

God's Unseen Hand at Work

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[0 : 00] as you see on the screen there, the sermon title, God's Unseen Hand at Work, the three points to follow a king's limited power, a queen's noble character, and the Lord's overruling providence.

It's a truth concerning God's unseen presence, that when it seems that he's most absent in the lives of his people and indeed absent in the course of human history, in fact, God is most active in his unseen work, God most active in directing the lives of his people and in his sovereign control over all nations.

And that truth surely should bring so much comfort to you, so much comfort to the Lord's people, particularly in times we're living in, when we can't always discern the Lord's working in our lives, when we can't indeed always discern the Lord's purposes and what's happening in the world and the current pandemic that we're facing.

when at times even in our own lives, when the Lord's way of working in our own lives appears baffling. We can't always trace his finger in the direction of our lives, nor indeed in the course of the lives of the nations of the world.

But even in these times of perplexity, even in this worldwide crisis that we're still living through, this crisis that continues to impact us at every level, in education and communication and learning and teaching and work and employment and church services, we've got that assurance, as we were thinking this morning, we have that assurance that God is with us always.

[2 : 01] As the Savior promised, he'll never leave us nor forsake us. He is there. He's there even when we can't always discern his presence. The unseen God is at work and continuing in his work and through his steadfast love and his wise providences and his gracious provision for his people, working out God's purposes fully and truly and doing so for his glory and for the good of his own.

This is what we're going to consider as we see evident in the book of Esther. It's a remarkable book. It's a remarkable book in so many ways.

And particularly one aspect of that remarkable nature of the book is that never once do we see the name of God mentioned. Nor is there even an indirect, well, not even a direct reference to God, even without mentioning his name.

That God is there. God is there throughout the book. He's there, as it were, in the background. God working through the various circumstances that we read of and we saw in chapter one there, God working through the various circumstances in a king's court.

God's unseen hand determining the coming to a position of great power of a, as we'll see later, a young Hebrew woman, a young Hebrew exile in Persia.

[3 : 29] This woman, Esther, who would become a savior of the Lord's people, of the Jewish people. And throughout this book, we're seeing God's ruling and God's overruling in the, we might say, the murky world of Persian politics.

God working to redeem his people, to redeem his people from the hands of evil opponents, of those who are his own. And what we're reading here in Esther chapter one, well, these are events that happened 500 years before the coming of the Lord Jesus.

But even events that we read here in this chapter, in this book, that have a direct relevance, a direct bearing on the coming of the Lord Jesus.

His coming to save his people. Lord Jesus, when he came, and yes, in his human nature, we even see a direct link between what we're going to find in the book of Esther, on the coming of the Lord Jesus, certainly in his human nature.

And indeed, in the message that he came to, to fulfill the message of salvation for those who are his. For all, the risen Lord Jesus, when he was with the two in the Emmaus Road, remember, he

said to them that, that all scripture pointed to him as the, as the promised Christ, the promised Messiah.

[4 : 55] And of course, all scripture includes the book of Esther. And so there's so much relevance in this book, relevance for you, relevance for each one of us. And to see that we see the bigger picture, bigger picture that this book gives to us, the chain of events leading, you might say, from Esther to Christ and to ourselves, all under the sovereign purposes of God.

And so there's so much in this book for, for edification. In many ways, it's a neglected book, but yet there's so much in this book to, to help us, to give us a greater understanding of God's ways with his people.

There's so much teaching in this, this book. This is a divinely inspired history book. And so it's so well for us to absorb this book, to absorb its, its focus, its devotion on, on, on God and his ways and his working.

So as we worship God, as we are engaged in worship, remember that we're worshipping, yes, the God of Esther, the God of Mordecai, Esther's cousin who features it later in the book.

We're worshipping the God who saves his people. Saves his people from, from wickedness, from the ruthless hands of, of wickedness. That we see even in this, this book, as we see in the lives of all who are his, God's surpassing goodness in redeeming a people for himself.

