

Esther Pleads for Her People

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Date: 13 January 2013

Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[0 : 00] And just a quick word about Caber Faith, those of you who usually go to the group that meets in the Caber Faith. There'll be no meeting this Tuesday, please note there'll be no meeting this Tuesday, but it will resume, God willing, the following week, that's a weekend Tuesday, on the 22nd of January at 8pm in the Willow Suite of the Caber Faith Hotel.

And as always, if you know of anybody or if you are aware of anybody or if you yourself would like to start coming along to that as an introduction to the Christian faith by way of questions, answer, discussion in a totally informal atmosphere.

It's not a service or a meeting as such, it's more of a discussion and there's a simple question, answer with tea. You'll be more than welcome if you know of somebody who'd like to come along, even for one week.

It may be the kind of thing that you won't want to come to again, but even if you come for one week, you'll be very welcome. And so that's on Tuesday, that's starting a week on Tuesday at the Caber Faith at 8 o'clock.

Now we're going to sing together in Psalm 138, that's on page 179, it's the New Psalms, the Sing Psalms version of Psalm 138.

[1 : 13] It's a long meter, it's going to be the tune Duke Street. Page number 179 and it's Psalm number 138. We're going to sing from the beginning to the verse of Mark 6, that's verse 5 stanzas.

I'll praise you, Lord, with all my heart. Before the gods I'll sing your praise. I'll bow towards your holy place and bless your holy name always.

I'll praise you for your faithfulness and for your covenant love, O Lord. And over all things you have raised your holy name and faithful word.

The very day I called to you, you gave an answer to my plea. You made me bold within myself. With new resolve you strengthened me. And so on, the first five stanzas of this psalm.

It's Psalm 138 to the tune Duke Street. I'll praise you, Lord, with all my heart. I'll praise you, Lord, with all my heart.

[2 : 15] Before the gods I'll sing your praise. I'll bless you, Lord, your holy place.

And bless you, Lord, with all my heart.

I'll praise you, Lord, with all my heart. I'll praise you, Lord, with all my heart.

I'll praise you, Lord, with all my heart. You made me bold within myself.

With new resolve you strengthened me. O Lord, may all earth's kings give praise, when from your mouth they hear your word.

[4 : 14] Let them exude the ways of God, for it's the glory of the Lord.

Although the Lord dwells so high, the loving person he protects.

Where does the crown and the holy come, he looks a part of our riches.

Let's join together in prayer. Father, we pray that you will draw us afresh this evening and keep us trusting in you.

Make us steadfast. Give us strength to keep looking to Jesus and not to take our eyes off him.

Father, we pray in a world surrounded by other influences, in a world where it seems like everyone is going after that which is not God.

[5 : 56] And believing anything rather than believing in the truth of God in the Bible. And it is so uneasy sometimes to be alone and to stand for Christ alone.

Particularly when it appears that we are the only ones. But there have been times, and we can go back to the Bible, and remember times when it appeared to your people that they were alone.

Like Obadiah and like Elijah. And when he felt that no one else was with him.

There were other times when it appeared that people, everyone was abandoning the faith. And we acknowledge, Lord, how distressing it is when there is that measure of backsliding and unfaithfulness.

And, Lord, we have to confess ourselves to a measure of backsliding. And that we are not what we ought to be. We haven't grown as much as we ought to have. And we've misused the time that you have given to us and the opportunities.

[7 : 11] And we haven't been as prayerful or as faithful. And often when we go to prayer, we're so easily distracted or dissuaded away from continuing to pray.

And we listen to that voice too often that tells us that we're not really reaching God. We're not really being listened to by the Lord. And our prayers will not be answered. Lord, teach us to be steadfast. Give us the faith to believe that in Christ that we can do all things and that nothing is impossible with God. And, Lord, keep us on the road. Keep us, Lord, from veering off the road or from being distracted away from the heavenly prize.

Keep us running the race. Keep us, Lord, shedding every weight that so easily weighs us down. And the sin that so easily distracts us.

And we ask, Lord, that you will give us a greater and greater hatred for what is wrong in our lives and for sinful. Things that nobody else know about.

[8 : 15] And things that can be such a cancer in our hearts. And can cause so much corruption. Lord, teach us how utterly wicked we are.

Teach us how corrupt and how deceitful we are. And, Lord, if we think we are not, then we have successfully deceived ourselves. And show us by your word, Lord, expose us for what we are. Because if you don't, then we'll never come to Jesus. Because we'll never feel we need to come to Jesus. We ask, Lord, for not just faith but repentance.

