

Esther 06-04-11A

This is Tuesday, the 11th of April, 2006. We continue tonight our study in the book of Esther, picking up in chapter 5. Let's take a moment as we begin to go to the Lord in prayer, prepare our souls, and make sure that we are in a position for God the Holy Spirit to do His work on our behalf. Shall we pray? Father, we know that it is not by might nor by power, but by Your Spirit that You have ordained us to live.

We are grateful that we have that ministry available to us because of the Lord Jesus Christ and His work for us on the cross. We pray that as we look into the truth of Your word this evening, that each one of us will find in it those principles and doctrines that will guide us and challenge us and show us the path of faith in the days ahead. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

Well, we're at a very exciting part of the story here because the story is reaching its climax. We've seen a lot of background. We know that we're in the days of the Persian Empire with Xerxes or Ahasuerus.

He's gone off and fought the Greeks and come back with sort of a mixed success. He had some success, but then he got whipped. And in the meantime, he dallied around with a couple of women and came back and got crossways with his queen and banished her.

And she's out of sight for a while now, although she will eventually return to assassinate him and put her son on the throne after our story concludes. But Vashti is gone but not forgotten. And in the historic account where she is known as Amestris, she will return because she is Amestris.

In the meantime, however, Esther has become the queen and for five years has been at the palace. And then Haman has come to favor with the king, has come to prominence, has risen rapidly, has dazzled the king with his brilliance and has also impressed Mordecai with his evil. So much so that Mordecai will not pay any attention to him when he comes through.

Everybody else, the king said, you know, Haman is such a great guy. We want you to honor him and pay attention to him when he goes through. But Mordecai doesn't do it and this really torques Haman's jaws.

It chaps him. He doesn't like it. Chafes at him.

So Haman decides, well, this Mordecai, he is looked up to. He is the highest ranking of the Jews. So he could sort of lop Haman off.

I mean, Haman could lop Mordecai off the top of the tree there, but somebody else might sprout up in his place. So Haman says, I'm going to get Mordecai and everybody that looks up to Mordecai. We'll just wipe out the whole nation of Israel because there is a historic enmity between them and my family anyway going all the way back to when Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt.

Who were the first ones to come in and try to take advantage of Israel when they marched out of Egypt? It was the Amalekites. And Agag is the king of Amalek. And God commanded Saul, King Saul, through Samuel, to go and wipe out the Amalekites in 1 Samuel.

And Saul set out to do it, but then he kind of got distracted and the people wanted to keep a lot of the plunder that they were told to destroy. And so they left him alive. And so when Samuel showed up, here's Agag still standing there.

And because of this, Saul is rejected as king. This is in chapter 15 of 1 Samuel. Samuel said to Saul, The Lord sent me to anoint you king over his people, over Israel.

Now therefore heed the voice of the words of the Lord. God says, thus says the Lord of hosts, I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel. He ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt.

Now go and attack Amalek and utterly destroy all that they have and do not spare them. Kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey. Utterly obliterate them off the face of the earth.

Saul gathered the people together, numbered them, he went out and fought. But Saul attacked the Amalekites from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. He also took Agag, king of the Amalekites, alive and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword.

But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. Everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed. And this is rationalization, right? God said destroy everything and they said, well, that means everything that's worthless.

Surely God doesn't want us to get rid of the good stuff. So we'll keep it. So when Samuel shows up, the Lord comes to Samuel and says, I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king.

He has turned back from following me. Incomplete obedience is the same as turning back. And that's what Saul is guilty of.

He has not performed my commandments. Well, you can read the rest of that in chapter 15. And Samuel comes to Saul and says, When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? Did not the Lord anoint you king over Israel? Now the Lord sent you on a mission and said, Go utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites.

Fight against them until they are consumed. Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you swoop down on the spoil and do evil in the sight of the Lord? Saul said, I obeyed the voice of the Lord. I went on the mission that he sent me.

I brought back Agag. I've utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people, they took the plunder.

They took the sheep and oxen, the best of the things that should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal. Samuel said, Has the Lord as great a

delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice. And to heed is better than the fat of rams.

Rebellion is like the sin of witchcraft. And stubbornness is like the iniquity of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he also has rejected you from being king.

Saul said, I have sinned. I've transgressed the commandment. Please pardon my sin.