[6 : 28] So let's be encouraged as together. Well, the next number of evening services, as we work through this book, be encouraged, be comforted. As we see, and marvel and worship the God who is there, the God who works in the lives of his people, indeed, the God who works in his ways, for his glory, for the sake of the salvation of his people.

So as you walk with God, as you obey his word, as you follow his paths, so often when you can't, always discern his ways with you, and certainly can't see God physically, that you continue to trust in him at all times.

You trust in the God who is there, the God of the Bible, the invisible God, who makes his presence known through his mighty works of providence, so that truly we can say that all things do work together for good, to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.

So, we're going to begin, we're going to begin with the background, before we look at the various details that this chapter brings out, to indicate the way that God rules, the way that God overrules, and the events of his people, for the furtherance of his glory, for the furtherance of his kingdom.

So, so let's think first of all of the background to, to this great book, because really the story of the book is, is called the book of Esther. It's the story of how, one time anyway, an obscure Jewish girl becomes queen of the greatest empire that the world had ever seen, before the Roman Empire.

[8 : 15] It's the story of how this Jewish girl, uses the position that God brings to her, to rescue the Jewish people, from a holocaust, at the hands of an evil, arrogant individual called Haman.

The story is set, the story is set at a time when, when in fact many Jews had actually, left that area to go back, to, to Jerusalem and the surrounding neighborhood.

It had been 70 years that the Jews had been in exile, and many Jews had left, the place of exile to go back, to Israel. But there were many other Jews who remained, in that, in that area of Persia, the modern day Iran.

Many Jews who'd remained there, who'd settled down there, and made a living there. they were displaced people, certainly, that they'd chosen to remain as exiles in a foreign land.

And these exiled Jews included Esther and her cousin Mordecai. And these Jews, they remained in that land, they remained in exile, they lived in a, in a pagan land, under a pagan king.

[9 : 29] There was no temple for them to worship God, in that particular part of the, the empire. There were no priests to leave them in worship there. They were a people of God, in a strange land.

Even though they were a people of God, in a strange land, even though they were detached from their, as it were, their previous place of worship, God wasn't detached from them. God was still gone.

God who knows no limits to his presence. God was still with his people, even there in that, in that pagan land. Even in these days, in these years of exile, and continued exile, that God hadn't exiled himself, from his people.

And that's such a, a comfort, a reality of comfort, that really speaks to, to God's continued presence, with his people, wherever they are, wherever you are. You who know, and love the Savior.

Yes. You're very much an exile, in a pagan land. We live under non-believing rulers. We have rulers, political rulers, and government. We have business leaders.

[10:39] We have leaders of industry. Leaders in education. Leaders in media. We don't serve the one true God. We live in that environment. But remember that God is still God.

God is still Lord. God is sovereign. And God will not forsake, those of you, who are his. As we see, as we see in this great book, as we see in the lives, of the remaining Jews there, in that great empire, the Persian Empire.

And we're told that, still in the background, to the story, we're told at the start, of the book, that the story set, during the reign of King Ahasuerus, as we notice, this general title, of this king, whose name actually, was King Xerxes.

He's living in modern day Iran. He's the greatest ruler, that the world has ever seen, as we said up to that point. He rules a vast empire, from India, to North East Africa.

And we know from other sources, other historical sources, that this king Xerxes, was a very ambitious man. He had desired, to extend his kingdom, beyond even India, to the east, and North East Africa, to the other side.

[11:57] He had a great ambition, even to conquer Greece. And there's a connection there, because we read in chapter one, there's 180 days, of celebration, all the trappings of his wealth, to impress all who'd gathered there, as we read, including his army leaders.

And certainly, the situation, it would seem to suggest, that he's gathered, all these leaders there, to gain support, for his plans, for further conquering.

Great rewards, given to those, who would support him. He's a king, who's very powerful, as we say. I mean, the, the first part of the chapter, shows his great wealth, his great power, his generosity.

