to the power of God, but not fully explain it or summarize it. The coincidences in the book of Esther and in our lives are just one insight into God's rule.

Well, let's pick up the story at the beginning of chapter seven. I'm so glad we had five and six read. That's terrific because that heightens the tension.

Well, we've got the king and Haman going into Esther's second banquet. And as they were drinking wine, as you might notice, they're often drinking wine.

On the second day, the king again asked Queen Esther, what is your petition? It'll be given you. What is your request? Even to half the kingdom, it will be granted.

He liked it to sound generous. And Esther's reply is extraordinary. Then Queen Esther answered, if I have found favor with you, your majesty, and if it please you grant me my life, this is my petition.

[7 : 23] And notice these words, spare my people. This is my request. This is the moment when presumably King Xerxes learns for the first time that Esther is a Jew.

Do you remember Mordecai had told her to keep quiet about it? And now as Mordecai has publicly proclaimed his Jewishness by going around with sackcloth when the evil edict comes out.

So now Esther claims, identifies with the people of God. For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, had, had, for I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed, and annihilated.

The exact words of the king's edict. The king might be thinking, oh, perhaps I made a mistake in allowing Haman to do what he wanted. Perhaps it hadn't struck him yet.

If we've been merely made to be made male and female slaves, I could have kept quiet, but not, no, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king. She is so polite, isn't she, and respectful.

[8 : 38] Well, then the king asks the obvious question, who is he? Where is he? The man who's dared to do such a thing. Where is he?

He's here at the banquet. Who is he? An adversary and an enemy. He, this vile Haman. Haman is, I think, snookered would be the right expression at this point.

Well, Haman is not a silly man and he's terrified before the king and the queen. So the king got up in a rage, left his wine, that's, he must have been really cross to leave his wine, I can tell you, left his wine, went into the garden full of fury.

Haman, realizing the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life. How extraordinary that Haman, who'd planned the killing of Esther, is now begging Esther for his life.

Truly, the tables are turned. What a miraculous change. The enemy of the Jews is now begging a Jew for life. Why, that's a great Bible theme, isn't it?

[9 : 56] Saul was an enemy of the God's people, wasn't he? On the road to Damascus. And then receives life from the Son of God. And it's so brilliantly described as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall.

Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. Well, the king is very upset about this, of course. Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?

It's his own pride he's worried about. Selfish to the end. As soon as the words left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face because they knew he was a dead man only just walking.

And then it's always helpful to have a handy eunuch around. One of the eunuchs attending the king said, oh, by the way, there's rather a nice pole being set up for in Haman's house.

He had to put up for Mordecai. What a helpful comment. Thank you so much who spoke up to help the king. He's really rubbing it in, isn't he? So the king said, impale him on it.

[11:14] Decisive man. So they impaled Haman on the pole he'd set up for Mordecai and the king's fury subsided. We might say that what God has done is to turn wicked plans upside down.

Or we might as truly say what God has done is to set his plan and his people the right way up. Do you remember the words of Mary before the birth of Jesus? He has performed mighty deeds with his mighty arm. He's scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He's cast down the rulers from their thrones and lifted up the holy. And if you think about it, you can see that pattern throughout the Bible, can't you?

Where great empires are cast down by the power of God. Think of all the great empires in the Old Testament cast down by the power of God. The Egyptian Empire, the Assyrian Empire, the Babylonian Empire, the Persian Empire, the Greek Empire, and as prophesied in Daniel, the Roman Empire.

[12:33] power. And when God wants to display his great power, he brings empires to nothing. And he had rather a busy time in the 20th century.

The Ottoman Empire finally collapsed, that sick old man of Europe. The German Empire collapsed twice, a record, I think, in one century.

The Japanese Empire collapsed, the British Empire faded, the Dutch, French, and Russian empires collapsed as well.

See, empires look so powerful, but God brings down the proud and raises up the humble.

Well, I've recently read a book on diplomacy, How to be a Diplomat, and I found this wonderful quotation, which I think applies to Esther magnificently.

[13:32] Effective diplomacy requires a quick mind, a strong stomach, a warm smile, and a cold eye. That was Esther, wasn't it?