Return with me. Let me worship the Lord. Samuel says, I will not return with you.

As Samuel turns around to go away, the robe gets ripped. Samuel says, see how you ripped my robe? That's the way God is going to rip the kingdom away from you and give it to someone else. So eventually Samuel turns around to worship with Saul.

Then Samuel said in verse 32 of 1 Samuel 15, Bring Agag, king of the Amalekites, here to me. So Agag came to him cautiously. And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past.

And the word there for past means something that has ceased or stopped or has been caused to go away. And he says, well, surely there's not anymore this bitterness of death. And the word for bitterness is mar.

Remember in the story of Ruth, when Naomi comes back and she says, Don't call me Naomi anymore. Call me what? Marah, which is the feminine of bitterness. Well, that's the word that Agag uses.

And he says, oh, surely the mar of death has ceased now. Samuel said, just like your sword made women childless, your mother is going to be childless among women. And then Samuel hacked Agag in pieces before the Lord.

And that word for hacked in pieces is a hapax leguminous. It's the only place in the whole Bible where that word occurs. And they have difficulty even figuring out what it means.

The nearest they can come, there's a cognate that means to divide something up into little pieces. And so they figure that's what this means. Hacked him in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal.

Hacked in small pieces. You know what I think? I think he hacked him into about 50 pieces. You'll see why tonight.

So then Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went to his house at Gibeah. And Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless, Samuel mourned for Saul, and the Lord regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.

I find it very interesting. It says Samuel went to see Saul no more until the day of his death. I wonder whose death it's talking about there.

If it's Samuel's death or Saul's death. I mean, Samuel does see Saul one more time, doesn't he? At the witch of Endor. And it's the day of Saul's death.

And you get the idea that that was also maybe the day of Samuel's death because he comes right back up and says, why have you brought me up? Anyway, back to Esther chapter 4 and chapter 5. Because there is this threat to all of the Jews on the part of Haman. And Mordecai hears about it and goes into sackcloth and ashes. We've reviewed all of that.

And there's the three-day fast. Then Esther, on the third day, put on her royal robes. This is what we covered last time.

She went to see the king. He favors her, extends the scepter, and she comes and approaches near to the king. And she gains or earns the favor of the king so that she doesn't suffer death.

And he says, what is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your request? Up to half the kingdom it shall be done. And she says, come to the banquet I have prepared today for you and for Haman.

Now, it's important that Haman is there, right? It's his plot. And so rather than trying to hide this from Haman, because if she meets privately with the king, Haman is going to be all suspicious and wondering, what's up? What is this thing that I don't know about? And so God grants great wisdom in response to prayer and in response to the fasting that everyone in Shushan has been doing on her behalf. God gives her great wisdom and great insight.

And she includes the enemy, Haman, in this banquet. And he's there. And so they come.

And at the banquet of wine in verse 6, the king says to Esther, what is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your request? Up to half the kingdom it shall be done. So you think, alright, this is where the whole thing is going to be revealed.

But, Esther has great wisdom and great self-control. And she realizes that if she broaches the subject right now, Haman can interject. Haman can stop the thing because the king has not fully committed to granting her request.

He says, I'll grant it up to half the kingdom. It shall be done. Esther answers and says, this is my petition and request.

And we saw that that is this in italics ought to be crossed out. She says, my petition and request? If I have found favor in the sight of the king, if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them. And this commits the king to saying yes.

And it's very clever on Esther's part because she has essentially, with Haman right there in the room, gotten the king to say yes to her request without even knowing what it is. And she does this through this double sequence of banquets. And why does she do this? How is she smart enough? And for one, she observes this protocol which requires humility.

The essence of courtesy is humility. The essence of courtesy is putting others ahead of yourself, isn't it? You pull out the chair for someone. You open the door for someone.

You stand when someone enters the room. You treat someone as better than yourself, as taking precedence over yourself. And we're commanded to do this in the New Testament, aren't we? Prefer one another.

Give precedence, give preference to each other. And if everybody does this, it's a great system, isn't it? It's a function of humility to consider others as better than ourselves. Not in the sense of quality, but in the sense of treatment.

And if we could all just apply that principle regularly, the world would be a great place, wouldn't it? We wouldn't be inconsiderate. We wouldn't be impatient. We wouldn't be discourteous.

