

The Self-Defeating Pride of Man

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[0 : 0 0] that we're going to have in our sermon this evening. The personification of evil, as we see in the person of Haman, how he characterizes so much of man's opposition to God and his people.

And then the pride, again, from Haman, the pride that characterizes evil, the particular aspect of the evil that we see in his character. And then thirdly, the plots of man that reveal evil, looking at the plot that was carried out.

And of course, as we look at these three points, we are not simply focusing on the evil of this man, Haman. But of course, in contrast, we'll look at Haman's enemy, Mordecai, who personifies very much the opposite in his righteous adhering to God's law.

So we take up the story again from the beginning of chapter three. And when we come to this particular section of the book of Esther, everything seemed to be going so well for the Jewish exiles and the Jewish people scattered across the Persian Empire.

The Persian Empire, remember, controlled so much of that Middle Eastern area all the way to India, to the east and to northeast Africa, to the west, including the lands of Israel and Judah.

[1 : 3 4] But it seemed that everything was going really well for the Jewish exiles and indeed the Jewish people in that empire. It's true that many of the exiles had returned home, as they'd been given permission to do, returned back to the land of Judah, the land and its capital, Jerusalem.

These exiles had gone back to rebuild their lives, to rebuild their homes, and even rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. And of course, many other Jewish exiles prefer to remain in that area of Persia, as we would say nowadays in modern-day Iran.

And these exiles included Esther and her cousin Mordecai. But at that time, the Jewish people were living without persecution.

They were living without harassment. Life seemed to be so good for them. And as we saw last week, Esther now, the Jewish girl Esther, she's now become queen in the empire.

Her cousin Mordecai has uncovered a plot against the king's life. His name, because he uncovered this plot, and it was told to the king through Esther, his name recorded in the history books of the empire.

[2 : 5 5] So it seemed that things are going so well for the Jewish people. A golden age seemed to be dawning for them. Behind that apparent glow of prosperity was a dark cloud, a dark cloud of evil, a dark cloud of hatred and cruelty that had been planned from one individual, one man who had no love for God, one man who had no love for God's people, but a man who had only love for himself, and a man who would seek to destroy God's people simply to preserve his own self-designated dignity.

There was, in fact, no dignity at all. This man, Haman, this man who would become, I suppose, the equivalent of prime minister there in the empire, the Persian empire, this man Haman comes on the scene, and his pride, his conceit, his presence threatens to annihilate, to destroy the Jewish people.

All seems lost when before all seemed so promising. As we've mentioned time and time again, and doing so as we broaden out the principles that we find in this story, as we've seen so often, we're to be reminded that God is sovereign, that God is in control, that even the forces of evil are permitted to have sway for a period of time only, and that period of time within God-directed limits, because God's not going to be mocked.

God's not going to be defeated by evil, even though evil, even though the root of evil, even Satan himself, seeks to disrupt and destroy the church of God, blood-bought church proclaimed, that proclaims the Lord Jesus.

Satan is out to menace the church, to hurt the church, to destroy the church. But remember that the victor isn't Satan. The victor is the Lord.

[5 : 14] The victory is the Lord's, is the one who died on the cross for sinners, who defeated the power of Satan, defeated the power of sin, and three days later, in resurrection, defeated the power of death.

The victor is the Lord's, victory is his. And of course, as we see that situation, even to the present day, where as we look around, and we see that Satan may appear triumphant, Satan may well be on the march, and in so many areas of our life, in government, in education, through the media, in industry, in business, in families, even in the church, that God has set Satan bounds, bounds beyond which the evil one cannot go beyond.

And as we see here in chapter three, even in these events that we're seeing in the Persian Empire, events with Haman now in that position of power, events that appear terrifying and bewildering even, for God's, God's people terrifying to them.

this unrighteous man, Haman, appears so dominant, so powerful. But as we see, one man remains righteous.

One man, Mordecai, will honour God, and fear God, and stand up against Haman. And through Mordecai's influence, Queen Esther, Queen Esther will ensure that the Lord's people are saved.