What a brave woman she was. How quick witted she was. How wise she was. How effective she was.

Well, talking about God turning things upside down, or more accurately, the right way up. Now listen to these words from 1 Corinthians.

for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.

Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

[14:45] Jews demanded signs, Greeks looked for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews, foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

And how extraordinary to look at the death of the Lord Jesus, the cross of the Lord Jesus, to see Jesus hanging on the cross and say there is God's wisdom, there is God's power.

Doesn't look like wisdom, does it? Doesn't look like power, but it is. Christ crucified the wisdom and power of God.

For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. That's how God worked in the Lord Jesus.

But then Paul goes on to say that's exactly how he works in the church. Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many influential, not many of noble birth, but God chose, look around the room, here we are, the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.

[15:57] God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things, the things that are not to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

For it's because of him that you are in Christ Jesus who has become for us the wisdom of God, that is righteousness, holiness, and redemption. Therefore, as it's written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

God destroys all human boasting because everyone's everyone to boast in the Lord Jesus Christ. Not to be ashamed of the Lord Jesus, but to boast in him whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness, our holiness, and our redemption.

And I tried to show you last week that when we read the words of Mordecai to Esther, perhaps you've come to the kingdom for such a time as this, that actually such a time as this, as words which we can apply to ourselves, each one of us who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. That you are in God's plan whether you realize it or not. That God's keeping you alive for a purpose. That he has a good plan for your life for each day.

[17:23] He's preparing good works for you to do. You are of strategic value in God's kingdom, whoever you are. So please recognize that good providence under the sovereign power of God and take the opportunities that God puts before you.

Pray the prayers that God gives you. Speak the words that God gives you. Do the serving that God gives you and see it as part of your dignity as a son, a daughter of God, a servant of God, a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Don't despise yourselves. don't despise the opportunities God is giving you. Don't spend your time envying other people's opportunities or wishing you were 50 years younger when you could do more than you can do now.

Don't waste time. Seize this day, this night, to know that you can live for God's glory in such a time as this.

I beg you, see, you are part of God's strategy, part of God's kingdom, even tonight. Well, I thought today of two great New Testament statements about all things.

[18:41] From Romans, all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose. all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose.

And from 1 Corinthians 15 and other places as well, God put all things under his feet, that is, under the feet of Jesus. So, nothing works for ill because all things work for good.

And nothing is outside God's control and God's plan. Because all things are under the feet of the Lord Jesus. He rules over them.

Well, that's all very well. But as a matter of fact, back in Esther, the edict is still in place. And if somebody doesn't do something pretty soon, lots of Jews are going to be killed.

So, that same day, King Xerxes, this is Esther 8.1, gave Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. Mordecai came to the presence of the king.

[19:56] Esther had told him how it was related to her. The king took his signet ring, which he had reclaimed from Haman, presumably, before he was put very high up in the sky, and presented it to Mordecai, and Esther appointed him, that is, Mordecai, over Haman's estate.

But there's still work to be done. Here's Esther on duty. Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet, weeping, she begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman the Agagite, which he devised against the Jews.

And again, the king extended the gold scepter to Esther, and she arose and stood before him. If it pleases the king, she said, and if he regards me with favour and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be written, overruling, overturning, the dispatches that Haman, son of Hamadatha, the Agagite, devised, and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces. For how can I bear to see disasters fall on my people, here she is again, saying I'm a Jew? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?

How wonderful that she identifies so powerfully, so clearly, so publicly with God's people. May we do the same. King Xerxes replied to Queen Esther and Mordecai, because Haman attacked the Jews, I have given his estate to Esther, and they have impaled him on the pole he was set up.

[21:27] Now write another decree in the king's name, in behalf of the Jews, as seems best to you, and seal it with the king's signet ring, for no document written in the king's name and sealed with his signet ring can be revoked.