For true repentance that dies first. The old person that we once were has to die. We pray, Lord, that you will put away our pride this evening. And put away all these barriers that we erect.

That want to defend ourselves and protect ourselves from any questioning voice. But, Lord, you have the right to question us. You have the right to examine us. And you have the right to expose what is filthy in us.

[9 : 20] And it's only when we come to that point when we realize that God is our only hope. And that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only one who can cleanse us from sin. That we will come to him.

And we ask, Lord, that you will work within us this evening. But we acknowledge also that that work is painful. And it involves us having to face up to what we really are ourselves.

And so, Lord, we ask that you will show us what we really are. That you will do a work, a powerful work within us. And especially tonight, those who haven't yet come to Jesus.

We ask, Lord, that you in your mercy and in your grace will work powerfully within them. And bring them to see that if they continue as they are, then they will be lost.

And for all eternity. And, Lord, show us afresh what that means. We ask, Lord, that you will strike that healthy fear into our hearts. Not because we want to exist in a reign of fear.

[10 : 24] But because your word warns us. And because your word lovingly reasons with us. God says to us, come now, let us reason together.

Though your sins are like scarlet, yet they shall be white as snow. We pray, Lord, that you will work honestly and personally within us, Lord. And bring out, show us, Lord, what we truly are in ourselves.

But then, O Lord, we pray that you will show us what Christ has done on the cross for us. And draw us by your power to know you and to serve you. Our Father in heaven, we also pray for those of us who are Christians.

Some of us haven't been on the road for very long. Others have been on the road for many years. We ask that we may never trust in our own experience. We may never trust in our own knowledge or our achievements.

Because we have achieved nothing except what you have achieved in us. It's your work and you deserve the glory. And we pray that the more we grow as Christians, the more we will learn to bow.

[11 : 32] And to acknowledge your hand in everything that we have done. Our Father in heaven, we are what we are because of your grace. And we do what we do because of your grace.

And we ask, Lord, that your grace will reign in us. And that will use us to your glory. We pray that we might be moved by the truth of your word.

That we might live as those who are temporary residents in this world. And Lord, we pray that we will be heavenly minded. That we will fix our eyes on heaven where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

And not on this world. We ask, Father, that you will fill us with that excitement. As we learn more about the reward that you have prepared for your people.

And Lord, we pray that you will give us to see the reality of that day. When you will say to your people, Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in a few things.

[12 : 37] Now I will make you ruler over many things and enter into the joy of the Lord. Our Father in heaven, whatever these words mean. They are joyful to us.

And they are the words of promise to each one of us. Lord, we pray for the work that we are involved in here in this town. We pray for this town.

Oh God, at the start of another year. We pray that this will be a year when many people will come to faith in Jesus. We pray that you will work within them. And we pray that you will, your spirit will enter into this town.

And that you will reach people who tonight haven't a thought about coming to church. We pray that you will so work within them that it will change their minds. And we pray that they will come to where the gospel is preached.

We pray, Lord, for every means, every occasion and opportunity that we have of sharing the gospel with other people. And we ask, Lord, that you will use us in some way to your glory.

[13 : 38] We pray the same thing for every church in this town, in our island and in Scotland that preaches and loves your name. We pray, Father, that there might be a mighty changing.

We pray, Lord, for the generations that are coming and going. We pray for our children and grandchildren. We pray for our young people and their children. We pray for the generations that are yet unborn.

Because we know that they, your word, has a great promise for them. That the generations yet unborn will praise and magnify the Lord. Our Father in heaven, we pray for the ministry that's beginning today in Loch's church.

We pray for Calum Ian and his wife and family as they settle into their new situation there. We pray for that congregation, a fellow congregation, a sister congregation of our own.

And we ask that you will richly bless them. And we pray for the ministry all across our country. Not just in our own denomination, but wherever your word is preached.

[14 : 45] We pray that, especially for those tonight who are discouraged and who see so little fruit for their labor. We pray that that will change. We pray, the Lord, that we will know that our labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Bless those who are not with us this evening. Bless our visitors, those who have joined us. We thank you for them and pray that we may worship together in one voice and in one mind. And forgive our sin in Jesus' name.

Amen. Psalm 72 from the traditional version of the Psalms. Page 312. Psalm number 72. We're going to sing from the beginning to the verse marked 8.

