

ESTHER

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[0 : 00] If you're new here this morning or you've had a bit of a gap in what's been happening here in the last couple of weeks, we've been following the story of Esther. She's the young orphan Jewish woman who becomes the queen of Persia, the greatest empire in the world at that particular time.

It all turns bad for God's people when the crazed Haman, the bloke who we just saw in God's word just then, has all the people, the Jews, that is God's people throughout the whole empire of Persia, condemned to be annihilated because Mordecai, the other guy in the passage which was just read out then, wouldn't acknowledge how important he was.

Last week we saw that Esther risked everything in her life in her palace, her own life in fact, to work to save God's people.

You could have walked away from last week thinking that it's all about to work out now for God's people. A saviour has arisen.

But so far, Esther hasn't done a whole lot. She said she's got to go to the king and she's been to king once and, you know, let's have dinner. That's about it, really.

[1 : 16] The clock was still ticking towards that deadline of annihilation. And what we discover from what was just read out to us now is that there is a separate clock ticking, and that is for Mordecai's own fate, a fate that Esther herself and Mordecai and Xerxes were just oblivious to.

The edicts against the Jews had several months to run, but Haman's determination to execute Mordecai required only hours to run.

And again, we see here God is silent, but he is sovereignly at work through the ordinary, and in fact, I'm not sure if you picked it up as you were saying we're through there, through the ridiculous situation that we find ourselves in in chapter 6.

What I want to do today, though, is I want to really sort of plan to take a look at this villain of the whole story, this guy named Haman. I want to focus particularly on him.

Haman would have to be one of the most vivid and sustained case studies in the whole Bible about what the Bible says about pride and what happens when pride rages unchecked.

[2 : 38] So this is not an overstatement. It's important for you to listen, because it might just save your life. That's not an overstatement.

Haman has the highest position in the king's administration. Xerxes, in fact, has to command people to kneel down and to honour Haman.

It's a pretty odd thing to command, to make such a command in what is a hierarchical and a traditional society, where bowing is instinctive for position.

And so Haman must have been a particularly obnoxious individual for the king to have to command people to bow in front of him. And one man, despite the king's command, wouldn't do it.

Mordecai. We see that, first of all, back in chapter 3. But if we fast forward to chapter 5, verse 9, our text today, we see Haman is leaving a dinner party he's just had with Xerxes and Esther, and he's fairly pleased with himself.

[3 : 48] It says, Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and he went home.

And the next verses reveal that he didn't just leave the banquet in high spirits because of the effect of alcohol in his system.

He was also leaving because of the intoxicating impact of self-importance. At the end of verse 10, it says, He goes home from that moment.

He calls together his friends and his wife. And Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king has honoured him and how he has elevated him above the other nobles and officials.

And that's not all, Haman says. I am the only person that Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave.

[5 : 05] And she's invited me along with the king tomorrow. But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate.

Haman's whole world revolved around his fragile ego. His emotional strings were being pulled by his idol when he saw Mordecai.

And his strings, the emotional idol, his attachment here is his public recognition, his public respect. And when that idol was being fed by the masses, he felt good.

But when it was challenged, it led him ultimately to anger and malice. And so when his ego is dented by this guy Mordecai having left the palace, he immediately goes home to pump up his ego. He gathers his friends around. He gathers his wife and tells them how many sons he's got, like his wife doesn't know that, or how much money he's got, or how much power he has.

[6 : 08] He goes on this lengthy monologue of how great he is. It's ridiculous. And pride, according to the Bible, is concentration on the self.

C.S. Lewis gave a great definition, his little book, Christian Behavior. He wrote, Pride is a ruthless, sleepless, unsmiling concentration on the self.

Pride makes you concentrate everything about you. You don't get into relationships. You don't take a job or a role.

You don't do anything unless it makes you feel good about yourself. Whatever makes you happy is a statement of pride.

Pride's the goal. Pride is what drives that statement. Nothing is about the thing that you're doing. Everything is about you. And so Lewis writes that pride is essentially competitive.

[7 : 25] Pride gets no pleasure out of getting something, but only in having more of it than the next person. Pride turns everything as a means to an end.

You never do things for their own sake. It's a means to an end of getting respect and approval. That is, pride is about image management. And that's the reason why Haman can have all that he has. He can walk out of a banquet with Xerxes and Esther, and he finds no satisfaction, as long as this Jew Mordecai is still alive.

Mordecai will not give him the very thing he craves, recognition. And that's why I think Lewis is right when he says that pride is sleepless, and it's unsmiling.