And at once the royal secretaries are summoned yet again, they're having a busy time, aren't they? Three months since the last edict, I've had time to add a cup of tea, but on the 23rd of the third month, two months rather, later, the month of Sivan, they wear it out, all Mordecai's orders to the Jews, all the satraps, governors and nobles of the 127 provinces, stretching from India to Cush. These orders were written in the script of each province, the language of each people, and also particularly to the Jews in their script and language. And Mordecai wrote in the name of King Xerxes, sealed the dispatches with the king's signet ring, king, and sent them by mounted couriers who rode fast on horses specially bred for the king.

You see, Haman's wicked edict meant that every Jew was in danger. And Haman's edict meant that every non-Jew was a threat to every Jew throughout the empire.

Because they had not only permission to kill and plunder any Jew they wanted, but the king's orders to do it. It was a wicked edict.

[22 : 58] Now, notice what the second edict gives permission for the Jews to do. It is permission to do the only thing which will solve the problem.

If everyone is the Jews enemies, and that edict has gone out, then it's essential that the Jews be able to defend themselves.

That is the only possible remedy. And please see that the edict gives permission for the Jews to assemble, that is to get organized.

Here we are in 811. To protect themselves, and to destroy, kill, and annihilate, the same words, the armed men of any nationality or province who might attack them and their women and children.

That is, they're allowed to defend themselves. It's not that they'll go around randomly killing people. No, the only people who will be killed are those who come to try and kill them.

[24 : 02] And most significantly, I think, we read in chapter 9 and verses 10, 15 and 16, that when the Jews were attacked, and when they did kill those who were attacking them, they didn't take any plunder.

So they weren't trying to benefit themselves, they were just trying to stay alive, just protecting their own lives. This is not revenge, this is permitted self-defense by the order of the king.

Well, as we read in Proverbs, many are the plans of a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails. Or again, from Proverbs, in the Lord's hand, the king's heart is like a stream of water that he channels towards those who fear him.

Well, what a complex turning of the tables has been achieved, a complex overturning, the plan to destroy the Jews is frustrated, Haman who made up the plan is now dead, Mordecai has replaced Haman, and Esther and Mordecai have greater honor, and God's people are protected.

Well, it is, apart from those foolish enough to attack the Jews, and apart from Haman and his family, a happy ending, so beloved of people who read books and watch films, who doesn't like a happy ending.

[25 : 48] What the happy ending in Esther tells us is that God can do it. God can protect his people. God can defend his long-term salvation plan, for from these Jews, from these people, will come the Lord Jesus Christ, the descendant of Abraham, the son of David.

Yes, God's not just protecting his people in Esther's day, he's protecting his long-term plan, of which we are beneficiaries today. God can do it, God did it, but dear friends, we need to remember that doesn't mean that God will always do it.

God will not always protect his people. as Paul says in Romans 8, we're being given over to death all day long, whereas like sheep to the slaughter, yet nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Yes, being a believer doesn't bring you immunity from suffering or persecution. In fact, being a believer in Jesus might increase the possibility of suffering and persecution.

The current theory, I think, is that one Christian dies every five minutes somewhere in the world. One Christian is put to death for their faith in Jesus Christ.

[27 : 13] So we don't want to take the message of Esther and say, well, this is a wonderful world and nothing ever goes wrong because God puts it all right. Because God has not yet put everything right.

Because Jesus has not yet returned. But what the book of Esther does hint at and promise is that God will do it finally in the Lord Jesus Christ at his return.

No wonder Christians pray, come Lord Jesus, and no wonder we cry out to God, how long, O Lord?

But here is the great prophecy of the book of Revelation. the seventh angel sounded his trumpet and there were loud voices in heaven which said, the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah and he will reign forever and ever.

And the 24 elders who were seated on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God saying, we give thanks to you, Lord God almighty, the one who was, is, and was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.

[28 : 36] Or again in Revelation chapter 19, I saw heaven standing open and there was one before me on a white horse whose rider was called faithful and true.

With justice he judges and wages war. This is a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming. His eyes are like blazing fire and on his head are many crowns.

He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He's dressed in a robe dipped in blood and his name is the word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.

Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter. He threads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God almighty and on his robe and on his thigh has this name written, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Well, King of Kings was one of Xerxes titles. It was a title of Persian kings. They called themselves King of Kings. But whatever Xerxes reign was like, there's only one King of Kings and one Lord of Lords, that is, King over all kings and Lord over all Lords.