That's six verses. Psalm number 72. That's page 312. The Tunis Free Church. O Lord, thy judgments give the king his son thy righteousness.

With right he shall thy people judge the poor with uprightness. The lofty mountains shall bring forth unto the people peace. Likewise, the little hills the same shall do by righteousness.

[15 : 49] Psalm 72 from the beginning to the verse marked 8. That's the first six stanzas. O Lord, thy judgments give the king. O Lord, thy judgments give the king.

That's of thy righteousness. O Lord, thy love, thy world if not. O Lord, thy kingdom lends.

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CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS O'er the Lord shows all air that falls.

[18 : 08] The just shall vanish in this day, and prosper in this way.

He shall while the moon enters, abundant peace may take.

His large and big dominion shall from sea to sea extend.

It from the river shall reach for unto earth's utmost end.

Book of Esther, chapter 7, page 495. Esther, chapter 7, reading at the beginning.

[19 : 43] So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. And on the second day, as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king again said to Esther, What is your wish, Queen Esther?

It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled. Then Queen Esther answered, If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be granted me for my wish and my people for my request.

For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have been silent.

For our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king. Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, Who is he? And where is he who has dared to do this?

And Esther said, A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman. Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

[20 : 56] And the king arose in his wrath from the wine drinking and went into the palace garden. But Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther. For he saw that harm was determined against him by the king.

And the king returned from the palace garden to the place where they were drinking wine as Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. And the king said, Will he even assault the queen in my presence in my own house?

As the word left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face. Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, Moreover, the gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word, save the king, is standing at Haman's house fifty cubits high.

And the king said, Hang him on that. So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the wrath of the king abated.

Amen. And we pray that God will bless that word to us. We'll return to it. And after we sing together Psalm 1, and that's on page 1, that's the Sing Psalms version of Psalm number 1.

[22 : 19] The tune is Argyle. We're going to stand to sing this psalm. We're going to sing the whole of the psalm. Blessed is the one who turns away from where the wicked walk who does not stand in sinners' paths or sit with those who mock.

Instead, he finds God's holy law, his joy and great delight. He makes the precepts of the Lord his study day and night. Psalm number 1a, that's on page 1, the very first psalm.

The Sing Psalms version, the tune is Argyle. Blessed is the one who turns away. We're going to stand to sing. Amen. Blessed is the one who turns away from where the wicked walk.

To God's cross, God's cross, God's cross, God's cross, God's cross, cross, God's cross.

Instead, he finds God's holy law, his joy and his delight.

[23 : 44] He makes the precepts He saves from the Lord his sunny day and night.

He prospers ever like a tree that's planted by a tree.

And if you see the guilt is true, its dreams are always free.

Not so the wicked they are by, the shaft that's gone away.

They will not stand when judgment comes, or with the righteous day.

[25 : 07] It is the Lord who sees and knows, the brave and righteous know.

But those who live and evil lie, the Lord will overcome.

Amen. I think we'll summarize next week the three remaining chapters in one sermon and see what we can draw from that.

In chapter 7, of course, the story is now coming to or being drawn to a conclusion. You remember, of course, how the story has gone at Vashti at the very beginning.

This is in the Persian Empire, 450 years BC. And we're in Persia, the great superpower. There's Ahasuerus who is known to have been a hugely, massively powerful king.

[26 : 57] And all you have to do is to read the literature on it. There is quite a bit of information on Persia and the kind of lifestyle that they had.

And the kind of king that Ahasuerus and others would have been. His queen let him down. She affronted him in chapter 1 by refusing to do what he commanded her to do.

So he put her out of the palace and then he called together. He put the word out that all the beautiful girls in the kingdom were to be drawn together so that he would choose out of them all a queen.

And, of course, Esther was amongst them. She was a Jew. She had been brought up by Mordecai, her cousin. And she lived in Susa. And she was brought into the king.

And she became the queen. And you remember how also that this man Haman had risen to great power to the extent where he was pretty much the prime minister.

[28 : 00] He was next only in power to the king himself. He enjoyed tremendous political success. He was well known in the empire. And yet Mordecai, Esther's cousin, refused to bow down to him.

And we remember when we looked at chapter 3, we saw the reasons why Mordecai refused to bow down. And, of course, as a result, Haman was absolutely furious.

And he tricked the king. He manipulated the king into signing an agreement which essentially was going to annihilate the Jewish people, the Israelite people, of course, to which Esther belonged and Mordecai.