It's sleepless because it results in an endless ego calculation. And it's unsmiling because you're never happy because you're not getting it.

[8 : 40] Am I getting the thanks I deserve? Am I getting the appreciation I deserve? How am I being regarded? How does this make me look? Now, there are two forms of pride.

There is the superiority form of pride. It's generally recognised as a pride by most people. That is, when you see it, you see it. It's acknowledgeable.

You know, mention names like Donald Trump. He's never been called a humble man. Things like that. I mean, it sticks out. Superiority form of pride. There's another form of pride. It's the inferiority form of pride.

And this is where you are down on yourself and you don't like yourself. You're very self-conscious and always beating yourself up. Now, the inferiority form of pride is doing exactly the same thing as superiority form of pride.

It's just that you don't score yourself as well. You're always looking at yourself. You're always assessing yourself. You just don't score as well. And so humility is not thinking less of yourself it is thinking of yourself less.

[9 : 53] Humility is not thinking less of yourself it is thinking of yourself less. Humility is not being needy or driven for approval and recognition and respect.

And if you actually met a truly humble person you wouldn't come away thinking they were humble. You were just thinking they were incredibly happy and were just interested in you.

Humble persons not thinking about themselves and how they're being treated or how they're being looked at. That is, the ego calculation is not there. Am I being recognised? Now, pride can be a little bit embarrassing and a little bit awkward like I think it might have been to listen to Haman's monologue but, you know, how bad could it really be?

Very bad. Very bad. Haman wasn't just satisfied with killing Mordecai and therefore forcing him to bow. He wanted to annihilate all the Jews in the empire.

Pride leads to devastation it leads to destruction. It is deadly. Pride makes you evil. Pride is what the devil is what made the devil the devil.

[11 : 20] Since St. Augustine Christian theology has acknowledged that pride is not just one sin amongst many but really is in fact the root sin below them all.

C.S. Lewis again writes Pride leads us to every other vice. It is the complete anti-God state of mind. It is the essential vice the utmost evil unchastity anger greed drunkenness are mere flea bites in comparison.

So for instance some of us maybe even many of us struggle a heap with bitterness towards people because of what they've done for us in the past. But you cannot stay angry and bitter with someone unless you feel superior to that person.

That's what C.S. Lewis is saying it's the root pride's the root. There is no bitterness without pride. Pride says I would never do that.

And if your life is distorted by anger it's because pride is the root of it. Pride leads to being opinionated but it also leads to being indecisive.

[12 : 35] Pride makes you shy but it also makes you too abrasive. There is racism and social injustice and imperialism they all come from pride a racial pride or a class pride which results in all kinds of evil.

Pride makes you evil. Pride also makes you a fool. Haman didn't pick up at all that three was a crowd. Would that not have been awkward?

Going to the queen's banquet just just the three of you? Pride makes you a fool. Pride keeps you from ever learning from your mistakes.

A proud heart is always justifying itself. When relationships are going bad or the job isn't working out it's always something or someone else's fault.

When you're angry it's always someone else's fault the reason why you're angry. Humble people aren't always standing on their own dignity. They can actually laugh at themselves.

[13 : 38] They can learn. And when something goes wrong they look for what they might have contributed. What they might have even if it's not mainly their fault. They find the part that they need to own to learn from it and grow.

And proud people don't just learn not learn from mistakes in general they don't learn from criticism in particular. One of the best ways to grow is to take criticism.

The superior type of pride dismisses criticism because who are you to tell me how I need to improve? the inferiority form of pride means you get so melted down with criticism that people are too scared to say anything to you without a good box of tissues.

You never learn anything and so therefore you constantly make bad choices like Haman does here and you surround yourselves with the wrong advisors like Haman does here.

what is particularly difficult is that pride hides itself. Pride is the carbon monoxide of sin it's the sin that hides itself it kills you without you even knowing it's happening the more proud you are the more you are in its clutches and the less proud you think you are because the more you will see it in other people.

[15 : 21] Lewis again writes I pointed out a moment ago that the more pride one had the more one disliked pride in others.

In fact if you want to find out how proud you are the easiest way is to ask yourself how much do I dislike it when other people snub me or refuse to take any notice of me or patronise me or show off. Now many people hate snobs but you can only hate snobs if you feel superior to snobs. Hating snobbery is a form of snobbery.

Do you look down your nose at people who look down their nose? Do you do that? I mean you know so far we're 15 minutes into this.