[6 : 55] We come to that, of course, later in the story. And through, obviously, through God's divine intervention, that God working through individuals, as Mordecai and Esther, that God's saving his people.

And so, we want to try and understand this chapter, and try and understand the application that we find in this chapter, to be reminded that, yes, when we do see evil raise its head, and it appears that the power of evil seems so dominant, remember that God is Lord, and he's not going to permit his enemy, and the enemies of his people to triumph.

I've been reminded of that truth, seen ultimately on the cross, when evil men put the Lord Jesus to death, when evil men sought to triumph over the Lord Jesus, when to the forces of evil, it would seem that Jesus had been silenced once and for all, but of course on the cross.

Jesus revealed his glory, revealed his power, in defeating sin and Satan, and Jesus showed on the cross, that he is the victor.

And, we have to remember too, that, you know, when we look around, and we see, even the forces of evil, that seem to have all these little victories, again, to be reminded, it's not the ultimate victory, the ultimate victory is the Lord's.

[8 : 27] because he is, is, is our Lord, and Savior, the triumphant one. So, back to, to our headings then, as we, we saw on the screen earlier, we're going to look at these three headings, as, as we notice.

The first one then, the personification of evil. And, as we, we notice right at the start, when the, when the author, gives us this narrative, the mood seems so promising.

Seems promising for Esther. It seems so promising, for Esther's people, the Jewish people. Mordecai, as we said, has informed Esther, of this plot against the king, and as a result, the king's life is spared.

Mordecai's name is written in the records of the empire. He's written down as a hero, someone who indirectly has saved the king's life. And, we can actually work out from historical sources, written at the time, that that happened, well, it happened five years, before the king appointed Haman.

So, for five years, it would seem, that the Jewish people are having this, this, this, this time of peace, this time of safety.

[9 : 47] Esther as queen, Mordecai, the same, the king's life. It's been five years of, of relative peace, relative security, for, for God's people.

But then, disaster looms, or apparent disaster looms, in the shape of the man mentioned in verse one, Haman, the agagite. Haman, the agagite.

And the word agagite, of course, nowadays means nothing. But when we, again, look at the context of that name, we see how important it is to, to realize, why the author mentioned, not just the name Haman, but the name, that is described as the agagite, because, that refers back, to King Agag, King Agag, 500 years before Esther, King Agag, was the king of the Amalekites, and was king at the time, when King Saul was, it was king over Israel.

And King Agag, hated God's people, he hated, the Lord. Agag very much, was a personification, of, of that hatred, of that hatred, against the, against God, against the one true God.

And so, for anyone to be, referred to as an agagite, it was a designation, of someone who, opposed God, and his people, someone who, so opposed, God the Lord, and, his word of truth.

[11 : 16] And so, for Haman here, to be, referred to as, Haman the agagite, immediately tells us, who this person was. Here's somebody, who, who characterizes evil.

Somebody who, is so opposed, to, to the one true God, and so opposed, to God's people. And so, we have here, Haman, Haman, the God hater.

Haman, someone who, who, so hated, everything to do, with God, and his people. And, as we say, Haman, in that sense, personifies, everyone, who's so opposed, to God, and his people.

It's the, the mindset, that we see today, and, and so much, anti-Christian attitude, that, that's so alive, and well, in our land. And so, what we're going to read here, of Haman, we can broaden out, and see, and understand, really, what characterizes, even all who today, seek to, to disrupt, and hurt, and destroy, the, the church of God.

As we read of Haman, we can get this, this broader picture, of, of all who, who are intent, to, to, emphasize evil, in our land, and removing, from our land, everything connected, with the church, everything connected, with God's word, everything connected, with the Lord Jesus.

[12 : 48] And so, what we're reading here, even in these very opening words, of chapter three, gives us, this, this, announcement, if you like, that, seeds, already, are being sown, to try, and destroy, God's people, and to try, and remove, everything, in relation, to the one true God, even from that empire, and from the world itself.

And, that's what we're going to see, in, in this personification, of evil, and, in relation, to this man, Haman. So, as we see right, at the start of chapter three, the scene set, for, for Haman, to display, his, his antagonism, to show his deep hatred, for, for all things righteous.

