

The Threads of God's Providence

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[0 : 00] As we read this chapter, this narrative of events during this great period of God's blessing on his people, even in that empire, that Persian empire, that empire that covered so much of, you might say, the Middle East in these days, the greatest empire the world had ever seen to that point.

And, of course, God's sovereign rule over that empire, even working for the good of his people. Let's read from the beginning of Esther chapter 2.

After these things, when the anger of King Ahasuerus had abated, he remembered Vashti. Remember Vashti was the wife of King Ahasuerus. Ahasuerus is the general title of his name. His particular name is Xerxes. Anyway, let's read on. He remembered Vashti and what she had done. Remember she had refused to come into the king's presence and what had been decreed against her.

Then the king's young men who attended him said, Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king. And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the heaven in Susa, the capital, under custody of Haggai, the king's unit who's in charge of the women.

[1 : 26] Let their cosmetics be given to them. Let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti. This pleased the king and he did so. Now, there was a Jew in Susa, the citadel, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jer, the son of Shammai, the son of Kish, a Benjaminite.

He had been carried away from Jerusalem among the captives, carried away with Jeconiah, king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had carried away.

He was bringing up Hadassah, that is, Esther, the daughter of his uncle, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at.

And when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter. So, when the king's order and his edict were proclaimed, and when many young women were gathered in Susa, the citadel, in the custody of Haggai, Esther also was taken into the king's palace and put in custody of Haggai, who had charge of the women.

And the young woman pleased him and won his favor. And he quickly provided her out with her cosmetics and her portion of food and with seven chosen young women from the king's palace and advanced her and her young women to the best place in the harem.

[2 : 47] Esther had not made known her people or kindred, for Mordecai had commanded her not to make it known. And every day Mordecai walked in front of the court of the harem to learn who Esther was and what was happening to her.

Now, when the turn came for each young woman to go into King Ahasuerus, and after being twelve months under the regulations for the women, since this was the regular period of their duty, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women, when the young woman went into the king in this way, she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the harem to the king's palace.

In the evening she would go in, and in the morning she would return to the second harem in custody of Shazgath, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubine. She would not go in to the king again unless the king delighted in her, and she was summoned by name.

When the turn came for Esther, the daughter of Abahel, the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her in as his own daughter to go in to the king, she asked for nothing except what Haggai, the king's eunuch who had charged with the women, advised.

Now Esther was winning favour in the eyes of all who saw her. And when Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus into his royal palace in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign, the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favour in

his sight more than all the merchants.

[4 : 20] So he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. Then the king gave a great feast for all his officials and servants. It was Esther's feast.

He also granted a remission of taxes to the provinces and gave gifts with royal generosity. Now when the virgins were gathered together the second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. Esther had not made known her kindred or her people, as Mordecai had commanded her. For Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him. In those days, as Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bichlan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the threshold, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.

And this came to the knowledge of Mordecai. And he told it to Queen Esther. And Esther told the king in the name of Mordecai. And the affair was investigated and found to be so.

The men were both hanged in the gallows. And it was recorded in the book of the Chronicles in the presence of the king. May God add his blessing to that reading from his holy word.

[5 : 35] As you see the title of the sermon, the threads of God's providence. As we see the way that God works in his providence to work out his purposes.

And the three points we're going to look at is God's providence, God's choosing and God's purposes. Those of you who were here last Sunday afternoon, last Sunday evening, you'll remember that we began looking at this remarkable book.

The book that bears this woman's name, the queen's name, Queen Esther. It's a book, as we were reminded last week, it's a book in which there's no direct reference to God, no reference to the name of God.

And yet we know that God is behind every event, every circumstance in the narrative, in the passages, in the chapters that we read in that book.

God is there. God is there working out his purposes. God's providence is seen in the different circumstances happening in that land. The circumstances happening in the royal palace that connect with a young Jewish girl, Hadassah.

[6 : 49] Whose name we know better as Esther. God working out his purposes for his glory and for the sake of his kingdom. For the sake indeed of his people.

Esther in God's providence would become queen. And through Esther's intervention, Esther would save God's people, the Jewish people, from the hands of an evil, cruel, vindictive individual, as we'll find out, a man called Haman.

And when we see the bigger picture, we realize that that act of salvation directly impacts the coming of the Lord Jesus in his human nature.

The saving of the saving of the saving of the saving of the saving of the Jews there. Some, what, 500 plus years before Jesus comes from heaven to earth. The actions in that Persian empire having a direct implication for the coming of the Lord Jesus, who will bring that full salvation of his people.

So the story of Esther then, it's got so much for us to dwell on in relation to God working out his plans for his glory and for the good of those who are his.