The capital, Susa, apparently, was a place, of magnificent wealth, magnificent beauty, and splendor. All that power, all that wealth, all that majesty, all that beauty, it was an illusion.

what seemed, from the outside, from the outset, to be a picture, of stable power, stable wealth, stable majesty, stable glory, was an illusion.

[13:13] It was fleeting. It was just passing. In fact, just a few years, after this, this great feast, King Xerxes, lost, in battle, against Greece.

So much of his wealth, was depleted. He'd spent so much, in financing that war, against Greece. And then 20 years, about 20 years, after this great celebration, King Xerxes, lost his life.

He was actually, assassinated, by one of his close advisors. Now, this is the point. Those, who certainly, initially read, the book of Esther, they would realize, all these things.

In all probability, this book was written, after King Xerxes' life. So the people, who first read the book, they'd have read, the account of this man's, power and wealth, and grandeur.

And they'd have realized, how fleeting, all these things were, in terms, of the value, that the world places, on earthly power, and earthly majesty.

[14:13] And you know, all that we read there, in the first part, of this chapter, all that we read, of this, excess of wealth, excess of materialism, this, display of kingly power, surely it reminds us, of the fleeting, and passing nature, of all these things.

Now, nobody, not least in scripture, itself, nobody denies, the God given blessings, that riches, are given to, to the Lord's people, when God gives out, of the storehouse, of his riches, for, to be used, for his glory.

Remember to set, a heart in them. Jesus reminds us of that, in the Sermon on the Mount. Don't store up for yourselves, treasure on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in, and steal.

But store up for yourselves, treasures in heaven, where moth and rust, do not destroy, and where thieves, do not break in, and steal. As Jesus said, for where your treasure is, there your heart, will be also.

Well, this king, this Ahasuerus, this king Xerxes, certainly he displayed, majesty, and power, and wealth, and authority. But that, picture, of earthly power, earthly might, stands in such contrast, to the greatness, of the Lord Jesus, the Lord of Lords, and King of Kings.

[15:38] That description, read there, of Ahasuerus' power, the extent of his rule, the magnificence, of his hospitality, surely it's given to us, to reveal how small, how tiny, how tiny, are the greatest of men, even before the King of Kings.

Ahasuerus, we're told, ruled from India to Ethiopia. He ruled over people, of many different nations, many different nationalities. the Lord Jesus, reigns over every nation, every tribe, every language group, every people, to form his kingdom.

Jesus, the Lord and Savior, is the King of Kings. He's the one, whose power is, infinitely greater, than the greatest of men. It's he, who controls the nations.

Yes, the invisible God, who made visible, his being, in the person, of the Lord Jesus, the Son of God. He who's sovereign, in power, and might.

So whenever, you know, you're tempted, to even envy, the power, and wealth of others, whenever your heart, is set on things, below, and not on things, above, be reminded, of what we read here, in this chapter, in this, in these early verses, of Esther.

[17 : 01] Because ultimately, as scripture tells us, there is that great reversal, reversal from what seems to be, enduring and unworthy, to what truly is, enduring and unworthy.

Because only what is true, and pure, and just, will truly, and fully, endure. All else is an illusion, of greatness, an illusion, of power.

And that will be, utterly destroyed. the promise, that you have that promise, in scripture, that when the Lord Jesus comes, all that has, been, considered, a worldly worth, worldly value, will be removed, will be destroyed.

What is of true value, it will remain, and be changed, and transformed, into, that glorious, glorious glory, that God promises, when the Lord Jesus returns.

We can also say this, from the passage, that we read, that we're seeing God, moving in history, God supreme, in his sovereign power.

[18 : 11] And it's, sort of the case, that we find, in the, the pages of history, human history, that God, works, even through, non-believers, that he works, through men and women, who have no saving, relationship with him, such as this king, King, King Ahasuerus, King Xerxes, that God will work, even through such people, to work, out, his purposes, for his glory, and for his people's good.