And we see that, particularly, in the way, that he, expresses, his pride, our second heading, the pride, that, that characterizes evil.

As we saw, at the start of chapter three, Haman, as it were, appears from nowhere. The king, Ahasuerus, we remember his, his proper name, is King Xerxes, Ahasuerus, just the title, like the title of Pharaoh.

This, the king, the king of the Persian Empire, he promotes this man, Haman, to, to position of great power. And Haman now has great authority in the land. Of course, the honor should have been given to Mordecai for his, alerting, the king to that plot against, against the king's life.

[14 : 26] But Haman doesn't seek any honor. Haman, in his, in his humble walk with the Lord, isn't seeking any, any position of power. But Haman's difficult.

Haman is given honors, can give some of these particular honors. And there's nothing to indicate in the passage that he deserved anything, anything of any honor from the king.

And Haman certainly accepts all the, the fawning praise and respect that's given to him and, and everyone bowing down to him. Mordecai is not going to bow down before this man.

Mordecai's not going to show honor to a mere man. Why? Because Mordecai honored God. Mordecai honored God in his heart.

And it's to God alone who Mordecai will bow. And even though that would mean, and Mordecai would certainly know this, that that refusal to bow to Haman would certainly mean punishment and even, even death.

[15 : 34] Mordecai will not bow down to this evil man, Haman. And we'll come back to that. The, particularly as we broaden out again, the principle that we, we find there, but let's just focus on, on Haman just for the moment.

As we, we focus on that pride because Haman's pride is offended by one man, by Mordecai. And as we read in the passage, his pride is so offended that, that when he discovers that the man who won't bow down to him is a Jew, Haman's pride is so, so hurt that he's, he's determined he's going to avenge his wrath, not just against that one man, not just against that one man who's Jewish, but against the entire Jewish people in the whole of the empire.

The pride of the Agagite. Pride, it comes to the fore, it comes to the surface. And that pride, as we've seen, a pride accompanied, certainly by the threat of violence, with the prospect of violence to come as a result of his pride.

A pride, as we notice, that pride is rooted in Satan, rooted in, in Lucifer, the angel whose, whose pride sought to elevate him above his position, so that he'd be like God.

You read of that in Isaiah chapter 14. Of course, Satan's pride, Lucifer's pride, led to his fall. That pride that we see personified in Haman, Haman who's, displaying all the characteristics of, of those who won't live by grace, who won't live by, by the power of the Holy Spirit, who live according to the sinful nature.

[17 : 19] Of course, pride comes in, in many forms. But at the root of pride, is that desire to be like God, or to be asked on, that desire to usurp God's authority, or the authority of self.

It's that Satan-like desire, to exalt self, and deny God. And we see it all around, wherever, wherever there's pride in self, wherever there's pride in an identity, or pride in any achievement, it's that pride that seeks to demote God, and deny the God of truth.

It's that pride that denies the God of creation. It's that pride that denies God's creative order. It's that pride that denies that God is Lord, and that pride that results in graceless living.

And let's pray that each one of us seeks to avoid, even a hint of pride in our lives, in whatever circumstance we find ourselves in. Because as we all know, we all know the pain that pride brings.

Pride accompanies, whether it's violence of action, or violence in speech. Pride will be accompanied by all that's contrary to God's word, and God's law.

[18 : 37] And let's seek to have that power of God, that strength of God, to desist from any semblance of pride, even in our own lives.

We have nothing to be proud of, nothing in self to be proud of. It's all of God. Your salvation is all of God. Salvation is through Christ, not through self.

And again, think of Jesus. Think of Jesus when Jesus was reviled. Think of Jesus when insults were thrown at him. He didn't retaliate. And if you profess the name of the Lord Jesus, you profess to imitate the Lord Jesus, even in your character, in your ways, even in your relationship to others, don't return insult with insult.

trust in God, in his righteous judgment and justice. But what of Mordecai? What of Mordecai's refusal to obey the king's command, to bow down to Haman?