Because he hated Mordecai so much because he refused to bow to him, he manipulated the king to send out this order. On a certain date, all the Jews all over the empire would be annihilated.

And, of course, this would have meant the eradication of all of the Jews. He didn't think, of course, of what made the Israelite people what they were.

[29 : 07] The Jewish people, it wasn't a question of an ethnicity. It was because they were God's people. And God was ultimately on their side because he had promised to be their God and they would be his people.

Even although, at that particular time, they weren't what they should have been. They weren't as faithful to him as they should have been. And God was working in them to bring them back to himself. And, of course, in preparation for the coming of Jesus into the world, it was amongst the Jewish people that Jesus was born.

And, of course, when Mordecai heard that all his people were going to be annihilated, he pleaded with the queen. She was his only hope. And she sent a message to him and pleaded with her that she was going to have to plead with the king.

And we saw in chapter 4, of course, that great verse, the most famous verse in this chapter for such a time. Who knows whether you have been raised for such a time as this.

She went to the king. She asked him. She asked him if he could possibly come to a feast. This, of course, expanded Haman's head even further. And you remember at the same time, of course, that Mordecai had done something very noble.

[30 : 21] He had saved the king's life. And one night when the king couldn't sleep, he went over. He read the book of the Chronicles, the diary of the events that had taken place in his kingdom.

And he found out that Mordecai had saved his life. And he wanted to honor him. So the next day when Haman was coming into the palace to arrange the death of Mordecai, the king got in before him.

And he asked him what should be done to the man who the king delights to honor. Haman assumed that that was him. But we saw last time that in a moment of time the tables turned.

And the king ordered that Mordecai, of course, the king had no idea that this plot was being hatched. He was hatched against Mordecai.

And he honored, he ordered Haman to honor Mordecai. Which, of course, filled Haman with shame and embarrassment. Because he was the very person.

[31 : 25] And now, of course, in chapter 7, we read there that this was the second feast. Esther is trying to find an occasion when she can be honest and open, where she can plead with the king for her life and the life of her people.

And this is the time. Even here, there's a distinct emphasis on the wisdom and the tact of Esther. I don't want to go into it too much. But if you read it carefully, you'll see that she's choosing her words very carefully.

She's looking for the right kind of opportunity to be able to bring her case before the king. And she puts this feast on for himself and Haman.

And at the right moment, when the king cannot contain himself any further, he knows that there is something on her mind. And perhaps that was the reason why he couldn't sleep the night before.

However, he knows that he's wondering what it is when somebody says to you, look, I'd like to see you about something. You're instantly wondering, what is it that that person has to say? Sometimes it's not very important.

[32 : 28] And you're filled with a sigh of relief. But sometimes it's massively important. And you're wondering, you're speculating. You don't know what it's going to be. You're wondering, whatever it is, this queen has taken a chance.

She's risked her very life. I could have had her executed because she came into my presence without an invitation. This must be massively important. And so he can't wait any longer. And so he asks her, what is it? Up to half, ask anything you want. Up to half my kingdom, I'm going to give it to you. And then she's out with it.

We have been sold, she said. I and my people to be destroyed, to be killed, to be annihilated. And then she says this. She says, if we had been sold merely as slaves, I wouldn't have bothered you. That wouldn't have been important. But we're all going to be annihilated. Me, my people, my family, everyone who belongs to us.

[33 : 35] We're all going to be annihilated. And the king, as a response is, he's puzzled. How in the world could this have come about? He said to Queen Esther, who is he?

Who's done this? Actually, actually, he was partly to blame because he had been tricked into signing the agreement, signing the order. And so, you can see why, you see, if she had told him this in front of his court, in front of all his advisors, he would have had egg running all over his face. It would have been so embarrassing to him. He would have had to adhere to the order. And he would have had to say, I don't care about your people. This is an order that I have given in my authority.

It will be carried out. See, to save face. We're all concerned about saving face. Ahasuerus was concerned about saving face. But now, in private, when they're alone, it's only him and Haman and her.

And she's put the story to him in such a way, truthfully, of course, that emphasizes the plight of her people. So, he asks her, who is this?

[34 : 59] And, of course, she didn't mention his part in it because he was a kind of an unwilling accomplice, if you like. But the real culprit was Haman.

And Haman was terrified before the king and the queen. And, of course, the king was absolutely furious.

Because I guess all kinds of thoughts would have come flooded into his head, including his own part in this plot. He had been so stupid in allowing himself to be taken in by this man and to signing an order which actually was still binding.