[8 : 04] And the story, as we said, the story of God's providence working out all things for good. As we said, the story of the salvation of the Jewish people there in that Persian empire, the Jewish people not just in the area we now know as modern-day Iran, but Israel, Judah, the extent of the Jewish people in that empire that saved through God working through Queen Esther.

And as we see in this passage, we are brought before a king who rules in this great empire from India to Ethiopia.

And yet, we know that his power is as nothing compared to our God and king who rules not just from India to Ethiopia, but the whole world, every tribe, every language, every people group under. His sovereignty under. And in his kingdom. So it's a story that tells us of, in the immediate sense, Queen Esther or Esther's rise to royal position.

And as we saw last week, we can get a little bit of background just to help us again. The king who had organized a great banquet, a banquet that was lasting 180 days.

[9 : 33] History tells us that this banquet was really to prepare for a great expedition against his enemy, Greece. So he's building up support within his empire, the great nobles of his empire there, to give support to the king in his plans for war against Greece.

And as we read in chapter one, in that great gathering, the wine flowed, the rabble became so drunk. And the king for that rabble had wanted his queen to appear, to appear before them. And Queen Vashti, in her dignity, refused to come before that drunken rabble. And the king, hot with anger, decides that she has to be deposed from her position. And a law is passed that another will become queen in her place. God's sovereignty ruling and overruling ensure that Esther will become queen in that empire. And so let's just focus a little more than on our first point, the point of God's providence. Because when we began chapter two, we read words that might seem really quite innocuous. [10:48] Just pass them by, but in fact, they're not. The very first words of chapter two are, After these things. After these things.

And we might think, well, that's just a joining, connecting words to link the previous chapter to the current chapter. But not at all. These words are very important.

Because they tell us that there was actually a gap in time between the feast that the king had offered and Queen Vashti being deposed.

Between that time and Esther becoming queen. We know again from our history books that it was in the third year of Ahasuerus' reign, Xerxes' reign, that that feast had taken place.

But as we see in verse 16 of chapter two, Esther doesn't become queen until the king's seventh year. So four years elapse before Esther becomes queen.

[11:50] And in that intervening time, the king was away fighting, fighting in Greece. There was no thought of an immediate replacement for Vashti.

And so while the king is fighting his war against Greece, at the same time, there's a young girl living in relative obscurity, relative poverty.

It wasn't yet the right time for this young woman to become queen in the Persian Empire. But all is under the providence of God.

And I suppose the question is asked, why didn't God immediately set Esther on the throne after Vashti was deposed? Why did Esther have to wait four years for her to become queen?

Why that four-year gap when you might think or might say, well, she could have made a big difference even in these four years? A difference for good? It's the kind of question that, you know, we often ask today in our own lives.

[12:55] Indeed, the lives of others. Why does God not act sooner than he does in changing the course of people's lives?

Why are conversions not sooner than they are? Why do we have to go through difficult providences when it would seem better to know a smoother path to glory?

You know, whenever we use the words or words such as better or sooner in relation to God, then we're actually usurping God's sovereignty.

Because God is sovereign. God knows and God cares. And we affirm that his ways are not always our ways. He chooses the appointed time for his perfect purposes.

And it's that time and his timing that we submit to God for in every happening, in every occurrence, in every matter of our lives.

[13:57] Because God's delays, so-called delays, are not delays at all. All that God does in his time and in his timing, all that he does is his prerogative.

It's his perfect timing for his perfect purposes. So none of us has any right to question that timing, to question his wisdom and the timing that he exercises in the work that he carries out to bring change in the lives of his people and the lives of the nations of the world.

As far as Esther was concerned, her time of waiting was a time that was utterly under the sovereign control of God. God was moving in the events of that time, in his time, according to his timetable.

And so the very threads of his providence were being woven together to bring about that result of Esther becoming Queen of Persia. And all the consequential results of her becoming Queen.

Let's think, secondly, of God's choosing. I thought of God's providence. I thought of God's choosing. Because if the timing of God's providence is that perfect timing, is God's timing, then surely also those whom God chooses to carry out as purposes must be his people, his timing, his people.

[15:33] God's chosen individuals through whom God moves and works. Not a working of accidental circumstances that bring about what happens in your life and in my life.

There's no accidental random occurrences that happen in the lives of the nations. Because God isn't a random God. God is a God of order. God is God.

God's ways are purposed and planned for his glory, for the good of his people. And that should fill you with really tremendous confidence.

You know, when you look back even at your own life, remember that nothing happens and nothing has happened by chance, by coincidence, or by accident.

Even the difficult things that you have experienced and even now are experiencing, even these things, we have to say, are ordered by God.

[16:34] God is sovereign. And yes, God will use sinful individuals such as ourselves for his sovereign purposes. So that what he does through you and through me, we pray, will be for his glory.

And he will use individuals. As we read in the passage there, of two particular individuals, Mordecai and Esther. We see their names mentioned for the first time there in verse 5.