We wouldn't be rude. We wouldn't be unthinking and unfeeling. Prefer others better than ourselves.

And Esther does this. And at this first banquet, she says, if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, then let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said. And she cleverly converts this to where she is the one complying with the king's request, rather than asking the king to comply with her request.

It's the greatest subtlety and tact, and it requires great self-control and great humility, because you know this issue is weighing heavy on her heart, and yet she has this great skill. And it's strength that comes from God. Discernment that comes from God.

This is the fruit and the result of that prayer and that fasting that has gone on for half a week. So, we pick up now tonight in verse 9, And Haman went out that day joyful and with a glad heart. Joyful and with a glad heart.

Now, the Bible talks about the wicked being happy. You know, we tend to think, well, if you're wicked, you're going to be unhappy and terrorized all the time. Wicked people can be very happy.

Haman is joyful and has a glad heart. But back in the book of Job, Job 20, verse 5, he says, The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment. It's there, it just doesn't endure.

It doesn't last. The principle is that those who are happy now are going to pay in the long run, and if their happiness is based on wickedness. Do you remember the story of the rich man and Lazarus? We reviewed that pretty recently.

Remember how the rich man had all of his comforts and all of his good things, and he walked by Lazarus and didn't extend his hand and didn't try to help him at all? And here's Lazarus with sores being licked by the dogs, and the rich man walks by him every single day and does nothing for him. Well, that lasts for maybe 20 years in life, but for a thousand years, Lazarus is comforted, and the rich man is tormented. So in Luke chapter 6, verse 25, that principle is expressed, Woe to you who are full, for you shall hunger.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Now this doesn't mean just any old fullness or any old laughter. This is the fruit of wickedness.

This is the product of hypocrisy. These are people who get by by pleasing themselves and who make their goal out of self-fulfillment. Laughing now, they're going to mourn and weep.

In John chapter 16 and verse 20, Jesus said, Most assuredly I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. There is a reversal.

The humble are exalted and the exalted are abased. God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. Well, Haman goes out with a joyful and glad heart, but when he sees Mordecai in the king's gate and that he did not stand up or tremble before him, he's filled with indignation against Mordecai.

Now Haman is a pretty well-off guy, but this one thing destroys all of his happiness. This goes back to chapter 3. Remember, at first, it was because Mordecai would not bow. Mordecai is standing up and he won't bow when Haman goes by.

Now, as he comes out in the middle of the business day, Mordecai is seated in the king's gate and everybody else stands up to honor Haman as he comes by and Mordecai doesn't stand up. Have you ever been in a crowd? Have you ever been in the bleachers or the seats or whatever? And something happens and everybody wants to stand up and give the person an ovation, a standing ovation, but you don't think it was that good? I've had to do this in church a few times. Not this church.

I'm always generally standing up in this church. I've been in groups of believers where something would happen or something would be said and everyone would stand up. And to me, it wasn't something that ought to be honored.

It was the wrong thing in a wrong way. And you wind up being the only one remaining seated while everyone else is doing the standing O. And it's just a matter of principle. It's not something that deserves a standing ovation.

In fact, it may be something that if people knew better, they would be ashamed of. And yet people stand up and are giving great honor to this thing. And you sort of stick out.

People on each side of you and behind you are looking and saying, well, what's the matter with them? They're not standing up. There are other times when you might be the only one standing up. I've been in a situation where the American flag is going by and nobody stood up.

And you stand up and you stand up by yourself. And then people sort of shamefacedly say, oh, I guess we're supposed to stand up. And by the time the flag is gone, there's a few of them standing up.

Or, you know, a lady walks into the room and all the guys are sitting around and nobody stands up. You stand up and everybody's looking at you like, what's the matter with you? Is your chair wiggling or something? Why are you standing up? And you wind up, your behavior doesn't match that of the crowd. This is Mordecai's situation and it really inflames Haman.

Well, why does Mordecai do this? Why does he feel free to disregard the king's guidance about Haman? This goes all the way back to a principle you can find in the Psalms. For example, Psalm 15, verse 4. This is the Psalm of David and he's talking about the man who honors God. The man who is a faithful believer.

I think of these as those on the narrow road trying to go through the straight gate. Psalm 15 is great. It says, Lord, who may abide in your tabernacle? This is David praying to God.