Have you been mainly thinking about someone else? Have you at all thought about another individual? Maybe in this room maybe not in this room. it takes a certain amount of pride to come this far through a message like this and to be mainly thinking about someone else.

[16 : 47] things. And that leads me to one more deadliness associated with pride and that is that pride I think there is no pride like religious pride.

Religiosity can kill greed off to a certain degree. It can kill lust off to a certain degree and a whole lot of other sins to a certain degree.

that is it can put external constraints on you but religion makes pride worse. Religion might subdue a range of sins but it's like throwing petrol on the fire of pride.

Just to be told that God is great and that you need to obey him doesn't decrease pride in your life at all. Jonathan Edwards in his lecture on humility in charity and its fruits says that I think this is what he says the language is a little bit difficult but I'm pretty sure this is what he says that to know that there is a great infinite God of justice does not create humility because either you will try to live up to that God's standards and become self-righteous and a Pharisee or you will feel like you can't live up to those standards and it will crush you but that still makes you proud because either way you're absorbed in yourself religion will either make you feel more self-consciously a failure or it will make you feel so much more superior to everyone else that's what religion does and it's deadly everywhere in the

Bible we are told that pride goes before a fall both James and Peter in James 4 and 1 Peter 5 both warn us that God opposes the proud which is exactly what we see here in the life of Haman and we start seeing it in chapter 6 in the beginning of chapter 6 Haman is coming to see Xerxes Haman isn't just satisfied with killing Mordecai he wants to make a public spectacle of Mordecai he wants to show everyone that ultimately Mordecai will bow to him he has spent the night building this huge pole in a public place because he is surrounding himself by morons of advisors who say yeah go and build a big pole and now he's coming to King Xerxes to ask for special permission to have Mordecai on that pole hung on that pole and while this has been going on the poles being built [19:49] Xerxes can't sleep we're not told why can't sleep maybe it's the construction noise from the 75 foot pole going on that's keeping him awake but we're not told that now bear in mind that Xerxes has a harem of the most beautiful women in the empire he has the choicest food the choicest wine he has dances he doesn't have foxtel but he has endless options of entertainment and while he's awake in the middle of night he says bring the AGM minutes and read them to me idiot unless of course he's thinking this is going to put me to sleep read me the tax act and so he's got someone there reading him the AGM minutes records all that his life has done and he gets the minutes that records that

Mordecai has saved his life from assassination and he says so what did he get for reward no reward what do you mean he didn't get a reward it's a crisis hits in the early hours of the morning if word got out that Xerxes doesn't reward the people who save his life who's going to risk their life to save his life he ended up getting assassinated as it turns out he needs this whole gossip dobbing system to flourish for the sake of his own life and you can imagine this impulsive king jumping out of bed striding out of the royal chamber in the early dawn's light this admission from four years prior has to be rectified it has to be done right now but what do I do Xerxes isn't the sharpest tool in the shed what do I do he is helpless without his advisors so he asks his servant who's in the court immediate response no one's in the court do you see what time it is

Xerxes they're all asleep except for Mordecai he's building this take thing you know and Haman comes in at just that moment coincidence hang around I don't think so and Xerxes asks Haman what should for the man the king delights in and Haman desperately needing respect desperately needing approval desperately wanting the honor and the glory driven by a heart that is so absorbed in himself is thinking that the king could not possibly be thinking about anyone else but him unthinkable it must be me and so he comes up with the most fascinating proposal verse seven now bear in mind this is this is the highest this is the prime minister there's no one higher except the king himself in all the empire but it's not enough verse seven for the king delights in delights to honor have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden on one with a royal crest placed on its head that's the picture there of the king riding the horse on return from conquering another empire this is the picture of a conquering king riding a horse verse nine then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king's most noble princes that is let the greatest noble be given the position of a slave that leads the horse and that will show how much delight in this man and let them robe the man with the man the king delights to honor and this is a very significant thing here that he's put the robe on this man the robe that the king himself has worn very significant because in ancient times for the king to put the robe on someone is not just giving them a high position so for instance in

Genesis 41 when Pharaoh puts the robe on Joseph he's actually partaking in the king's position and when Jonathan gives his kingly robe to David in 1 Samuel 18 it's Jonathan's way of saying you should be king not me see what Mordecai is doing here sorry Haman is doing here very subtly and

very carefully he's committing an act of treason I want to be king I want to be king if I can't be king then I want you to say that I'm the person that you delight in more than anyone else I'm the one that usurks his love and I think Haman he is pretty excited he's probably thinking if the people saw that I am loved like that by someone as great as