We're going to see next week, God willing, how that order, that command to annihilate the Jews could not be revoked. We talk about the laws of the Medes and the Persians that can't be changed. Well, this was the law of the Medes and the Persians. It could not be changed. So, what's going to happen? Even although Haman, at the end of this chapter, is put to death, you're still left with a question, what's going to happen to the Jewish people?

[36 : 19] Because the order is still valid, still alive. It has to take place. That was the next dilemma that we'll come across. So, that's one thing.

The second thing is, how did he allow himself to get into this in the first place? And the third thing was, of course, that he was constantly aware of the possibility of somebody betraying him.

These kings were neurotic. Some of them were paranoid about the very people who were next to them. They couldn't trust them. There were so many plots and plans and schemes that were designed to overthrow kings during that time.

If you were a king, you were a very uneasy person. And he had allowed this one man to gain such power in his kingdom that he could manipulate him into fulfilling his own ends.

How could he do that? How could Haman abuse his privilege in such a way? He was absolutely fuming. You can see why. He had every right to be.

[37 : 29] But you see, in kings like that, there was no fair trial. I guess there was for lesser offenses. I don't know what kind of judicial system there was in Persia.

But when it came to anything which encroached on the palace and which threatened the king in such a way, then there was no time for some kind of fair trial.

The king's word was law. If you read the history books, you read terrible accounts of how kings took their vengeance out, whatever upset them.

But they would just simply, they would kill thousands of people in one go and in the most terrible ways. And this was one of these occasions when this man had dared to manipulate the king to try

and win his way into his favor and to get him to do what he wanted to do.

The king was absolutely furious. And his own pride, of course, had a lot to do with it. Anything that threatens our pride, it's deeply upsetting to us. That's the way that we are as part of the sinful human race.

[38 : 39] I want us to see, very briefly, three things that I can't help noticing in this chapter. And the first of these is focused on Esther herself.

Because in order for Esther to plead her cause and to plead for the lives of her people, she had to confess to her own identity as a Jewish person.

Up until that time, she hadn't done so. You remember when she took part in this beauty contest, chapter 2, when she was brought to the king, Mordecai, for some unknown reason, told her, don't let on who you are.

Don't tell anybody that you're a Jew. And she had obeyed him. She had gone into the king and she had spent years now without confessing who she was. Nobody knew.

Maybe one or two of the palace officials. I don't know. But as far as we know, she never confessed it to anyone until that moment in time. There was no choice.

[39 : 48] She was forced to show her hand, to say to the king, I am a Jew. And by saying that, you were saying, I belong to the people of God.

God is my God. We are his people and we worship him. That's what you were saying if you were saying that you were a Jewish person.

And so to reveal your Jewishness was to reveal the God that you worshipped. I can't help wondering why Mordecai said this before.

I can't help wondering why it was that Mordecai told her when she went into the palace at first not to reveal who she was. Because that would have meant her having to compromise many of the ways in which God commanded his people to live.

What they ate, for example. I would guess that she would have had to compromise on that. And some of the things that she did. She would have had to undermine some of the laws that God had given to his people.

[41 : 01] I'm not sure why. But it does bring up the question as to how, as to whether we are prepared in the New Testament to reveal our identity as God's people.

And how ready are we to confess to the world around us, to the watching world around us, to the interested and the disinterested and the hateful and the despising and the indifferent and the laughing world around us that we are Christians.

I don't mean that you go in with all guns blazing. And anybody who you are introduced to, when they say, well, this is Ivor Martin, and he says, oh, by the way, I'm a Christian.

That's not what I mean at all. But how long does it take before people find out? And how willing are you for people to find out that you do belong to Jesus?

And I say this because we are living in a world where it's not easy to say that. And it's not easy to confess. And it might even mean that we're treated differently because we are Christians.

[42 : 15] I believe that increasingly it is getting more and more difficult to live a consistent Christian life in a world which is more and more hostile.

And the temptation more and more is to not say who we are as God's people, as Christians, because it is definitely not cool.

I can tell you that without a shadow of a doubt. But if you don't, then you're going to have to blend in and do the same things as everybody else does.

Talk like they do. Get involved in whatever they do. And make sure that by doing so that nobody finds out who you are. But that's not the way that the Lord God said to us, you are the light of the world.

You are the salt of the earth. And if the salt loses its flavor, then how can it be made salty again? It's no use for anything except to be trampled by men.

