

Sin and Judgement

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[0 : 00] from his holy word as you see there on the screen on the slide, the sermon this evening, the focus on sin and judgment in the chapter we read, the two points for this evening, the courage of faith as we see in Esther and the condemning of sin as we see in the case of Haman. Sin and judgment, providentially we were considering the whole matter of judgment, the judgment of God against sin, the judgment of God through the Lord Jesus when the Lord Jesus returns. We were thinking of that this morning when we were looking at Jesus' foretelling of his return to earth, the second coming and the separation of the sheep and the goats. And this evening in many ways we're going to continue that theme, the very theme of judgment. And you know there are lots of things that I suppose that so many really want to avoid thinking of and one thing is judgment, the other of course is sin. Many don't want to hear these two words sin and judgment. Sin, even the mentioning of sin makes for in many ways uncomfortable reading, uncomfortable hearing.

Because sin condemns sin, it condemns everyone unless that person comes to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus. And to be called a sinner offends, offends the sensitive individual who considers himself fine without any real faults or real sins, and certainly who considers himself not as, well, not as bad as others who are far worse. But then there's judgment, judgment in relation to God's judgment.

judgment again that's considered just so negative, so condemning. If judgment's accepted, well, only for the really bad people and certainly not for the likes of ourselves who, well, who get by and for whom we live. And as long as it doesn't hurt anyone, we're fine. That's the way of, that's the mindset of the thinking that's contrary to the word of God. That God's word speaks of sin and judgment.

Yes, God's word speaks of grace. It speaks of the love of God. It speaks of the forgiveness of God. God's word speaks of hope, the hope that we have as sinners saved by grace. Sinners who come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus. At the same time, if God's word speaks of the wonders of God's saving grace, of the wonder of God as the God of love. At the same time, the Bible speaks of the consequences of not knowing and not having that saving grace. The Bible speaks of the consequences of lives lived devoid of the love of God. The Bible speaks of those who will not bow the knee to the one true God. And so the Bible then, not man-centered thinking. It's the Bible, God's word, that directs us in relation to this deep subject of sin and judgment. It's God's word, God's law, God's truth that we listen to and abide. And it's that truth that speaks of life for all who by faith, who follow the Lord Jesus, who followed by faith, who follow the Lord Jesus, who follow the Lord Jesus, who follow the Lord Jesus.

And here in Esther chapter 7, then here in this chapter that we just read, we see this scenario, as it were played out, the scenario of life and death in relation to sin. And of course we see judgment seen in the judgment of Haman, the one who hated God's people and hating God's people, hated God. In this chapter that we read, we see life expressed in the one who is faithful and true to the one true God. We see life given to Esther, Esther saved through faith in the one true God.

[5 : 04] But correspondingly, we see death. We see death given to the person, the one who was the enemy, that enemy of God. And so we have in this chapter then a message for us all. There's certainly no neutral ground. We see here this message for each one of us, that no one, not one of us is exempt from this all critical subject regarding the eternal destiny of our souls, that eternal destiny in relation to how you are before the one true God. So we focus on this chapter, we take heed in the teaching that we find in this chapter. We're going to seek to draw out the principles that this chapter brings out in the relation to where you stand before God, whether you stand before him as one who knows life, life in him, through saving grace, through faith in him, through that grace that saves, or whether indeed you're still outside of that grace. And yes, as we will be uncomfortable hearing for many, even for maybe some of you here this evening, because we are going to focus on this whole subject of sin and judgment, and the consequences of God's judgment against sin. But remember, God's word opens our hearts.

God's word does offend, and it offends us when we are lost in our sin. So listen to the word that we've read, listen to the application of that word. It may well be a painful listening, a painful hearing, but may it be for the good of each one of us, as we come to see the teaching that we find in this word, God's word. You know, when many of you have been through a surgery, a particular surgical treatment, you know, at the time it can be very painful, but that pain is there to enable you to recover and heal. And may it be that even as we're going through this again, this whole subject of sin and judgment. If there's pain, may it be for a good reason, that you're released and brought to that saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus, that you come to have that peace in your heart with him who knows all, who sees you, who knows you, and who loves you. So let's look more closely then at the passage that we've read. And before we actually come to the main points that we saw on the screen a moment ago, let's again just get the focus, the context of where we had reached where we started in chapter seven. So as we know, as we've been going through these chapters, we know that Queen Esther,

Esther is the wife of the king of Persia, the greatest king at that time. Esther is Jewish. And as we've learned, she and her people, her Jewish people, have been sentenced to death by this wicked nobleman, Haman, whom the king appointed to be second in command of his empire.

