

A Day of Action

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[0 : 00] A principle that we latch onto, this principle of divine sovereignty, working hand in hand with man's responsibility. It's something that we surely need to grasp and to keep and to remain within our hearts, even as we're living through these difficult times, continuing through these difficult times, that we seek to trust in God and to live by faith in his perfect providence.

And to know that God does all things well. What God does is for his glory and we trust him. We trust him for that grace that so often hides behind frowning providences such as even we're living through at this time.

Well, as we've reached the point in the story then where Haman has been put to death for his wickedness, his wicked scheme against the Jewish people, we continue to see the sovereign purposes of God being worked out in tandem with the God-given wisdom exercised by Queen Esther and her cousin Mordecai.

Yes, God is sovereign. Yes, nothing can thwart God's purposes. That doesn't minimize the actions of his people.

That doesn't minimize the work that God has given to his people to carry out in his name and for his glory. And as we're going to see in this chapter, this chapter really has to do with action.

[1 : 38] Particularly action taken by the Lord's people for the cause of the Lord's glory. We're going to see, we might say, proactive work.

Proactive work for the Lord. Work being carried out for the sake of his name. Work carried out by those who love him, those who serve him. Even in the most hazardous of situations.

So that's what we're going to look through this evening. Even as we saw the headings on the screen just a moment ago. We're going to look at the emotional action of Esther.

And again, bring that out in relation to our own action for the sake of God's name. We're going to look at the decisive action of Mordecai. What Mordecai did that was so decisive in ensuring the safety of the Jewish people.

And then, as we said, thirdly, the joyful action of the people. The people of the immediate area rejoicing that the Jewish people would be protected and saved.

[2 : 45] So let's look first of all then at the emotional action of Esther. Again, as we've seen in previous chapters, we've seen Esther as this woman of faith.

Esther exercising courage, exercising wisdom to ensure that Haman is really shown to be who he is in all his wickedness.

Haman's been exposed in all his wickedness in his desire to see the destruction of the Jews in every province of the empire.

When Esther revealed Haman, the one who plotted to destroy our people, we see that when she revealed that to the king, she showed a boldness, a courage, a strength.

And her faith was rewarded. The king took her side. And the king made sure that Haman was executed. But there was a problem.

[3 : 48] There was still a problem to be resolved. There was a mountain still to be crossed. The law that the king had earlier passed, the law regarding the destruction of the Jewish people on a particular day and 11 months from the time that that law was passed, that law couldn't be revoked.

It couldn't be changed. It was still in the statute book. So how was that law going to be dealt with? How were the Jewish people going to be saved if that law was still to be carried out?

It seemed impossible. It seemed impossible to change the fate, as it were, of the Jewish people. But Esther doesn't sink into despair.

Esther will act at a particular time that was required. To ensure that the Lord's people would be protected. And so we might say then that Esther's now calling the shots.

Mordecai is going to be replaced. She's ensuring that Mordecai, her wise cousin, is going to replace Haman in a position of great authority in the land. And that action, the action of appointing Mordecai, is going to be seen in all its consequences for good.

[5 : 04] We'll see that in a moment. But then as she comes before the king, we see her true nature, as it were. We see Esther's heart truly involved in the desire to save the Lord's people.

And we see that in the way that the author here describes how she comes before the king. She's weeping. She's weeping profusely.

She's falling at the king's feet. She's pleading for the king to authorize action that's going to avert this holocaust. And the way that she speaks reveals her emotional distress at what Haman had decreed.

She's showing an emotional response to the injustice and wickedness that was there written in the Empire Statute. And her tears, they're real tears.

And her heart truly is sore. And she's no cold observer of evil. Her emotions are absolutely integral to her desire for justice, for the sake of the Lord and for the sake of his people.

[6 : 17] Now, there's an important lesson, I think, that we can see here in Esther's emotional response. And surely it's this. You're a believer. If you know the Lord Jesus as your saviour, if you're going to respond to evil, whether it's the sin within your own heart, whether it's the sin within our own land, surely there has to be that emotional response.

Surely there has to be these genuine tears of sorrow. Surely there has to be that heart breaking at recognising all that's an offence to a holy God, even when we harbour within ourselves indwelling sin.

I think, for example, when you hear, when you see of actions, words and actions that are being uttered to carry out, to challenges against God's law.

When we see and hear of actions that are designed to eliminate the cause of the gospel in our land, surely there has to be in your heart and in my heart an emotional response, an emotional response that cries to the Lord to have mercy upon us as a nation.

