

ESTHER

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Preacher: Debbie Gould

[0 : 00] Our Father and our Lord, we thank you for your word. We ask now that as we look at it a little more closely, Lord, might you by your spirit speak to each and every one of us.

Might you help me be clear in what it is that you wish to speak today. Amen. Well, Esther.

I think many people actually think that Esther is a little bit like a fairy tale, but let me tell you a fairy tale it is not. There is, though, a young girl who wins the King's Beauty Pageant that is similar to a TV show that some of you might have seen, The Bachelor, on TV.

There is lust, there is sex, there is power, there is greed, there is money, there is deceit. Practically all of the seven deadly sins are mentioned here in this story.

And we wonder, how is that? Why is that? Well, we come to our second message from Esther. And last week, Steve left us with the question, what if?

[1 : 13] What if Queen Vashti didn't stand her ground? What if the king was a strong character and was wise in all the decisions he made? What if Esther wasn't chosen as queen?

What if Mordecai had brought Esther up to actually share the fact that she was a Jew in the society that she was in? What if?

Well, today's passage is no different. And we can continue to ask the what if question. Now, I have been quite disturbed as I've been reading Esther and reading the various commentaries on Esther. In fact, at times, I have felt quite angry, felt the anger rising up in me. I have felt self-righteous at some of the stupidity that occurs in this story.

And then, I have to actually realise that I too make foolish decisions. I too hide the fact that I belong to Jesus sometimes.

[2 : 25] I too am silent when I need to speak and sometimes I speak when I need to be silent. Well, there is much for us to learn.

And we learn here at the end of chapter 2 that there is dissension within the gates where the king's guards are.

What their exact problem is, we don't know. We can guess, but we don't know. But it's a big enough problem for these two characters that we read about to plan to kill the king.

No mean feat. Mordecai, Esther's cousin, we read, is at the king's gate. And that tells us that Mordecai holds some sort of political office.

Since it's at the king's gate that most of the official business takes place. Now, whilst at the gate, Mordecai learns of the plot to kill the king.

[3 : 29] And he tells Esther so that she can warn the king. Now, that is all investigated. And it's found to be true. And so, the king has the two guards killed for their attempt and their discussions to do so.

The fact that Mordecai at this stage is not rewarded will be taken up in a couple of weeks by Steve. But it would have been a normal thing for him to have been rewarded for the knowledge of protecting the king.

It does, though, remain an important point, even though we're not going to discuss it. And yet again, we want to ask the what if. What if Mordecai did not hear about the plot against the king?

Or what if Mordecai was rewarded right at the time of actually sending the message via Esther to the king to warn him of the assassination? What is the purpose of the Lord to have this scene within this story?

Well, they're questions we need to leave for a little later. So, we are going to come to chapter 3. And when we come to chapter 3, there's been four years between the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3.

[4 : 53] And we see here that Haman is elevated by the king. Not Mordecai, as we would have thought, but that's for another day.

But let me tell you a little bit about Haman, because this is really important. We learned in chapter 2 that Mordecai was a descendant of King Saul.

Haman, who is the antagonist in this story, the arch-nemesis of Mordecai and the Israelite people, is an Agagite.

He was a descendant of Agag. Who was Agag? He was the king of the Amalekites during the time of Saul.

Now, the descendants of the Amalekites were always at war with the Israelites. One of the more famous battles is in Exodus 17, where the Israelites were winning against the Amalekites, only as long as Moses kept his staff raised in the air, and eventually Joshua and Caleb actually had to help hold his arm up so that they would win the battle.

[6 : 10] In the period of the Judges, we read again and again of the Amalekites and the many troubles that they caused Israel. And finally, in 1 Samuel 15, we read of a deadly serious story.

King Saul is to attack the Amalekites and put them all to death, young and old, including all the animals. But King Saul does not obey God.

Instead, he takes the best animals for himself, which he tries to excuse by saying he will sacrifice them to the Lord. But aside from the animals, King Saul allows the king of the Amalekites to live.

And who was that king? That was King Agag. Then the prophet Samuel comes and confronts Saul with his sin, and then Samuel goes and kills King Agag himself.

But apparently, some of Agag's children escape. Because 600 years later, we come across Haman the Agagite.

[7 : 31] Haman, the descendant of King Agag. He certainly remembers what has happened to his family in the past at the hands of the Israelites.