[43 : 21] What an alarming thing for the Lord to say. There are three things about this passage that make me feel distinctly uneasy.

And this is the first of them. How easy it is for me to just live and blend in with everyone else without them ever finding out that I'm a Christian. It's the easiest thing that you can do.

It's the easiest way to live. But it's not what God expects of us. And it's not the way to witness for him. Nobody else is going to find out by the gospel.

You might be the only person who that other person is going to meet who is a Christian. That means that you might be the only person who can tell them the truth of Jesus Christ. And share the gospel with them. Ah, you say, but they're not interested. How do you know they're not interested? How do you know that God is not going to work in that person's life and make them interested?

[44 : 21] You say, ah, but I don't know how to tell somebody. Are you kidding me? You don't know how to tell someone that you are a follower of Jesus.

And that you came to know him the way you did. And that you believe the Bible. The Lord doesn't want us to give out some kind of theological discourse. That's not what he's asking us. He doesn't need us to be apologists. We're not to know all the scientific arguments and the philosophical arguments. But you can do, what you can do, is to tell people what the Lord has done for you.

Is that too much to ask? I don't believe it is. You are the light of the world. And the Lord has not called us to a comfortable life.

To an easy life. And more and more, I believe, in an increasingly hostile world, it's going to be harder and harder for us to do what Esther, because the time will come, just as it came here, when it's going to be forced upon us.

[45 : 30] And when that happens, of course, people say, well, why did you not tell me that before? I mean, if you're a Christian, if it means so much to you, why are you keeping quiet about it? And then you feel ashamed.

Rightly so. Because you've kept quiet the most important thing in your life. And that's your love for Jesus. I don't mean that you make a pest of yourself and that you hound people every day and throw the Bible at them.

Of course I don't. There's a big difference between that and keeping quiet and not telling anyone and not revealing who you are as a child of God.

Who knows what God could do through you? One conversation was enough for one woman at the well in some area to be completely transformed. Who knows that one person, through your witness, will become a Christian and will be the means of others coming into the kingdom.

And that will not happen unless we are faithful and unless we are courageous and unless we let our light so shine before people.

[46 : 41] So that's the first thing that makes me feel uneasy because it reminds me of how unwilling I am and how unwilling and how difficult it is.

It is difficult to reveal ourselves, to show our hand to the world in which we live. Second thing that makes me feel really uneasy about this passage is how quickly Haman's life changed.

Hours before, this man was the most successful. He lived in luxury. He couldn't, he simply couldn't have risen any higher in Persia.

That was the superpower of the day. He couldn't have done any more or achieved anything. He had everything. And now, hours after, he is being dragged out of that room, utterly terrified and petrified to his death.

How have the tables turned for Haman? I know what you're going to say. You're going to say, well, he serves them right. He should have, that's good.

[48 : 01] This is good that justice is being done. Well, we'll talk about justice in a few moments time. And just in case you're too quick to point the finger and say, good, he got what he deserves, let's look at ourselves.

And let's remember, we'll see this in a minute, let's remember that every one of us one day will stand before the judgment seat of God. So we have no room to point the finger at others.

But what we can do is we can be reminded tonight of how quickly a person's life can change. And that ought to remind us that what we are today could be very, very different from what we are tomorrow.

All it takes is a few hours, even a few minutes, for things to radically change and for your circumstances that you enjoy tonight and that you think are going to last forever to be taken away from you.

All your props, everything that you're depending on, everything that right now you're enjoying and that you're living for. And the more we enjoy out of this life, the more we think it's going to last forever.

[49 : 13] The more you have, the more you want. That's what covetousness means. It means having moreness. And it's not just the rich and the powerful that are covetous. Everyone, everyone has that measure of covetousness within themselves.

It can be in the form of jealousy and bitterness and envy. But what I want us to think about tonight is that how quickly, in the twinkling of an eye, our lives could change.

And there were several people like that in the Bible, I believe. And they're quite like each other. They're quite similar to each other. People who were determined to live a certain way. And indeed, they were determined to live in the opposite way from the one that God commanded them to live. And if you decide that, then you're actually fighting God. Jesus says, if you're not with me, you're against me. And there are several examples in the Old and the New Testament of people who proved that living like that is destined to failure and to fall.

Goliath was one. There's nobody like Goliath. To this day, nobody was bigger than Goliath. The statistics prove themselves ten feet tall.