Mordecai, who's Esther's cousin, Mordecai on a number of occasions, many occasions, had refused to bow before Haman. It had been the king's command that everyone bows before this man, but Mordecai knows that he bows to only one, and that's to the one true God. So Haman is offended. Haman is going to punish Mordecai and his people by sentencing them throughout the empire to death. And that's going to happen, as he reckons, in 11 months' time. The king has passed the sentence. The king has, we might even say, weakly acceded to Haman's request that the people, these Jewish people, be put to death.

Esther has heard of this wicked plan, and she's heard from Mordecai. Mordecai has told her to go to the king and to seek the king's mercy for her people. At first, Esther has been reluctant or very hesitant to do that because she knows that without having been given permission to come into the king's presence, she could be put to death unless the king extends his sector to her. But by resolve of faith, strong faith, trust in the one true God, she does go into the king's presence and requests that the king holds a feast for herself and for Haman. This shrewdness of Esther's planning under, through the wisdom of God, that plan to bring Haman before the king as the enemy of Esther and the enemy of the Jews.

[10 : 22] But in the meantime, we've seen that Haman has his own plans. Haman has built a gallows 75 feet high in order to hang Mordecai on. And, well, it seems as if this is going to happen in his thinking.

But again, as we saw last week, under the providence of God, that King Haman, one evening, and a very crucial evening, the evening of before the morning, or the day when Haman's going to carry out his plan, the king has a dream. Our king rather can't sleep. And he asks one of his officials to open the chronicles of the empire. And in that reading, he discovers that Mordecai, who'd saved his life five years before, Mordecai hadn't been rewarded for that saving. And so the king sets his own plan in place to reward Mordecai and brings Haman in to tell him how a reward should take place. Somebody who's honoured the king. Haman thinking it's himself and tells the king that this person should be honoured with wearing the king's robes, riding the king's horse and paraded through the city and honoured by all.

And in fact, as the king tells Haman, the one to be rewarded is Mordecai. Haman returns to his house after he's led Mordecai through the streets. Haman returns to his house, dejected, desolate.

And when he's told that with Mordecai being a Jew, that this in fact bodes ill for Haman. And as we saw, nothing happens by chance. Everything, everything under the providence of God, even the very timing of that event, even the very timings in your lives, all under the providence of God for your good and for his glory. And it's in that providence, the setting out of God's sovereign purposes that we're going to see in this chapter. The wonder of the truth of human responsibility, working hand in hand with God's sovereignty. The human responsibility of Esther. Esther in her action in revealing Haman as the enemy of her people, and all this under the sovereignty of God.

So what do we see then in this chapter? Well, the first six verses show us the courage of faith. Because Esther has had to exercise true faith, true courage in implementing her plans. She's already shown that in coming into the king's presence to ask him to have these feasts, these successive feasts for himself and Haman. Again, we have to see Esther again exercising the strength of faith as she's, as she comes into this situation. Because from a purely human perspective, it was no foregone conclusion that the king would actually listen to Esther and not listen to Haman.

[13 : 57] I mean, when we think of it, it was the king who'd approved of Haman's plan to put to death the people who Haman wanted to destroy, the Jewish people. It was the king who'd appointed Haman in that position of power.

And the fact that, you know, it was the king who'd done these things in favour of Haman. For Esther to show the king that Haman was the enemy, then there was no foregone conclusion from a human perspective that the king would listen to Esther rather than show favour to Haman. And again, the fact that Esther would have to reveal her own national identity that she's a Jew. Again, this was a risk. Because after all, she'd concealed that fact, and she was chosen as queen, queen by the king. So from a human perspective, for Esther to continue with her plan, from a human perspective, there were real dangers.