Let's think a little about these two individuals. Mordecai. Mordecai. Well, Mordecai is thoroughly Jewish.

We see his genealogy. He came from the initial exile, so he must be at this time an elderly man. And Mordecai has a young cousin.

And her Jewish name is Hadassah. But it's happened so often with those who were exiles in a foreign land. Their names were changed to the language of the culture.

[17:37] And Hadassah's name has changed the Persian name Esther. We're told various things about Esther. We're told that naturally she was very beautiful.

And that's going to be important when we read on in the story. So we've got these two individuals, these two Jewish individuals. And they're part of the Jewish community in exile.

As we learned last week, some of these exiles have returned back to the homeland. But many others remained. And so Mordecai and Esther, they're not the Persian.

They're not of the Persian ability. They're not of the Persian people. They're living as Jewish exiles. In a foreign land, difficult circumstances.

Esther, as we were told, that she's an orphan. She's cared for by her cousin. And yet she's utterly under the care of Almighty God. Esther, that young woman, God had chosen her from all eternity.

[18:42] To be the one, the individual who would save, or through her, that God's people would be saved. Save from a Holocaust. Save from the desires of an evil opponent to destroy the Jewish people.

As we'll see further on in the weeks to come. For Esther, the threads of God's providence are being woven so that she will be led to the royal palace.

She'll be led to that very place where one day she'll exert such an influence for the good of God's people. That's going to happen in the future.

But for the present, she's exactly where God wanted her to be. She's God's choice to carry out God's will. Again, when we look at the circumstances of that choice, it's really quite remarkable. She wasn't of noble birth. Of course, kings at that time, and certainly until very, very recent times, kings or monarchs only married within a particular strata of society.

[19:48] Kings would marry into other royal families and so on. Well, she wasn't of a royal family. Certainly not an earthly royal family. Or to be considered even to be queen in the Persian Empire was really quite extraordinary.

And secondly, she was Jewish. Now, we read in chapter 2 that passage we read. We read that Mordecai made it very clear that she wasn't to tell anyone of her background or Jewish background. We don't know the particular reasons, but certainly Mordecai was very concerned for her safety. And Mordecai made clear to her, don't tell anyone whom you are of.

So we see that, you know, for this young woman, non-Persian, non-royal, non-noble, this Jewish girl, this young woman, this Jewish girl marrying a pagan Gentile king, certainly was unprecedented.

That she was God's choice. She was God's choice. She was God's choice to succeed as a queen. So despite all the obstacles to becoming queen in that royal position, despite what human wisdom would say was impossible, no, God's plans were supreme.

[21:10] Because God makes the impossible possible. That's what we see supremely in God's choosing all who are his.

God choosing you who are his. Remember what Jesus said to his disciples in John 15, 16? You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.

Because there's no human pride that's permissible when we consider the Lord's choosing of his people.

It's nothing that you and I can do to merit salvation. It's all of God. It's all of his grace. It's all of his choosing. What does it work in saving sinners whom God has chosen from all eternity to be his? So let's give God the glory for that divine choosing. That choosing that none of us deserve, that none of us merit. What of Esther?

[22 : 16] What of chosen Esther to become queen of the Persian Empire? So that she had that position of influence to ultimately to save her people from destruction. What about her nature?

What about her personality? What about her faith in the one true God? I mean, as we said at the start, there's no mention of God's name, no specific mention of God's name.

But there's no doubt that God has been blessing Carlos. We see in the evidence in the passage. God had given her her blestor with outer beauty. But her inner beauty was evident.

We see that in a number of occasions in the passage where she's described as having one favor before others. If your Bible is open, you see that in verse 9 and verse 15.

One favor. And you see that expression elsewhere in Scripture. When Joseph was in prison in Egypt, we're told that the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

[23 : 23] Think of Jesus in his years as a child. We read in Luke 2.52. That Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

And that favor comes from what we might say is an inner disposition of grace. In Esther's case, she won favor from others ultimately because of her inner beauty.

Her faith in practice. It was evident. Esther not only had outer beauty, she had inner beauty. That inner beauty that caused other people to notice her and to give her that respect, to give her that admiration that only inner beauty brings out from one person to another.

Of course, we don't exercise our faith to gain favor from others. There's no doubt that a consistent, faithful witness will impact others, will make others notice who you are, that you follow the Lord Jesus.

In your Christ-like life, in your winsome Christianity. We pray we'll draw others to the Savior rather than repelling others from the Savior.

[24 : 41] And there in that royal palace and the citadel in Susa, Esther was showing that grace. She was showing that winsome beauty.

And not just physical beauty, but we have to say spiritual beauty. She had that quiet inner faith. It may well not have mentioned explicitly the name of God.