After the service, we're going to have a time of prayer. I'm going to ask the elders to lead us in prayer. And surely even within the elders' hearts, within our own hearts, for all who are gathered in that time of prayer, that we have that emotional response, that emotional reaction of the heart that truly cries out to the Lord for his mercy towards us.

[7 : 55] Because otherwise, we're simply going to have hearts that are cold and detached before the God of all grace. And ask yourself, as I have to ask myself, even when we see in all that's happening in the world in relation to the cause of the gospel, all that seeks to undermine the cause of truth, am I simply going to respond with a heart that's so cold and detached from the ways of the world?

Well, Esther, as we see in Esther, she certainly didn't have a heart that was cold and detached to the wickedness that was there in the land.

Esther displayed that emotion of grief at the thought of evil being inflicted on our people. And of course, as we see in Esther and her emotional response, above all, we have to look to the Lord Jesus in his emotional response to sin.

It's particularly in Jesus' emotional response to the sin of rejection of his name and of Jesus as Lord and Savior. Listen again to the emotion of Jesus' voice, of his heart, as Jesus cried out in grief over the people of Jerusalem, when Jerusalem, the people of Jerusalem rejected him.

You read in Matthew 23 to 37, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it.

[9 : 32] How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings? And you would not. Think of the emotion, you know, the emotion of weeping, of pleading with God for his deliverance, for God to bring about salvation in the hearts of our loved ones.

Think of the emotions that you expend, that I expend, even in calling upon God for his mercy, his saving grace, to be upon those whom we love, who related to friends, colleagues.

Again, ask yourself. Each one of us ask ourselves who call upon the name of God. When was the last time that you truly did weep in your heart as you called upon God for his mercy to be upon a loved one?

Jesus wept. Jesus wept when he pled with his father to save him in his hour of sin-bearing. You read in Hebrews 5, verse 7, that in the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications

with loud cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death.

He was heard because of his reverence. You know, it's all too easy to hide behind a mask. Not a physical mask, we're doing that all the time.

[10:59] But to hide behind a mask of respectability for the things of the gospel. And yet at the same time, we can be so cold when it comes to just abandoning any kind of emotional response when we call upon God for his mercy.

Even when we see evil around us, evil, when we know the evil within our own hearts. And while we are, are called to such reality. But Esther, Esther had that correct response to the things that she was so concerned of regarding.

And she showed that response by her tears that reflected the grief within her heart. And I pray that, yes, we truly do weep with Esther. When we weep in regard to all that's contrary to the truth of God's word as we see all around us.

So the emotional response of Esther. But then secondly, decisive action that we see in regards to Mordecai. You see, Esther, in fact, actually shows more than just an emotional response to the crisis that was facing her and her people.

Esther showed wisdom. How did she show that? She showed wisdom in delegating to someone else, delegating to Mordecai, the particular details of the action that had to take place in order for her people to be saved.

[12:33] Esther had played her part. Esther had pleaded before the king. Esther had come before the king to plead for her people. But she knew that wasn't sufficient. There had to be a wise way of ensuring that the Lord's people were to be saved.

And Esther knew that that wise dealing would come from her cousin Mordecai, this man of wisdom. So Esther, in her wisdom, she shows leadership.

She delegates to Mordecai the particular details as to how the plan is to be carried out to save the Lord's people. And this is Mordecai.

Remember, this is the man who just a short time before was doomed to die at the hands of Haman because he defended Haman. But the same man who just moments before seemed to be heading towards the gallows.

He's now exercising wisdom to ensure that he and his people would have life. The man who was condemned to die is the same man who's going to ensure that life is given to his people.

[13:46] And we're told in verse 9 that we read there that because of his now new responsibilities and his authority as second in command of the empire, that Mordecai ensures that the royal secretaries write out his orders in the name of the king.

So Mordecai's taken decisive action. He's done so to protect his people. He's not going to hesitate to ensure that the people, the Jewish people, are going to be protected.

And he's showing, again, we have to say, strong, courageous action. Let's probe a little more as to that particular action.

When we look at the details, we might think, as we were reading them to our modern 21st century ear, that the details as to how the Jewish people are going to be protected seem very cruel even, seem almost violent, excessive, barbaric even.

But the more that we look at the details, the more we realise the wisdom in them. Because the orders that are to be carried out, the orders on the order of Mordecai, they're a mirror image of the orders that Haman had sent out against the Jews.

[15:11] You see that in chapter 3, verse 11. What Haman had decreed against the Jews is going to be countered by Mordecai's decree against the enemies of the Jews.