In many ways, again, from a human perspective, things could backfire in Esther. Esther and she'd be punished rather than Haman. She'd be punished for trying to ruin the king's favourite.

Esther's not going to allow these so-called potential dangers to her own life. She's not going to allow these dangers to prevent her from continuing in faith and then pursuing that plan to save God's people.

Esther obviously would be very aware of the dangers before her. But she's not going to give in to fear. She's going to exercise faith. Faith in the unseen, invisible God. God who honours those who honour him.

[15 : 52] And surely that's a lesson then for each one of us who seek to live by faith in the one true God. And it's not going to be a part of the world. Particularly when you're faced with what appears to be impossible obstacles in your way, as it were, in your walk with the Lord. But it's by faith. We can echo the words of the psalmist when the psalmist in Psalm 18 cried out with my God, I can scale a wall. It's by faith that we do as Jesus told his disciples, by faith, you can move mountains. As Jesus said in Matthew 17, I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, a grain of mustard, you can say to this mountain, move from here to there and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.

And I ask you even this late afternoon hour, even in the quiet of your own heart, will you bring in, as it were before, even your own heart?

Maybe one area of your life, maybe something that maybe is puzzling you even, causing distraction. Something that you know requires much faith.

Maybe it's a decision that you have to make or a decision that you've already made and something perhaps that's causing you particular anxiety at this time. Maybe something that you look ahead to, maybe even this week and you have that fear and anxiety.

Maybe there's some obstacle in your way that appears just impossible to move. You commit to God, commit by faith, that particular issue.

[17 : 45] Even faith as tiny as a grain of mustard seed. And commit to God, that particular problem, that particular issue. And yes, cast your burdens on the Lord, but he will sustain you.

You'll never let the righteous fall, as we know from Scripture. Do it through faith, through that strong faith, the faith that Esther had as she exercised her faith in a very difficult situation.

And know the blessing that God gives to you when you come before him in faith, when you trust in him with all your heart. And know that nothing is impossible with God.

And that as Jesus says, nothing will be impossible for you. So be strong and be courageous. And yes, pray for that wisdom. Pray for the wisdom that God gives you so that you will be that mountain mover.

And trust in him. Esther and her seeking to honour God.

[18 : 53] Esther, remember, had come before God. She'd fasted. She'd prayed. And through the wisdom that God gave her, she would exercise that wisdom in faith.

So what do we find? What do we find in the passage? We find that Esther waits. We've now come to the second of the feasts.

A long feast. These feasts that happened for many, many hours in Middle East practice, Middle East culture. Esther actually waits until the second day of the second feast.

And it's then that she's going to announce to the king, or plead with the king, that the king spares her life and the lives of her people.

Because as she says, as we read there in verse 4, of being sold, I and my people to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated.

[19 : 53] Well, she mentions her people. She and her people. She hasn't mentioned who these people are. But what she's doing, surely, is she's, at this point, arousing the wrath of the king against such a wicked crime, particularly when that crime will, if it's carried out, impact her life, the life of the queen.

And so when she tells of what has been planned against her and her people, the king's furious. The king is hot with anger. He's in a rage.

He asks who this wicked person is, who would devise such a plan to destroy the wife of the king, the queen in Persia. And this is the opportunity for Esther to tell who this wicked person is.

And the king, he hears this. He's furious as he hears what Esther has to tell him. But the man who's actually sitting beside him is the man, as Esther says, a foe and enemy, this wicked Haman.

You can just sense that Esther's faith at this point is, you might say, being tested to the limit. Now everything's out. The name of the wicked person is out.

[21 : 16] Haman, the name is out. The truth's out. But how's the king going to react to this? When he hears that it's Haman, the man he appointed, the man he set with honour upon honour.

How's the king going to react to this news? Esther's reached this critical point in her life and in the life of her people. Because if the king decides he's not going to punish Haman, if his fury subsides, then it will happen.

Esther and her people will be put to death. And so we might say that there's this critical moment, this moment, again, humanly speaking, this moment of uncertainty.