And he is out for bloody revenge. Now, coming back to Esther here, we now see that Haman is elevated and the king orders that everyone is to bow before Haman in honour.

Now, this is nothing more than just showing respect to somebody in this position. It would be the same as us bowing or curtsying before the queen if she actually came to visit us.

But there is one who refuses to bow. Now, don't make a mistake and think that Mordecai is not bowing because it has something to do with his religious beliefs.

That is not the case. Mordecai knows only too well that Haman is an Agagite. And he would know that they were the arch enemies of the people of God.

[8 : 48] Mordecai's refusal to bow may have well been just totally out of bitterness and hatred of the Amalekites. Now, so often we become bitter and twisted because of past events.

That we hold on to the bitterness and the anger and we refuse to hand that over to Jesus. How often in arguments, if any of you argue, that maybe you bring up things that have happened in the past into a current argument of today.

I certainly have been guilty of that and I have needed to repent of it. Or we may follow what we have been taught by our parents or society to follow a hatred or a racism that has been passed down to us.

We want justice because we are sinful people. And if we don't get the same justice that we think that we deserve, then we get angry and bitter.

But scripture tells us that there is only one just judge and that is Jesus. And he will be the one who will right every wrong.

[10 : 16] One Peter actually tells us, speaking of Jesus, when they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats.

Instead, he entrusted to the one who judges justly. And in Revelation, we learn of Jesus returning and making all things new.

The things that were seen to be unfair and unjust are going to be made new. What a day that will be.

Now, Mordecai shares his reason for not bowing to Haman with the officials that are trying to encourage him to bow. And just maybe he might have given the officials a history lesson, but the passage actually doesn't tell us that.

But we do see that the fact that what he actually said, what he shared, it was shared with Haman.

[11 : 19] And of course, the rage within Haman and the rage toward the people of Israel, God's people, grew exponentially.

That is what bitterness can do. The bitterness and the hatred could not be quenched by just killing Mordecai. We see Haman decide on the need for a genocide of the Jewish race.

A little over the top, one would think. And we see a king who we have already seen to be outrageous and over the top and lacking wisdom.

We see that he actually agrees with him. And yet, why are we, God's people, so constantly surprised when life gets tough?

Because scripture is very, very clear that it says that if we are the people of God and we are going to stand up for God, it is not going to be easy.

[12 : 30] You must go through many trials before we enter the kingdom of God. 2 Timothy says, do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, but join with me in the suffering for the gospel by the power of God.

Romans says, now if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. If indeed we share in his sufferings, in order that we may also share in his glory.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds. We are so slow to learn that the Christian life, we are to expect some tough times.

And surprisingly, or maybe not, this plan to destroy God's people is not a new thing. Throughout history, and even today, there has always been attempts to kill God's people, or at least to silence them.

The ultimate being the crucifixion of Jesus, our Saviour, which was meant to be a win for evil, of which we know it was the greatest win for God's people and for God.

[13 : 50] Is God sovereign at all times throughout history? Is God aware of what is happening here in Esther?

Is he at work? Nothing is said of God here in Esther. But we see his hand working time and time again.

Look with me at verse 7. Verse 7 says, In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month, the month of Nisan, they cast the purr, that is the lot, in the presence of Haman, to select a day and a month.

And the lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of Adar. Now the purr is the lot. It's a set of dice, or die is the word, but it seems so odd to say it's a set of die.

But anyway, these die don't have dots on them like ours do. They rather would have inscriptions of prayers for good luck on them.

[14 : 56] And probably they had a board with all the months written on it, and whatever month the purr would land on, that is the month that they would choose.

And typically the same answer would have to come three times in a row to be considered as a valid answer. Now they were casting lots because the Persian religious system stressed fate and chance.

They were very superstitious. Little did they realise, though, that the God who created all things and controls all events was also in control of lot casting.

Proverbs 16 says, The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord. The lot fell, and we see here on the twelfth month.

So that's about one year away. No accident, that one year. In verse 8, we see Haman exploiting his access and his intimacy with the king.

[16 : 08] He goes in to share his plan with him. Haman makes two statements here. First, he says that there's a people dispersed all over the kingdom with different customs.