Then, secondly, we see that the Jews were actually given authority to protect themselves. So, in other words, this is a decree of self-defence.

The Jews weren't going to initiate any attacks on their enemies. The Jews had many enemies in the empire. We see that in the next chapter. But Mordecai in his gracious concern for his people, Mordecai gives them the right to protect themselves, to protect the men, the women, the children, from those who were still intent in carrying out Haman's evil plans.

Then we can also say this, that grace was in action. Because Mordecai had every right to ensure that his people would be protected from evil.

And this, of course, was a constant in Israel's history. Because as Israel, as a nation, stood against her enemies.

[16:26] Israel had many enemies who were out to destroy her, to destroy her worship, her true worship, and to replace that worship with pagan, idolatrous worship. And the whole matter of resisting evil, well, it's a constant in the struggle of righteousness against evil.

Because sin must be punished. Evil must be destroyed. And so from the perspective of God's chosen people, there was every justification for Mordecai's plan to defend the people, to seek to be strong and courageous against those who had that evil intent against them.

And so the Jewish people, they're promised the gift of deliverance from the hand of evil. Decisive actions taking place. This man who, as we said moments ago, had stared death in the face, but he's now rejoicing in the promise of life.

I mean, even what we read in the chapter of Mordecai, his sackcloth being replaced by royal robes, indicates the change in his status, indicates that the one who had faced death is now rejoicing in life.

That life-changing status given to him. We have a saviour. We have a saviour who didn't only stare death in the face, but experienced death for us.

[18:00] He paid the price for your salvation. The Lord Jesus Christ, he endured death, and he rejoiced in life, in life, in his resurrection from death.

The Lord Jesus, robed in clothes of majesty. And we again say, as we need to say so often, the wonder upon wonder that the Lord Jesus has clothed his people, clothed you who are in him, clothed you with his robe of righteousness.

So that you have that royal status as a child of God. You're an heir of God and a fellow heir with the Lord Jesus. You've got that promise of a heavenly inheritance forever there in the Lord's presence. And that's the reward of faith for all who are in Christ. That royal status that's been given to you as a result of the decisive action of God when God the Father sent his one and only Son at just the right time for your salvation.

So give praise, give thanks that a greater than Mordecai came, that a greater than Mordecai acted in decisive love and grace for the protection of his people from the consequences of sin.

[19:27] Jesus came as our great protector. Yes, the penalty of death was hanging over us. We were looking death in the face. The grace of salvation came defeating the power of sin and to bring to each and every one who are Christ's, to bring you into his eternal safety, his eternal presence.

And you who know that deliverance, rejoice, rejoice on earth and rejoice with the Lord's people, even rejoice with those in heaven who are rejoicing over sin or saved.

You know, it's that theme of rejoicing that, well, we see in the last part of this chapter, the expression of joy there in that citadel of Susa, the joyful action, the joyful action of the people.

As we read in these last verses that Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white with a great golden crown and a robe of fine linen and purple and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced.

The Jews had life, and I'm going to focus on these words in a moment, the Jews had life and gladness and joy and honor. And in every province and in every city wherever the king's command and his edict reached, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday.

[20:51] And many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews for fear of the Jews had fallen on them. So what do we read here? We read of celebration in that city, in that citadel.

Celebration because of what the people have heard in regard to Mordecai's law. And we're told, in fact, the non-Jewish citizens of Susa, they're rejoicing.

There's great joy amongst them. And the very fact that Mordecai now has this position of authority, that transformation is reflected in the joy that the people have.

Because just a short time before, we read earlier in chapter 3, we read there of the people of the city, they're bewildered at the law that was passed to bring about the execution of every Jew.

Even the non-Jews were perplexed at that law. But now there's a transformation in this city. And look at the responses. Look at the reaction, the reaction of particularly of the Jewish people.

[22:05] Yes, they still have a death sentence hanging over them because the law still stands, Haman's law still stands. But Mordecai has ensured that the Jewish people are going to be armed and prepared and able to defeat their attackers.

And we might say that the Jewish people respond with great joy. And particularly these four expressions that relate to that great exaltation, they had light and gladness and joy and honour.

Because before were all the opposites. Instead of light there was darkness. Instead of gladness there was gloom. Instead of joy there was despondency.

Instead of honour there was dishonour. Now there's that transformation because of the actions of Esther and Mordecai all under the sovereign control of God.

Let's just look more closely then and what the author here tells us of the response of the Jewish people. We're told they had light. They had light. It's that picture that light gives us of rejoicing, yes.

