

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 17TH - 18TH, 2022 // BOOK OF ESTHER

APPROACHING THE KING (ESTHER 5:1-8)

Queen Esther has finished a three-day/three-night fast in order to **seek God's favor before approaching the king** (4:16, vs. 1).

- She's hoping to appeal to the king about a **royal decree concerning the genocide** of every Jew in the Persian Empire in 11 months' time.
- This decree was concocted by **the wicked Haman (who hated the Jews)** and agreed upon by King Ahasuerus (3:10-11).

The **difficulty behind Esther interceding for the lives of her people** before the king was that she was only allowed to come to the king when called.

- If she came on her own, **she could be executed for approaching the king** without an invitation.
- While Esther was completely dependent on God to give her favor with the king, she also **showed a considerable amount of courage** in her willingness to go before the king!

On the third day of the three-day fast, **Esther changes into her royal clothing (presumably out of her mourning garments)** and stands in the inner court of the palace facing the entrance of the king's throne (vs. 1).

- When the **king looks up and sees Esther**, his heart toward her is softened.
- She gains favor with him as he extends his scepter towards her as a **sign of approval** (vs. 2).

"The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; **He turns it wherever He wishes.**"

–Proverbs 21:1

- God is able to **guide and change hearts**: even someone as noble and powerful as a king!
- God is able to give **His people favor with those in positions of influence and authority** so that we can accomplish His purposes in the world.

Even though **Esther was completely dependent on God to give her favor with the king** (and God answered that request), she showed a tremendous amount of tact, patience, and wisdom (vs. 3-5).

- It would seem that she wants to **win the king's confidence in her** and that she's putting together a plan to expose Haman's wickedness before the king.

So she **invites the king** and his second in command, Haman, to a banquet.

- In ancient Persian culture, **no serious discussion occurred during the meal, but once the meal was finished and the wine was served**, important issues could be addressed (vs. 6).
- The king asks Esther once more what her request might be, and Esther simply invites the king and Haman to a **second banquet** the next day (vs. 7-8).

WHY DIDN'T SHE JUST ASK THE KING RIGHT THEN?

- **Possibility #1**: She didn't have the courage at that moment and needed more time.
- **Possibility #2**: She planned on two banquets all along to win the king's approval.
- **Possibility #3**: She deciphered through divine wisdom, patience, and humility that it simply wasn't the right time to make the request.

GOOD SPIRITS & RAGE (ESTHER 5:9-14)

Imagine leaving a **state dinner hosted exclusively for you by the king and queen of the land**...and on your way home, your Jewish neighbor doesn't wave at you.

- Haman has been given **the highest honor in the land**, and yet the disapproval by just one person (**Mordecai**) causes him to feel worthless!
- What a picture of the inability of the world's rewards to **address humanity's insecurities**.

"STILL, NONE OF THIS SATISFIES ME..." (VS. 13)

Haman leaves the palace feeling like the man, but **Mordecai's refusal to bow to him or fear him makes him feel small** (vs. 9-13).

- Haman's problem wasn't Mordecai: it was the **emptiness of his own heart** and the meaninglessness of all that he was living for.
- Haman's rage was an **indication of his feelings of powerlessness** and loss of control.

THE APPROVAL TRAP.

If you live for **the applause and accolades of other people**, you'll die by their criticism and disapproval.

- If you seek out **fame, honor, recognition, or the approval of others for yourself**, you'll only see other people as competitors for the honor that you desire.
- Haman is a **miserable, empty, sick-hearted man**.

Insecure, selfish, and **prideful people will often seek out advice** from other fools.

- They're not searching for **true wisdom**, but only for things they already want to hear. Haman's wife, Zeresh, and all his friends give him a **solution to fix his insecurity and anger**—arrange a public, humiliating execution by hanging **Mordecai the Jew** on gallows 75 feet high (vs. 14).

There's **no absence of bad advice in our world**—so many of us go looking for what we think is new information that simply confirms our own existing beliefs or ideas.

- So many of us look to **sinful solutions (like violence, in Haman's case)** to try to solve the pain, emptiness, or helplessness we feel on the inside.
- Nothing can **fix the brokenness of our innermost being** other than the God that knows and loves us completely.

A SLEEPLESS NIGHT (ESTHER 6:1-9)

King Ahasuerus did what many of us do when we can't sleep—we read or look for a **mental diversion** to may help us feel sleepy again.

- The king calls for the chronicles, or **the book that records daily events in the kingdom**, to be read to him so he can fall asleep (vs. 1).
- Out of all the volumes of the Persian chronicles, **one particular book just so happens to be brought in to be read** (vs. 2).

Don't miss the sovereign rule of God in the midst of what seems like a series of coincidences.

- It's not a coincidence that the king can't sleep—**sometimes, God wakes us up** for a very specific reason.