[50 : 41] No one could come anywhere near him. And yet, because he lived the opposite to God's way and fought with the Lord, because in fighting Israel, he was fighting with the Lord, he was killed by one single stone to his forehead.

You remember the enemies of Daniel? When Daniel rose to power and got to be the prime minister and when his colleagues were jealous of him, they wanted to find a way. They thought they lived the same way.

So they manipulated, they plotted, they planned, they told the king, Daniel's disobeying you. They had arranged for the king, Darius, to issue an order that no one was to worship any other king apart from himself.

So he did so again. He was manipulated by his politicians. All they wanted to do was to find an excuse to get rid of Daniel. And what happened?

The very opposite. They too fell. They came crashing down. For them, it was power one day, influence, luxury, success, ease.

[51 : 51] The next day, they were being torn to shreds by lions. How quickly things can change for us. It was the same with Herod.

Remember in Acts chapter 12, he took it into his head to please the people. He would start persecuting the Christian church. So he started jailing them. He started killing them, executing them.

This pleased. This pleased the Jewish people. So he did more and more and more. And the more he pleased people, the more his head expanded expanded, and he thought he was going to live forever.

He rose up, and they said, this is a God. Dead. Now you say, I'm not like that.

I'm not a tyrant. I'm not a murderer. I'm not talking about things. I'm saying tonight, or the Bible says, it's the same sin that dwells in all of us.

[52 : 53] It just manifests itself in different ways in different people. And if you have convinced yourself tonight that you are essentially a good person, all you've done is deceived yourself.

The Bible says, you're not. The Bible says, I'm not. The Bible says that the heart of man is desperately wicked and deceitful.

So when it comes to God, we haven't a hope. Our sins have separated us from God. How quickly things can happen to us.

And all the more reason for us to look in the mirror of the Bible tonight to accept what we are and what God says about us and only then will we see the answer in Jesus Christ.

And that takes me on to the third thing that makes me uneasy. I can't help looking into the eyes of Haman. I can't help it. When I look into the eyes of Haman, I see a man who is utterly, utterly terrified.

[54 : 08] If I looked into his eyes the day before, I would have seen a man who wouldn't give me the time of day. And now he is grasping at any opportunity that there possibly is to be saved.

And there's none. He is utterly lost. There's only a matter of moments before he's taken away and he's put to death. And by the way, it wasn't hanging. I'm saying nothing else.

You go away and read the history books yourself. It was the most fearful kind of death. The very thing that he had planned for the man he hated was what he was going to suffer himself now.

The tables had turned. And this throws up for me the whole truth of judgment. Here we have what you might want to call natural justice.

It happens sometimes. The Bible says that we will reap what we sow. Sometimes that happens in this life to a certain extent.

[55 : 20] Other times it doesn't. I read sometimes about Nazi war criminals. who have been pursued over the years for what they've done.

And many of them have died. Some of them have died in ease and comfort and they have done the most horrific things during the Second World War. I remember reading a headline when one of them died without having been caught.

I can't remember his name but the headline says so and so escapes punishment. that's not true. He may have escaped punishment in this life but you'll never escape the judgment of God after death. death. We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. And I don't care how unpopular it is for me to say this tonight.

My job my place I would be unfaithful to God if I was to say anything but the truth the Bible clearly warns every single one of us that we will be there the day will come when life as we know it in this world will have gone and so will the opportunities that God has given us in this world and we will all face God in judgment.

[57 : 05] I know that there wasn't much of a trial for Haman it was the king's word the king's wrath if the king was angry with you away he went off to be executed but so you never really knew whether you were being tried and whether you're being executed for something that you had done you weren't there was no defense there was no prosecution there was no jury all of these things it was just a matter of how the king felt at the time so you could say that the system was wrong that will not be the case with God God is the perfect judge he knows everything about us but he demands a perfect life and none of us have lived a perfect life and we are accountable to God every single one of us is accountable to God and will be made accountable on that day and from that throne from that location wherever it will be there will be two roads one heading in the direction of heaven and the other in the direction of hell everyone who stands before God's judgment seat deserves to be sent to a lost eternity to hell and yet there will be some who won't go there what's the difference between those who will go to hell and those who will go to heaven have they been better in this life have they lived a better more respectful decent life than the rest have they helped more people no they haven't there is only one difference between those who spend eternity in heaven and those who spend eternity in hell and that is Jesus