Well, of course, in Mordecai, that refusal to bow down, it reveals absolutely nothing of pride. What we're seeing here is, is this humble, selfless grace, grace that obeys God, rather than man.

[19 : 59] It was Mordecai knew, that to obey the command of the king, to bow down to Haman, if he obeyed that, that command, he'd be dishonoring God, because it's to God alone, whom we bow.

It's to God alone, whom we give reverence for. And we'll not bow down to any man-made systems, or man-made creations, or man-made philosophies.

No, we bow, and bow alone, to the living and true God. And Mordecai displayed that fear of God, the fear of God, that the apostle Peter, would echo many centuries later, when Peter said, that we must obey God, rather than men.

It's that fear of God, even to this day, it's seen when the Lord's people, won't bow down to sinful laws, that are contrary to the law of God. Because we're to obey God, rather than man.

And yes, to be prepared, even in this current situation, these current times that we're living in, that we continue to reverence God, and to obey him, and not bow down to anything, that's contrary to God and his word.

[21 : 18] And of course, for many, that will bring about the ultimate cause. You've been seeing in Andy's talk, and Eric Little today, Eric Little, who refused to bow down to the law of man, to the ways of man, who remained true to the principles of God's word, relating to God's day.

And we remember those, even in our own day and age, who refused to bow down to governments, to laws, to practices that are so contrary to God's word.

Even those who are suffering, even in prison, are brothers and sisters in Christ, who, like Mordecai, won't bow down to evil. Even when evil appears in the ascendant, we don't, we don't bow down, we don't offer any kind of reverence to that which is contrary to God and his word.

But let's look further in this chapter as we see thirdly and finally the plots of man, the plots of man that reveal evil. Because looking at the picture that we find, without the hindsight that we have in the remainder of the chapter, there seemed no way out for Mordecai and the Jewish people to escape Haman's plot, to destroy every Jewish person in the empire.

As we see in the plot that Haman hatches, Haman so convinces the king that there's a people in the land who are not abiding by his law.

[22 : 59] Haman, at this point, doesn't mention that they're Jewish people. He simply tells the king that there's a people who don't abide by his command, his law. And the king, the king, is actually quite a weak individual.

He listens to Haman. He listens to even Haman's willingness to give him 10,000 talents of silver to put in the king's coffers to help with the destruction of the Jewish people.

The king's coffers are fairly empty after the war with Greece. And so the king listens to Haman. And it seems as if there's nothing that can prevent the destruction of the Jewish people.

For the king, of course, to hear of a people who don't honor his law, that would tell the king that there's a people who are disruptive in his kingdom, threatening the unity of his kingdom.

So the king agrees to Haman's request. And a decree goes out throughout the land, throughout the empire, that every Jew in the empire is to be destroyed.

[24 : 04] So it seems there's nothing that's going to stop Haman's despicable plan. The king's signet ring is applied to the law. It's a law that can't be reversed.

The date's already set for the massacre. The date that was, the day in which the massacre is announced. We're given the day, the particular day.

It's the 13th day of the 12th month of Adar. The lots were cast to indicate that particular day. And again, the lots cast to indicate when the massacre is to take place.

Another 11 months time. So the king's armies to be prepared, to be ready to go out into the empire and destroy every Jewish person.

So there are 11 months between that time of the announcement of the destruction and the supposed destruction of the people of God, the Jewish people.

[25 : 05] And no wonder Haman was so satisfied with himself. I mean, the last verse of chapter 3 really sums up his arrogance, sums up his pride.

We're told that the king and Haman sat down to drink and the city of Susa, the city where all this is happening, was confused. Even the very people of that city, the non-Jews and the people are confused.

They're bewildered at this law of the king. But the schemes of man, schemes of man against God and his people, these schemes won't triumph, won't triumph ultimately.

And it's absolutely fascinating when you delve deep into this particular detail of the events that we read in chapter 3. Because the very day in which this decree was given for the destruction of God's people, the very day when that was given was in fact coinciding with the Passover, the day of Passover.