Her life was so obviously and clearly attractive from a beauty that wasn't external, but within. And that can surely tell us that she was one who had true faith in the living and true God.

You who are in Christ, seek to nurture your faith, mature in faith, grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. To strengthen that inner beauty that lies within.

So that truly you reflect the beauty of Christ. Even this morning as we were thinking in Hosea 14 of those who return to the Lord. And have that beauty and fragrance that indicates and shows forth the beauty and fragrance of the Savior.

[25 : 55] And of course that inner beauty, that inner fragrance, that beauty will be evident in your actions. It will be evident in the words that you speak, the words seasoned with grace.

As you seek to live a sanctified life to the glory of God. God, the invisible God. God was working in the life of Esther. And God ensured that Esther was being looked upon with great favor.

Not just by the king, but those who were facilitating her move towards that royal position. As we said, it wasn't an immediate appointment.

Not just the four years, but within these four years, there were 12 months when she actually had to wait to become queen. All the preparations that were being done at that time.

12 months. Surely the point is this, that Esther had to go through all that she went through. Because God was dealing sovereignly in her life.

[26 : 59] God had planned from all eternity. All the events that were happening to secure Esther's position. Which really leads us to the final point to look at from this chapter.

God's purposes. God's purposes. We read that the king, King Azuerus, King Xerxes is his name. Esther's made queen by this king. From a human perspective, it's all happening according to the king's plans, the king's design. The king has chosen his queen.

It's been months of preparation. Months of choosing, deliberating who's to become queen. We're told actually in verse 17, the words are that the king made her queen.

But of course it was God. It was God ultimately who made Esther queen. It was God who was working out his sovereign purposes to ensure that Esther's inner and outer beauty were won over those who mattered in the choosing of Esther becoming queen.

[28 : 08] Ultimately then it was God who lifted up this young woman from obscurity, from poverty, to royal position as queen.

And in what might appear then disconnected events, just as we were thinking last week. Events that would seem to have no bearing on God's big picture.

Events that seem to be so detached one from another. But in fact, fully connected with God's perfect plan and perfect purposes. Even that little section that we read at the end of chapter 2.

That section, remember, that tells of Mordecai discovering a plot against the king. And Mordecai telling Esther, who would tell the king of that danger to the king's life.

And although this is happening at the start of the story, even that little event that seems so detached from the rest of the story, that event itself is utterly connected with the later actions and the decision of the king to spare Mordecai and to put to death Mordecai's enemy and the enemy of the Jewish people.

[29 : 25] All because of what Mordecai had done in informing Esther of that plot against the king. All things working together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purposes.

So never, ever think that seemingly trivial events in your life have no importance. God is working in your life for his purposes, for his purposes to be fulfilled.

And surely then you who trust in Almighty God, surely that must give you great comfort and a much assurance to know that you are safe in the hands of God.

Even though these many times when you don't always and don't fully or don't even understand why such and such a thing is happening in your life or indeed in the life of the church or even in the life of the nation.

Remember that God is sovereign in each and every of these cases and that God has loved you with an everlasting love. And you know in the providences that God allows to happen in our lives, we continue to trust in him.

[30 : 40] Remember that everything, yes, these occurrences, the outcomes, the circumstances, these have been appointed by God. We have to say to him, be the glory.

To him be honoured and glory. And let's express that truth from the heart with heartfelt thanksgiving. To know that God is at work, has been at work, is at work, and is at work eternally in the lives of all who are his, even you who know him as Lord and Saviour.

And while none of us will be elevated to any kind of earthly royal positions in this earth. And in Persia, nevertheless remember that in every circumstance of your life, that God's ways for you are his ways, as God sees fit in his carrying out his purposes for you.

We said that none of us will be in all likelihood elevated to any kind of earthly royal position in this earth.

But remember this, that for each one of God's children, God elevates you to a royal position, to that heavenly position, that position in heaven where God promises that you'll reign with Christ forever.

[32 : 01] That's the ultimate outcome of your salvation. That's the ultimate outcome of God's great purposes for you.

That elevation to royal position, reigning with Christ, raised with Christ, reigning with Christ, elevated to glory, reigning forever with him.

So give thanks for God's work. Give thanks for God's providence and his providences before you. Give thanks for God's choosing you, for God's choosing all who are his.

And give thanks that God's purposes are sure and true and perfect for his glory and your good. Amen.

And let us pray. Lord, we thank you for your word of comfort, your word of assurance. We thank you, Lord, that what we read in your word is true and sure.

[33 : 02] That even events that happened so many years ago that have that direct connection with your saving grace. And so, Lord, we pray that as we have heard your word, listened to your word, absorbed your word, that we will apply your word and seek to live that life of faith and trust in your

perfect sovereignty.

Hear us, Lord, as we continue in worship before you now. Bless us and bless us for the remainder of this evening as well. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.