And we're told that the king goes into the palace garden. He's there to decide how he's going to deal with this situation, with the revelation that it's Haman who planned to annihilate the ester and her people.

Again, humanly speaking, it's not clear cut what's going to happen. In many ways, the king's in a dilemma. It's either he's going to execute Haman and show that, in fact, he had been wrong to appoint this man, or he's going to allow Haman to live.

[22 : 30] This will mean death to Esther and her people. And Haman realises that he, too, is in a critical position. The word death sentence hasn't been reached yet, hasn't been arrived yet.

All that we're told in that verse 7 is that the king means harm. Not full of what that harm is. And so as the king goes out into the garden, we might say to consider what his action is going to be.

Haman's left alone, left alone with Esther. And that will spell Haman's downfall. In the culture of the day, no male other than the king was allowed to be in the immediate presence of one of the king's wives or the king's wife, without the king being there as well.

And so for Haman to be there in the presence of Esther alone is Haman's death sentence. So we might say that certainly in this position, Esther's faith has been rewarded.

The courage of her faith has been seen and she's triumphed in what appeared to be such a difficult and almost impossible situation. The powerful Haman having been there at one time.

[23 : 56] But Esther's faith triumphing over wicked Haman. Now obviously there was still much more to happen for God's people to be saved.

The king had already passed a law that couldn't be revoked. Much still has to be happened to ensure that the Jewish people are saved. But already God's shown that nothing is impossible with him.

Nothing impossible for his people. And so, you know, you take courage from this episode in Esther's life.

That you have that faith to believe that yes, through the enabling power of God, that you can be that mountain mover. It was said of the people of Scotland some time ago, two and a half centuries ago, that they were called the people of the great faith.

Maybe it was said in a sort of a mocking tone by those who mock the faithfulness of God's people in different parts of the land.

[25 : 05] And I pray that, you know, that you as individuals, we ourselves as a people, that we truly will be in our people of the great faith.

That we'll know that all things are possible with our God for whom nothing is impossible. And the testimony of Scripture, the testimony of Scripture is throughout the testimony of faith of those who've trusted in God despite the mountains, despite the seeming obstacles.

We'll go through Scripture, the faith of Noah, when God called Noah to build that ark and God prophesied, spoke of the flood to come.

And Noah mocked for his building an ark when there was no evidence of rain at the time. But Noah, strong in faith, believed and obeyed. Think of the faith of Abraham, Abraham who trusted God when God sent Abraham from the land of Ur to, as we're told, the land that Abraham knew nothing of.

Or the faith of Caleb and Joshua, when they had that strong faith to believe that, yes, God could and would bring his people into the land of Canaan.

[26 : 25] For the faith of the Lord Jesus, faith in his heavenly Father. And on the cross, Jesus cried out, into your hands I commit my spirit.

So be those who are strong in faith, people of great faith, as you follow the Lord Jesus, as you trust in him, as you know the triumph of faith in the face of adversity, even as Esther triumphed in faith in the face of so much adversity against her and her people.

But we've mentioned in many ways the triumph of faith. We've seen life given and confirmed in Esther and her people.

What about judgment? What about judgment that we see, secondly, in the second part of verse 6 to the end of the chapter, the condemning of sin?

And I suppose in many ways this is the part of the story that a lot of people are uncomfortable with. Why couldn't Esther have forgiven Haman, some people argue.

[27 : 39] Why couldn't Esther have given Haman a chance to repent of his original intention to hang Mordecai and destroy the Jewish people?

Why couldn't Haman have been given a trial to set forth his point? And what about the whole aspect of judgment?

What of God? God in his being judged. What we even saw this morning. Why do we trust in the Lord Jesus who loves his people and condemns the lost?

And if God is a God of love, why doesn't he forgive everybody? But when we look at the evidence of the passage here in chapter 7, we see the whole importance of the subject of God's judgment against sin and against rebellion against him.

Because it's absolutely clear that Haman's punishment was utterly justifying. This is Haman, the proud Haman, the man who we have to say followed the author of self-glorifying pride.