[29 : 58] Only one Lord and one God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, may we pray, come Lord Jesus. What about life now, waiting for the mighty return of the Saviour and Judge of all?

people? What are the signs of God's fingerprints? Now, we've seen what they're like in Esther.

What are the signs of God's fingerprints? Now, what I want to do as I finish is alert you to the signs of God's work in our world today.

The food you have eaten today is a sign of God's care for you. I know Millie the cow gave the milk you drank this morning and Bertie the farmer reaped the corn that you had in your cornflakes.

But they all come from God. The food we eat is a gift of God. The air we breathe is a gift of God, a gracious gift of God.

For he's the giver of every good and perfect gift. And if there was no air in this room, we would be in serious trouble. But think perhaps of all the people who have influenced your life for good, all the way back to your parents and grandparents and friends and then people you've known and then people who've taught you, people who've directed you, people whose lives have inspired you, people who've written music you like, or people who've written a book that you like, or someone who's spoken a kind word to you.

[31 : 40] Think of all the people whose lives have enriched you. We are very rich people, you see. Every time I get in a tram and somebody stands up, I think, boy, I'm so thankful this is still happening. Occasionally I go on a tram just for the thrill of having somebody stand up and give me a seat.

But I think, what a wonderful sign of the common grace of God still at work in our world. It's lovely. And if you see me in a tram, please stand up. But of course, I'll be standing up for you, so they'll both be standing.

But think also of the daily work done by millions of people around the world to keep our world functioning. Electricity being produced, food being produced, sewage being removed.

What a great gift that is. We're all beneficiaries of that work, of people doing their daily work given them by God. Or think of the beauty of the world, and not only the beauty of the world, but eyes to see the beauty, and ears to hear it, and minds to remember it, even years after we've seen that beauty.

Or think of God's fingerprints in the frustrations of our lives, of which there are many, all designed to turn us to God, to find our chief joy in God, and not in our life or things or in people or possessions or whatever it is.

[33 : 10] They're all lessons, you see, to turn us to God. God's gracious gift to take our affection away from the creature and place our affection in the creator, who is the maker of everything that is good.

Or think of God's kindness, the fingerprint of God, the work of God, when he tells you what your sin is, and then invites you to repent, and then assures you of absolute and complete forgiveness.

What a gracious work of God that is. Or think of being able to read the Bible and have the Bible translated into our language. What an extraordinary gift of God that is.

See, many religions have scriptures which can't be translated, but God allows his Bible to be translated into any language, and it works in all languages. What an extraordinary gift that is.

What a sign of God's kindness and presence in our world. Think of people who prayed for you. Think of the trials of life which has trained you.

[34 : 24] Think of the times you've seen God bringing down the proud and exalting the humble and meek. Not all the time, but enough to keep us encouraged. Think of the joy of Christian fellowship, of meeting brothers and sisters in Christ, and seeing them living for Christ, inspiring us every day by

their examples.

Miracles of God's grace. Here's another work of God which we should receive with great thanksgiving. And think of all those times when we've thought that our life was a bit out of control, or we haven't known what to do, but then looking back years later, we can see that actually God was guiding.

We may not have felt guided at the time, but God was guiding and directing our life and protecting us and caring for us all the way through. That's another sign of God's fingers hard at work in this world and in our lives.

And of course, the hope of Christ's return, the sign of God's love, the power of God's love in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And the hope of Christ's return. Well, last week I quoted two sayings of Spurgeon, and I'd like to finish with those.

[35 : 44] Great Baptist preacher of the 19th century. If everything works together for our good, then nothing is left to work for evil.

people. And again, Spurgeon, everything, the most minute, as well as the most magnificent, is ordered by the Lord, whose kingdom rules over all.

Amen. Praise God, and come, Lord Jesus. myös Jesus.

All right, and DANI sle Pan ■■■■ down, and then to the moans out on to the cai payer, then it meets Pas as■■■■■■■■, Mormons and with Esp ■ things personnes.

To the patients, the three rewrite,