Now, we see that in verse, from verse nine, really to the end of the chapter, we see the chain of events, happening, that lead ultimately, to Esther becoming queen, and all that that involves, in the saving of, of the Jewish people, there in the Persian Empire.

You see, the story of what happened, in that royal palace, that we read of, when we read of a, well, a rather, drunken party, really teaches us, about how God, fulfills his purposes, and, and what lessons, that we can learn ourselves, to establish, and strengthen, our faith in him.

Because, what we're seeing here, has, has a relevance, even to our own lives, and indeed, the lives of the nations. We see how, seemingly, disconnected events, all come together, in that divine, weaving of human affairs, that God, in his wisdom, oversees, so that his, righteousness is exalted, and evil deposed.

We read in the passage, before us, in that palace, of Susa, we see that, this pagan king, he's been offended, when his, wife Vashti, has refused, to come into his presence, because the king, simply wanted, others to share, for all, her beauty, but in the context, of that, sort of drunken party, for, really for the queen, to be, the object of, of his leering officials.

[20 : 11] And when the queen, refuses to come in, she in fact, has acted nobly. She's not going to be, a person, to be simply an object, for human, sinful desire.

She's not going to, stoop to the level, of these drunken men, and simply become an object, to be, to be leered at. She's got certainly, a dignity, that wasn't going to be, cheapened, when the consequence, even when the consequence, of her refusing, to come before the king, and that drunken rabble, would mean, that she'd be deposed, from her status, as queen, in the greatest empire, of the world.

And you know, that's a timely lesson, in a world, that's so, that has so cheapened, the dignity, and worth, of human life.

Live in a world, that's so, cheapened, the physical, for the lust of the eyes. And surely, the Lord's people, have to, hold dear, the worth, and dignity, of life, made in the image, of God.

Because if you don't, then who's going to? And so, while this queen, this, yes, this pagan queen, exercises common grace, the grace, the common grace, that God gives to, to all, while she exercises, that common grace, and define the king's request.

[21 : 31] And while these events, are happening, that, that have a consequence, that, that lead to, the king seeking, a new, new queen, to replace Vashti, this new queen, being, being Esther.

As we're going to see, in chapter two. This is all, happening under, the sovereign, overruling, of God. Events that have, seemed so disconnected, working together, for God's, great purposes, and greater purposes.

For the coming, to position, of power, of Esther, and all that, that will involve, in the saving, of God's people. And so, we've got, an important principle here.

God, in his providence, oversees, and overrules, in the human affairs, of man. He overrules, and oversees, even in events, that might, themselves, seem, so, totally disconnected, and yet, are part of the, great chain of events, chain of circumstances, that God, brings together, for the furthering, of his purposes.

And we can see that, in so many examples, so many ways, whether in the history, of nations, whether indeed, in the lives, of individual believers. I've used this illustration, before, but, even think of, of your conversion, those of you, who know the Lord Jesus, as Savior, think of the different, circumstances, in your life, that brought you, to that point, where you, came to give your life, to the Savior.

[23 : 04] Different circumstances, that might even have, seemed disconnected, at the time.

They're all coming together, to bring you to that point, where you could do no other. Often, illustrations used, of the, the tapestry, maybe we don't, see tapestries, very much nowadays, but certainly, even, the way that, one side of a tapestry, the thread, seems so disconnected, and yet, the side, that's seen, the threads, all working together, all, moving together, as it were, to show, the beauty, of what, has been, formed, in that piece of work.

The great events, of Esther's life, well, yes, they were still to unfold. We don't know anything, of her, of her life, prior to her becoming queen. But even in these, unseen years, these years, that, that scripture, silent on, the unseen God, was working.

The master weaver, was working, to prepare Esther, Esther, the young Jewish woman, Esther, the Jewess, be key, in the delivering, of God's people, from the hands, of wicked men.