[28 : 56] He followed the devil. This is Haman, the hater of God's people, and if he's the hater of God's people, he's the hater of God. This is Haman who deliberately sought to destroy God's people, God's covenant people.

Because Haman's hatred against God's covenant people was hatred against the one true God. And so Haman's sin was vile.

He was vile in his human nature. He was vile in that expression of the human nature and acts of sin against God's people.

As God's word tells us, the wages of sin is death. And so we have to see here in Haman, in many ways, an example of sin and all its ugliness.

As we again know from scripture, a holy God must punish sin. Sin is an offence to God. Sin is an offence to our God who is holy.

[30 : 01] God in his goodness and his righteousness, God hates sin. And so God is just in punishing evil. So when we read here of Haman's demise, his end, his punishment and execution, then we're seeing here surely not just the punishment of one individual, but surely we're seeing the bigger picture, the punishment of sin for all who rebel against God.

And notice it's punishment for a person who, well, like all, who deserve God's wrath and God's curse against sin.

Because as we know again from scripture, sin is personal. Evil is personal. Evil isn't just reserved for one or two people who we might say are, or just viciously bad.

No, sin isn't just something that only is in those who we reckon are the Hitlers of society, as it were. No, we know sin isn't with the heart of every single person.

God must punish sin. Haman must be punished. Haman was guilty before God. Haman was responsible for his evil against God and his people. Then, of course, the question is asked.

[31 : 31] Well, yes, we believe that. We understand that. But how can anyone be saved if all have sinned and come short of the glory of God? Well, Paul tells us in Romans 3 that, yes, we have to, we know that.

Whether we're an evil Haman, whether we're a faithful Esther. Yes, we all deserve God's punishment. The wages of sinners is death.

But then we know from the reliability and truth of God's word, we know that Jesus came to save sinners, to save his people from their sins.

Jesus took upon himself the punishment that sin deserves. The Son was made sin for us. So that when Jesus died on the cross for us, Jesus paid the penalty for sin that you and I deserve to face.

Jesus paid that penalty as our substitute, him for us, that you might know life and life everlasting.

[32 : 39] And it's that life in the face of death that we've seen there in Esther's life. Esther being spared there, spared from the death penalty against her and her people.

When the prospect of death was so close, yet life was given to Esther and to her fellow Jewish people. And yet, in contrast, for Haman, the one who thought that his life was even in his own hands, he would pay the ultimate penalty.

And as we close here this evening, I'm going to ask you, do you know life? Do you know that life in Christ? Are you still without the Saviour?

Are you still without Christ and without that life that truly satisfies? Would you rather choose to be without Christ than with him?

You might say, well, I'm not a Haman. I'm not really a wicked person. How could God punish me for who I am? I haven't hurt anybody. I've not really done anything particularly bad.

[33 : 55] Remember what we said earlier. We all have fallen short of the standard that God has set. We're all sinners. God, the Holy God, is offended by sin.

Even the so-called little sins that are sins in God's sight. And God must punish sin. And anyone who doesn't have faith in the one true God, and who won't by faith trust in him, well, the prospect is, again, as we were saying this morning, the prospect is of eternal separation from God in the place of eternal fire.

And so what we find here in this chapter is a warning. It's a warning. The warning of God's judgment against all who persist in the refusal to follow the one true God.

And so I'm going to close this evening. Close with, actually, with words that Moses spoke to the people of Israel. These words that were spoken many years before Esther. But words that are utterly relevant even for ourselves this evening.

And it's words that we find in Deuteronomy 30, verse 19. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse.

[35 : 23] Therefore, choose life. I pray that you'll know the Lord of life, the Lord who is life, and that he will be and is your life, and that you'll give your life to him and know the blessings of eternal life in his presence.

Amen. Let us pray. Our Lord, our God, our gracious and loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

We praise you that you speak to us of the reality of sin and the reality of judgment. We pray, Lord, as we know the sin within our heart, that we will confess that sin before you with the promise that those who confess their sin, that we confess our sins, that you are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

May that be so for all gathered here this evening. May your people know the joy of forgiveness. May they know that peace that passes understanding.

Hear us, Lord, as we continue in worship before you now. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.