- It's not a coincidence that this volume of the chronicles was selected for the king to hear read.
- God is **active and involved in the day-to-day events of humanity**.

The book could have been opened to any page, but **it was opened to the exact page telling the story of Mordecai** and how he saved the king from assassination (vs. 2).

- God **guided every step** along the way!
- At some point in the reading, **the king interrupts and asks**, "What have we done to honor this man?" He **learns that nothing** has been done (vs. 3).

Haman "**coincidentally**" happens to be in the outer court (**he's preparing the gallows to hang Mordecai**), so the king calls for his second in command to come in and **counsel him on how to honor someone** who has done a noble thing (vs. 5-6).

- Haman is so **self-absorbed, arrogant, and entitled he can't think of anyone else** worthy of receiving this honor other than himself.

Haman thinks about what he would want for a reward, **choosing very empty things that really don't matter** much (vs. 8-9).

- Haman's desire was **simply to flaunt his greatness and have others adore him**.
- But God was sovereignly arranging **Haman's pride and arrogance** to be the cause of his ultimate humiliation.
- God is just: **we will reap** what we sow (Gal. 6:7).

A REVERSAL (ESTHER 6:10-14)

Can you imagine **the look on Haman's face when he discovers that the honor** he thinks is for him belongs to the man he hates more than anyone in the world: **Mordecai the Jew??**

- It's so ironic it's almost comical to imagine the **humiliation, shame, and embarrassment Haman must feel** as he is the one who parades Mordecai through the city and must publicly honor him (vs. 10-11).

"Whoever **exalts himself will be humbled**, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." —Matthew 23:12

- If we won't humble ourselves, **we set ourselves up to be humiliated**.
- God knows how to exalt and honor those who have chosen to **be humble, serve others, and not seek out honor and glory** for themselves.

Haman is so **absolutely disgraced**, shamed, and humiliated by this whole affair, he hurries home "**mournful and with his head covered**" (vs. 12).

- Haman is quite literally acting as if someone near and dear to him has died—**this is the ultimate blow to both his pride and public image**.
- In his devastation and humiliation, **he turns to the advice of his wife and friends**, but they don't have good news for him anymore.

Those who previously encouraged him in his **reckless pursuit of killing Mordecai** now predict Haman's downfall (vs. 13).

- Haman wouldn't prevail over Mordecai, but **Mordecai would prevail over Haman!**
- Isn't this how the advice of fools usually goes? **Empty, foolish guidance is given that leads to disaster**, and then no help or aid is offered at all.

Before Haman had any time to recover, **he was whisked away to the queen's banquet**, with his wife and friends' prediction about his downfall still ringing in his ears (vs. 14).

- God is about to **reverse the entire wicked scheme of Haman** and bring him to the point of ultimate humiliation.

Proud, godless people can make plans, but the **purposes of Almighty God** always prevail.

GOD IS ACTIVE AND INVOLVED IN THE DAY-TO-DAY EVENTS OF HUMANITY.

- There are no coincidences! Not even **sleepless nights or random turns of the page**.
- God is able to guide and change people's hearts: **even the hearts of kings** (Prov. 21:1).
- If you feel alone, unseen, or like God is absent from your story—**open your eyes and look to see the traces of His hand** at work.

WHATEVER WE SOW, WE ALSO REAP (GAL. 6:7-8).

- If we live to please our flesh, we will from the flesh reap **destruction, dishonor, and humiliation**.
- If you live by the sword, **you will die by the sword** (Matt. 26:52).
- If you live to please the Spirit, **from the Spirit, you will reap eternal life**.
- Living righteously, being obedient to God, and **following the Holy Spirit** has eternal rewards.

WHY WE STRUGGLE WITH PRIDE.

- The **proud (i.e., the insecure and weak-minded)** seek out fame, honor, and recognition for themselves because, deep down, they don't feel **worthy, wanted, or good enough**.
- In that desire to fill **the inner emptiness and insecurity** comes the pursuit of applause, recognition, and honor from other people.
- But it never works! **We always need more**.

GOD KNOWS HOW TO HUMBLE THE PROUD.

- When we live for our **own fame, honor, or recognition**, we will only be able to see others as **competitors** for the honor we crave.
- This leads us to **do incredibly hurtful and shameful things** to "crush the competition," which sets us in opposition against Almighty God (James 4:6).
- This leads to our **own humiliation**.

GOD WILL EXALT THOSE WHO CHOOSE HUMILITY.

- All throughout the Bible, **God specializes in exalting the unnoticed, obscure, and dismissed (the shepherd boy David, the stutterer Moses, and the Jewish gatekeeper Mordecai)**.
- It may take time, but **God works on His timing, and He never forgets**.
- Will we choose the path of obedience, honor, wisdom, tact, and humility and **trust God with the outcome?**