Passover. And when you can just merge this into the story, when we realize that the Jewish people who are so expecting to even remember in their hearts the Passover, the time when God rescued his people, and for this decree to come out at that time, yes, it would have bewildered the people there.

[26 : 32] But the very fact that this decree is given at the time of Passover surely indicates that the same God who rescued his people from the destruction of Egypt is the same God who will rescue his people from the apparent destruction of his people there in the Persian Empire.

Because God will not be mortified. And you can just see and picture the people or the Jewish people there in Susa wondering, asking, why is this happening to us?

Is God going to hear our cries when we're crying out to him as we face this destruction that seems so inevitable? As we said, the same God who delivered his people on that first Passover will deliver his people from the evil desires of Haman, from evil oppression.

The sending out of that decree, again, we can just picture in our mind's eye the devastation that that caused in the empire. The very fact that the decree is given at the time of Passover telling us that despite the closeness of evil, despite what seemed an impossible situation from which the people of God had no rescue, despite what seemed apparent, deliverance would come for God's people.

Deliverance coming from the God of Passover. God had delivered his people in Egypt from a situation that seemed impossible to be rescued from.

[28 : 14] And the same God will deliver his people from what seemed an impossible situation for the people there in the empire, the Persian empire. the same God who's promised to be with his people in the past, who promised in the past to be with his people, the same God who promises to be with his people now and eternally.

And when we realize that it's the same God who will rescue his people from the evil intentions of Haman, we realize and know that this is the same God for whom nothing is impossible.

And when we know that, then you know that you have that sure hope, that sure hope in him who's sovereign, God who's sovereign, and he's not going to allow the forces of evil to triumph.

Haman had these plans that seemed to be so sure of happening, so inevitable, wiping out the Jewish race, that God's plans for his people were superiors.

These plans would prevail, not Haman's. Out of one family there in the Persian empire at that time was the family through which the Lord Jesus would come in his human nature.

[29 : 32] And God would ensure, of course, that that family, the family line would be preserved, the coming in his human nature of the Lord Jesus. So as we come to the close of the service, pray that God would preserve his people, even now from the hands of evil and cruel men who are intent upon evil upon our own land and across the world.

Because we're seeing pride raising its ugly head in ways that we wouldn't even dreamed of even a decade ago. as we said at the start, pride comes before a fall.

Yes, through these difficult times, may God strengthen you. May God strengthen you to trust in him the more that God will preserve his work and preserve his church and preserve his people from the scheming hands of Haman-like men and women, and women who care nothing for the truth of God and nothing for the truth of God's word.

So continue then to be faithful. Continue to be faithful as Mordecai was faithful in that difficult time. And know that God is with you and his people who trust him at such a time as this.

Amen, may God add his blessing to the preaching of his word. Let's close our eyes in prayer. Let us pray. Lord, preserve the work of your hands, we pray.

[30 : 59] Preserve your church even through these times. Lord, strengthen your people, that your people will know and be assured that you're sovereign.

We can say, what can man do? Lord, may we truly know that that truth, that it is more better to, more important to obey God rather than man.

May we apply that in our lives and seek to follow you in all things. Here is, Lord, as we continue in worship before you now. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, we close now in Psalm, Psalm 65, in verse 6 to verse 13, the Sing Psalms version of the Psalm.

strength and power, you form the hills, you hush the ocean's voice, you calm the tumult of the waves and still the people's noise as we sing to God's praise, Psalm 65, 6 to 13.

[32 : 03] By strength and power, you form the hills, you hush the ocean's voice, you count the truth of other ways, and still the people's voice, those who in mammoth distant lands, with all regard your ways, where morning dawns and evening days, you call for songs of praise, you tend the land and water it, you make it rich and good, as you are dead, your sins are full, to give the people food, you drench the farrows of the land, you never loathe the ground, you softened in, with showers of way, and make its crops abound, you ground the year with fruitfulness, your harvest overflow, the grass and flowers share the air, the hills with madness glow, the pastures green with rocks and gold, the meadows covering, the hills are pressed with drops of corn, they shout for joy and sing.

We close in prayer. Lord be with us, we pray each one. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all both now and forevermore.

Amen.