Now, of course, even the very preparations, even the very events, that were happening, in that king's palace, these events, were certainly, unknown to Esther. God, was working, his purposes, that would ensure, that the events, even that were happening, in that, that palace, so, so far, from the very way of life, that even Esther, was knowing at that time, even these events, in that palace, absolutely connected, to her life, and to the lives, of God's people, all under, God's providential working, and that being the case, that it's, surely then, for you, and for me, to trust, in God, to trust, in the way, that God's leading you, in your life, because, that, that sure trust, that what he's doing, in your life, my life, and our lives, is for his glory, and for our good.

We might not always, see this, we might not always, understand his ways, but we're to trust, in his all-surpassing wisdom, because he is, truly concerned, for each one of your lives, even in what, might even seem to be, ordinary everyday lives, even in significant lives, but trust in them, continue to trust, in God, and the one who's, who rules, who overrules, yes, even your mistakes, even my mistakes, even, the times when we get it wrong, God overrules, and we'll do so, for his glory, and for our good, and yes, even good will, good will come, from evil, that of course, seen supremely, in the cross of Christ, when, when good came from, from the acts of evil men, evil men, who put the Lord Jesus to death, but God overruling, for the sake of, of those for whom, Christ came to give his life, good coming, out of the evil acts, of wicked men, good, for his, for God's glory, and for our eternal good, and so let's, fix our eyes on Jesus, even as this, book of Esther, yes,

[26 : 25] Esther has no mention, of the name of God, no direct reference, to God, this book, is leading us, to the Lord Jesus, and this book, then encourages, the Lord's people, to continue, to trust in God, in all circumstances, knowing, that God is sovereign, that God is Lord, and that God's purposes, are fulfilled perfectly, absolutely perfectly, in his way, and for his glory, so let's rejoice, in him, rejoice, in our Lord and Savior, rejoice in his goodness, to each one of you, because, he cares for you, he cares for each, and every, aspect of your life, he cares for you, as he directs your life, to honor, and glorify him, for his sake, and for the glory, of his name, yes, his purposes, are fulfilled, even, for his glory, Amen, and let us pray, our Lord, our God, our Savior, you, who, whose purposes, are true, yes Lord, you, who work, through the lives, of those, whom you call, to serve you, we pray Lord, that, you will strengthen, our faith, even at times, when we don't see, your hand, at work in our lives, even when, at times, we're even perplexed, we pray Lord, that you will, in our perplexity, lead us, to the rock, that is higher, than we are,

Lord bless, we pray your word, continue with us, as we sing from it, bless Lord, we pray all, that the fellowship, that we've enjoyed, one with another, this day, and indeed, we've enjoyed with you, continue with us, even beyond the service, bless Lord, we pray, that your people, in this land, in all lands, that we will know, that you are the one, who is sovereign, over all nations, that every people, every tongue, every language, confess, that Jesus, is Lord, hear us, as we continue, before you now, we pray these things, in Jesus name, Amen, now we're going to, close in Psalm 25, Psalm 25, sing Psalms, from verse 4, onwards, verse 13, I think it is, O Lord, reveal to me your ways, and all your paths, help me to know, direct and guide me, in your truth, instruct me, in the way to go, Psalm 25, from verse 4, God's name, O Lord, reveal to me, your ways, and all your paths, help me to know, direct and guide me, enter to, instruct me, in the way to go, you are my Savior, and I am my God, all day I hope, in you alone, remember, remember, Lord, your love and grace, which from past the ages you have shown, do not recall, do not recall, my sins of pure, or my rebellious, evil ways, remember me, in no great love, for you, for you, O Lord, and good, the ways, because the Lord, is blessed and good, he shows his paths, to all who stay, he guides them, in what is high, and teaches them, his holy way, Wertehheit, he taught you the time, for you, the people who stay, to those who keep, his laden, his mercy, his good path, he particuld, he ■■■sel, who has studied,