Xerxes then they'll know and then I'll know my worth my value and then he says make sure this horse is and this person is led through the streets and make and this is what is done for the man the king delights to honor and someone once wrote the praise of the praiseworthy is above all rewards the praise the and so it's quite humorous but very sad and quite a shock for Haman when Xerxes says do that to Mordecai do that to Mordecai and you take the role of the servant leading the horse and yelling that out it's it's the most incredible reversal of fortunes

[26 : 37] Mordecai was literally hours from death if not even less than that he was about to be lifted up and impaled on this ridiculous stake and now instead he's going to be lifted up and honored and Haman thinking he's about to be lifted up and honored is now taking the role of a servant leading the horse and he's about to descend even more in coming chapters and this reversal of Mordecai and Haman signals the reversal of God's people in Esther God stands against the proud and in verse 12 Haman rushes home he covers his head with grief he is so mortified and his wife and his friends gather there say to him well actually we told you so without actually telling you so

I mean you're an idiot Haman of course he's going to he surrounds himself with foolish people if you humble yourself you will be exalted but if you exalt yourself you will be humbled that that's right through the Bible C.S.

Lewis wrote lose yourself to find it lose yourself to find it now that might seem strange but it works in everyday life in social life you you will never make a good impression on people unless you stop trying to make a good impression on people and the principle runs through life from top to bottom lose your life and you will save it this is a principle of the universe because it is the nature of the God who made the universe how do we know this is the nature of God Haman wanted the one thing we all want let's be frank here Haman wanted the one thing that we all want and that is someone of ultimate glory recognizing us and loving us what we need is this ultimate assurance of who we are we need ultimate assurance of our worth we need someone we think the world of loving us we need the praise of the praise worthy

Haman asked Xerxes for what we all want and what we all need he didn't actually ask for the wrong thing he asked the wrong king that rhymes he didn't actually ask for the wrong thing he asked the wrong king there is a better king there is a king with ultimate glory who came to earth and stripped himself of his glory why because he was swapping places with us Mordecai was saved because Haman swapped places with him but it wasn't voluntary Jesus does it voluntary there is the ultimate king there is the king of glory Jesus Christ is the king you can go to because of at infinite cost to himself he came to us and reverses places with us and so there in that act of the

Lord Jesus you have both the consequence for our pride and the cure for our pride 2 Corinthians 5 21 God made him sin who knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God Jesus Christ was stripped naked he was nailed to a stake for our sin so that we could be raised up and closed with his perfect righteousness Jesus takes what we deserve so that we get what he deserves and the consequence of this trade is quite staggering John chapter 17 there's a place where Jesus says in John 17 this about those who love and trust him he says father I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory the glory that you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world the father has given glory to

[31 : 28] Jesus his glory to Jesus and then Jesus says something remarkable in the same context he says I have given them the glory that you gave me it's unbelievable glory is not fairy dust glory is delight glory is honour and that's for those who follow Jesus that's what Jesus does for the people that he delights to honour he gives them his glory and Jesus says you must realise that the praise of the ultimate praise worthy the glory and honour and robes of the ultimate eternal king are yours through me and when you know that he loves you like that when you know that the horror of the cross was the cost of your pride and the solution to your pride that's the one two punch that the ego needs to make it finally self forgetful and at rest self forgetful and at rest see it's not enough just to say

I believe in God that doesn't make you humble what you have to see is God coming down reversing places with you at infinite cost to himself to know that he had to die for you humbles you to know that he had to die for you humbles you it helps you to see your pride your sin but on the other hand

to know that he was glad to die for you affirms you infinitely and if you see him doing that for you you'll be strong enough to be weak you'll be strong enough to be weak strong enough to learn from your mistakes strong enough to take jobs to get involved in relationships to serve others below what you think what your standing might be in a church and doing those things not because they make you feel good not because they pump up your ego but because they're right and finally you won't constantly be down on yourself or elevating yourself or frankly anything about yourself don't you want to be free don't you want to get rid of that ego that's sleepless that's unsmiling well I think it's having quoted from you so many times I think I'll let C.S. Lewis in fact have the last word this helps us he says in taking the first step towards this healing he said there I must stop if anyone would like to acquire humility I can I think tell him the first step the first step is to realize that one is proud and it's a biggish step too at least nothing whatever can be done before it if you think you're not conceited conceited it means that you're very conceited indeed