Christ that's what will make the separation nothing but Jesus Christ every one of us I deserve a lost eternity this evening I deserve to be for the Lord to say to me depart from me that's what I deserve but by God's grace I've heard the gospel and I've heard that God in his mercy has sent his son into the world to die at Calvary for my sin taking the punishment that I deserved and saying to me because I have died you can live if you believe and trust and repent and come to me and trust in me and surrender yourself to me that's what faith is it is surrender it's repentance and following Jesus us we can't do it ourselves it's not by trying harder it's not by turning over a new leaf it's by looking to

Jesus and coming to him with a consciousness that we have no hope in this world and that's the way Haman was I can't help looking into his eyes and I'm tempted to feel sorry for him he was somebody's baby cradled by his mother don't know what kind of home he was brought up in he was like every other wee boy I guess good sometimes bad sometimes etc who knows what turns a man into a monster well we do know we know that the same sin dwells in every single one of us like I said before it manifests itself in one person in one way and another person in another way and we are not to try and explain away people's actions by some kind of syndrome and always by some kind of personality disorder every one of us has a personality disorder

I'm not trying to minimize the work that is done by psychologists and psychiatrists let's leave that aside let's leave that aside I have a personality disorder it's called sin and it means that I have become separated from God Haman's sinful heart in the right circumstances because he allowed himself to develop the bitterness and the sinfulness and the deceit of his own heart into hatred for someone else with me something else every one of us deserves God's anger and his wrath and his punishment for Haman there was no mercy he was lost can't help thinking of a similar man who was just as lost and yet at the very last moment he was saved a man who was impaled on a cross he had lived a life of thieving he was suffering what he deserved that was the law that was the

punishment at that time his hands were nailed to a cross and his feet were nailed to that same cross like Haman he had absolutely no hope whatsoever and in his eyes there was the same despairing terror but next to him was another man also having been nailed to a cross somehow there was something about this other man that gave the thief light and he turned to him and he said Lord remember me when you come into your kingdom and Jesus said today you will be with me in paradise tonight I have spoken about three things in this chapter that make me very uncomfortable for different reasons if I want to find light this evening I need to go to that man on the cross because only in him is there forgiveness forgiveness complete forgiveness you come to Christ tonight every ounce of guilt will be taken away he promises that you put your faith in Jesus you turn to him tonight and God will wash away all the ugliness and the corruption and the sin in your heart you'll put a new song in your mouth you'll be born again he'll give you a promise of everlasting life he'll make you into a new creation that's what it means to be a

[64 : 34] Christian a new creation and that's what we need to be forgiven and to be washed the only place that we will ever find that forgiveness is the Lord Jesus Christ may it be yours this evening let's pray and Father in heaven we pray that this evening that we will that if we need to feel uncomfortable then so be it if we need to be warned by your word and reminded of the terrible prospect that faces us all of having to stand before your judgment Father in heaven we pray that you will remind us that you will bring this great truth to us and great power because we need to hear it we need to be reminded of it we need to know we need to see the eyes of those to whom

God says depart from me you workers of iniquity we need to see ourselves as deserving that same fate so that we can run to Jesus and so that we can ask Lord for the prayer that the tax collector prayed Lord have mercy upon me a sinner we give thanks Lord that in wrath you remember mercy we give thanks for your great love to a lost world a world full of Hamans we give thanks that there are many a Haman has been saved has been brought to Christ Lord we also recognize that we are the sin of Haman lies within all of us so we pray to come to you and to ask for your forgiveness and for the change that you alone can bring in Jesus name amen psalm 121 the traditional version of the psalm page number 416 121

I to the hills will lift mine eyes from whence doth come mine aid my safety cometh from the Lord who heaven and earth hath made thy foot he'll not let slide nor will he slumber that he keeps behold he that keeps Israel he slumbers not nor sleeps psalm 121 and the whole of the psalm is page 416 and it's to the tune denfield I to the hills will lift mine eyes we're going to stand to sing I to the hills will lift my eyes from whence doth come my day thy safety cometh from the Lord who hath and earth hath may life who he'll not let slide nor will he slumbers not like it behold he that keeps Israel he slumbers not nor sleeps the Lord takes the Lord thy shed of thy right hand doth stay the moon by night thee shall no smite nor yet the sun by day the Lord shall keep thy soul he shall preserve thee from all hill henceforth thy going out and in God keep forever will now may the grace of our

Lord and Savior Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion and fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest on and abide with each one of us both now and always amen whoq