He says, Lord, who is it that can abide in your tabernacle? Who may dwell in your holy hill? He who walks uprightly and works righteousness and speaks the truth in his heart. He who does not backbite with his tongue. He who does not do evil to his neighbor.

He who does not take up a reproach against his friend. Now, take up a reproach, this is when everybody else starts climbing on the back of someone that has been good and now hears an unjust accusation. You can think about this in our political realm.

Does not take up a reproach against his friend. Verse 4 of Psalm 15, In whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honors those who fear the Lord. Some people are despicable and they deserve to be despised.

Other people are worthy of honor and they ought to be honored. The man who is qualified to dwell in God's holy hill and abide in his tabernacle is the man in whose eyes a vile person is despised. Now, this is Mordecai's situation.

He looks at Haman and says, that is a vile person and he does not deserve honor. He who does these things, the psalm concludes, shall never be moved. Never be displaced.

So, that is the idea here. Jesus spoke the same thing in Matthew chapter 10 and verse 28. Do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul.

Rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hades. So, Haman is full of indignation. He is full of wrath against Mordecai.

So, he goes home. He restrained himself. He did not do anything at that time, but he is just boiling mad.

So, he goes home and talks to his wife. He sent and called for his friends and his wife Zeresh. And Haman told them, now look at this in verse 11.

Haman is upset, so how does he comfort himself? How does he try to get over this? He calls all his friends, calls for his wife, sits them all down and says, listen, let me tell you what a great guy I am. He told them of his great riches. He told them of the multitude of his children.

Told them everything in which the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and servants of the king. Moreover, Haman said, besides, Queen Esther has invited me and no one else to come in with the king to the banquet that she prepared. And tomorrow I am again invited by her, along with the king.

Now, Plutarch wrote a biography of Xerxes' son, Artaxerxes. And one of the things Plutarch said, and I think this was probably a tradition that went back to his father and even his grandfather, is that no one was allowed to dine with Artaxerxes, to eat with him, except his real wife, none of the concubines, only his actual wife and his mother. You know who his mother is? A mistress.

A mistress could eat with him and his real wife could eat with him. Nobody else was allowed to dine with the king. And if he ever did allow someone to come in, it was an exception and it was considered to be a very high honor.

So you can understand Haman saying, I'm eating, I'm sharing a meal with the king and the queen, nobody does this, is the idea. So he says, I am exalted above everybody in the land, but all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate. My entire realm of happiness is spoiled by this one circumstance.

Now, this is the nature of life apart from God. It doesn't matter how much you accrue, it doesn't matter how much you attain, it doesn't matter what you possess or what you achieve, one little circumstance can completely blow your happiness away. It is ephemeral.

It's effervescent. It's evanescent. It's ethereal.

It's vaporous. It is hevo. One little puff of wind blows away all of your satisfaction and all of your happiness.

There's one Jewish man who doesn't stand up when other people stand up and doesn't bow when other people bow and all of these great achievements and all of these attainments and all of these possessions are meaningless to Haman because of this one guy who he sees periodically destroys all his happiness. He can't get over it. Why? The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest.

Those troubled waters just cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace for the wicked. The slightest contrary wind completely blows away the vapor of their happiness.

Now, what is the application of this? because we're close to our break. If we find ourselves with this level of instability, if our happiness can disappear in the blink of an eye, if we're not content, if we're not at peace, if we're not finding fulfillment and satisfaction in the day, guess what? We have the Haman kind of happiness. It is not rooted and grounded in the fruit of the Spirit where there is love and joy and peace and patience and the ability to endure and suffer long and be gentle and good and faithful and humble in the genuine sense of the word and have self-control.

That's the fruit of the Spirit. This is not the fruit of the Spirit. And if our happiness can disappear at the blink of an eye to be replaced with indignation and anger and a troubled spirit, we are not living in the power of the Spirit and the Lord Jesus Christ died.

What did He say? I have come that they have life and have it more abundantly. The abundant life is there for the taking. And if we are living the wicked life, this is how our life is going to be.

Who do we want to live to please? If we live to please God, we're going to find ourselves contented. If we live to please ourselves, we're going to find ourselves like Haman, indignant, unhappy. It doesn't matter how much good comes into our life.

We will not appreciate it. We will not enjoy it. Well, it's a little bit of a telltale, a little bit of an indicator on how we're doing.

Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll pick up in verse 14.