This is true. And it is not a bad thing. In fact, there were hundreds of people like this. Remember, it's a massive area. The Persians prided themselves on their diversity.

They were the melting pot of the ancient Near East. But secondly, he accuses the Israelites, these people, of failing to obey the king's laws.

This was, on the most part, just an outright lie. Haman says that the solution is to kill all the Israelites throughout the empire.

This would include those over in Israel who were trying to rebuild the temple. The king would be better off, Haman says, if they were all exterminated.

[17 : 18] But note that Haman apparently doesn't even name the race of the people involved. He just calls them a certain people. He continues in verse 9 and he says, Haman, because of his position, had become extremely rich.

The 10,000 talents was a huge amount. Now, Haman, of course, is not stupid. Well, we might question that.

But on this money side of it, he's not stupid. He knows that when he exterminates the Jews, he'll get much more than 10,000 talents of silver to replace what he has paid to the king if the king takes it. How is that? Well, in the law at this time, if you accuse someone of a crime and they are found guilty and were put to death, you've got to keep all of their land and their possessions.

Pretty amazing. Haman knows this, so this is a business venture for him. He is a venture capitalist looking to make some easy money along with getting the revenge that he so desperately is wanting.

[18 : 55] Does the king take the bait? You betcha, because he's a very unwise king. Verse 10 says, So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman, son of Hamadatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.

Xerxes, as always, is easily influenced by his officials. And he doesn't even investigate the accusations. He doesn't even know that his own wife is part of this whole deal.

And of course, once again, he shows no concern for anyone but himself. He disregards all the people that will be killed and he doesn't seem to care.

Both Haman and the king would profit from this as they were going to do the plundering of the Israelites, as we see when they draft the edict.

In verse 12, it says, Then on the 19th day of the first month of the royal secretaries was summoned. They wrote out in the script of each province and in the language of each of the people all Haman's orders to the king's satraps, the governors of the various provinces and the nobles of the various peoples.

[20 : 22] These were written in the name of King Xerxes himself and sealed with his own ring. The edict is sent out on the 13th day of the month of Adar and to plunder their goods.

The edict is sent out on the 13th day of the first month. Ironically, or is it coincidentally, or is it the sovereign Lord's hand at work?

This is the eve of the Passover, which is held on the 14th day of the first month, the month of Nisan. The Passover, you will remember, was a holiday for the Jews, celebrating when they were delivered from destruction at the hand of the Egyptians.

So just as they are celebrating their freedom and deliverance, they receive news that the government plans to annihilate them.

The decree was dispatched in March of 474 BC. Both sides had a whole year to get ready for this.

[21 : 55] The decree is not telling all the people that they can kill the Israelites. Rather, it's telling them what the military is going to be doing in a year from now.

So be warned and don't be scared, unless, of course, you're an Israelite. There was a sense of uncertainty for a whole year.

Verse 15 says, The edict bewildered and perplexed the people of Susa.

Apparently, such a decree had never come from the royal court before. Haman's bloodthirstiness, along with King Xerxes' seeming indifference to such atrocities, appeared incredible, even to the sophisticated society, which was used to cruel behaviour.

You would understand if the question, you would understand if the question the people of God were asking was, where is God here? Has he abandoned us and forgotten about them?

[23 : 27] Now, God had promised on Mount Sinai, back in Exodus 17, to protect Israel, and that he would be at war for them in every generation, with their enemies, and especially against the Amalekites.

So now the Israelites would be asking themselves, do God's promises still stand? Will he still fight for us against Haman, the Amalekite?

Would God keep his part of the covenant, even though they had failed theirs? Was the covenant even in effect anymore?

Even when all the cards are stacked against us, and there seems to be no hope, will God prove himself faithful and powerful against all odds?

Those are the questions. Those are the questions that the rest of the story will answer. And when we see the answers, we will learn that God is sovereign at all times, in all ways.

[24 : 52] If you ever have to face a crisis, or if you are facing a crisis right now, you may be wondering, what is God doing?

Or, has God forgotten me? The rest of Esther will tell us that God has not forgotten. He sees what his people are going through.

And it is as Jesus said in Matthew chapter 10, Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from the Father's will.

But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear, therefore. You are more value than many sparrows. God knows.

God sees. He has not forgotten or overlooked his people. He has not overlooked you. He will take care of his children.

[26 : 00] Amen.