[23 : 18] But the picture that light gives tells of a greater light. A greater light that was prophesied concerning the light of Christ's presence, the light of the Messiah to come.

And Jesus quoted from Isaiah the prophet regarding the promise of his light to come. You read in Matthew 4, 16 The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death on them a light has dawned.

Lord Jesus, Lord Jesus, for whom the darkness of sin couldn't overpower, who couldn't overcome. Well, the light of his love, the light of his grace, the light of his presence, of course, the light of his victory over sin, that light, of course, was seen supremely on the cross.

Remember, after these three hours of darkness in the land, Jesus cried out in triumph, it is finished. The darkness of sin overcome and the light of Christ's victory affirmed.

Well, the Jews in Susa, the Jews there had light in their hearts as they heard the news of their impending protection against their enemies. And if you're in Christ by faith, well, you shine, you shine with the light of salvation.

[24 : 47] You shine with that light in your heart and rejoice at the good news that Christ has won for you that victory over sin and that you have been saved from impending death.

Well, the Jews had light, light at the knowledge of their deliverance, their salvation. But we're told also that they had gladness and joy. Before, there was just sadness and despondency when they realized or heard that their annihilation as a people was to be carried out.

But now there's happiness. Now there's thanksgiving and rejoicing at this great turnaround in events. Pray that there's a transformation in your heart as you're reminded again of the deliverance that's yours in Christ.

And you're reminded of that great salvation that he won for you, even in giving of his life for you. It's that emotion of joy that David the psalmist, he cried out when we read in Psalm 30, verse 11, you've turned for me my mourning into dancing.

You've loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness. The Jews, they had light, gladness, and joy. And then we're told that they had honor, honor.

[26 : 17] And this word that's used here actually indicates something very precious. And of course, what was precious to them was their very lives. And you who are in Christ, you have an honor, you have that honor as a believer in Christ.

You have been given that which is of true value, true worth, true, that's of true precious value, and that's life. Your life in Christ, eternal life.

Because there's nothing more honorable, nothing more precious than to be counted within the flock of the Lord Jesus, to have and to know that you have eternal life within his family, within the kingdom.

And you know that honor that's yours has nothing to do with yourselves, nothing within yourself, but it's all of Christ. Life and gladness and joy and honor.

I pray that's your testimony this evening. You know, as you're reflecting on the deliverance that's yours in Christ, rejoice. I mean, the Jews there in Susa, they rejoiced, they had an emotional rejoice and an emotional response at the news of their imminent deliverance.

[27 : 37] I pray that you have a spirit of rejoicing in your heart. As you reflect in that great deliverance that the Lord Jesus has won for you in his defeat of sin and Satan and the cross, even in his victory over the power of death.

What if you don't express and have such rejoicing? What if instead of light and gladness and joy and honor, there's darkness and sadness and misery and dishonor?

well, Jesus tells us of that eternal prospect for all who don't have that light and rejoicing of heart in him.

Jesus tells us of the eternal prospect of eternal separation from him. He tells us of that place of separation, that place called hell.

Or as he says, there'll be the outer darkness. In that place there'll be weeping and gnashing of teeth. it's not the weeping that we heard earlier of Esther and our emotional response in relation to the saving of our people.

[28 : 46] That weeping will be the weeping over sin, over sin that was never confessed, sin that was never repented of. I pray there's none of you watching on with us this evening for whom that place is in your heart, that place is that place of prospect, that place of outer darkness, that place that's without the light of Christ, without the light of God's love.

I pray there'll be rejoicing, rejoicing in your coming to know the Lord Jesus and coming to have that joy in your heart, knowing that when you confess your sins that he's faithful and just to forgive your sins, to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

you will have that rejoicing in your heart when you respond to him, yes, with tears, tears of joy, that you respond to him in gladness, in rejoicing, knowing that you're safe, safe for all eternity, that the punishment, the punishment of death which you faced was taken by the Lord Jesus and that you who are in him declared not guilty as he took your place in the cross.

And may you then have that response of action, that you have that response of decisive action to serve him, to glorify him, and that you exercise that action as unto the Lord for his name and for his sake, and that you'll act in obedience to that call that he gives you to live for him, to glorify him. to serve him. Amen. Let us pray. Our Lord, our God, our Heavenly Father, we pray that you will have mercy upon us.

[30 : 42] Be with us, Lord, in all our ways. Help us, we pray, to honour and glorify your name, that you will have the glory, that you will have that honour truly that is yours.

Lord, hear us as we continue in worship before you now. Bless us each one, we pray for the forgiveness of our many sins. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

Amen. Thank you.