

Esther 06-04-11B

Let's pick up our study now in Esther chapter 5. We've already seen that Esther is playing a very high stakes game in terms of etiquette and court protocol and her dealings with the king. He is an unstable guy. He is prone to snap judgments and to anything that he doesn't immediately understand why he turns to the nearest advisor or set of advisors and says, what should we do? He tends to listen to advice.

And with Haman near at hand, it's a really tricky thing because this is Haman's plot and Esther knows it. And so with her initial approach out of the way and she hasn't been killed, then she gets the king and Haman to this first banquet and he once again makes this promise of compliance. And this is very shrewd.

It's very deliberate. It's very carefully thought out. Esther has had three days to think about how she's going to do this and it takes a lot of courage and a lot of poise and self-control to carry it off.

Can you imagine how nervous Esther might have felt at a banquet with Haman sitting right there where with a word from the king, a word from Haman to the king, she could be dead and all of her people. It takes a lot of faith. So she uses the tools at her disposal.

Diplomacy, courtesy. She piques the king's curiosity because she doesn't immediately reveal her request and this takes self-control. When you know something, when you've got a piece of information or you've got something really weighing on your mind and yet it's not the right time to bring it up.

I can remember distinctly the first time I learned this lesson and I learned it the hard way. I was about four years old and I've forgotten some of the details now but it was somebody's birthday and I knew what their present was and they didn't. And I think my dad had told me what he had gotten my mom for her birthday and I was just about to bust.

And so here we were in the kitchen and it was time to bring the presents out and I said, Dad got you an X before she ever opened the box because I had this information and that's how little kids are. They want to tell you what they know. And all of us, at least for me, you still have this instinct all through your life.

When you know something, you want to be the one to reveal it. It's like you somehow partake of the glory of the moment when you're the one that tells it. And it takes self-discipline and it takes self-control and it takes patience to wait and say a thing at the opportune time.

James says the man who can bridle his tongue has brought his whole body into subjection. Well, Esther has got this issue uppermost in her mind. All of the Jews in Shushan are praying for her and going without food thinking about this, worrying about it.

And yet, when the king says, just ask, I'll grant you whatever it is up to half the kingdom, Esther knows that the way to ensure that she gets a yes answer is to be patient. And so she says, my petition and my request? And she very diplomatically and very cleverly attends to

the ceremonial forms. It's important that the king be honored and feel honored and feel like he is the one taking the initiative.

And she is the one responding to his request. And he doesn't wind up feeling like he is at her mercy. That's what got Vashti in trouble.

Vashti told the king to go take a hike when he gave her a command. And Esther is very careful not to make that mistake. So she subtly restates the invitation in such a way that she says, tomorrow I will comply with the king's request.

Instead of, we'll come back tomorrow and I'll get you to respond to my request. And this is how this particular king has to be handled. Now, this is wisdom from God.

And unbeknownst to Esther, she is just doing the best she can with what she knows. But God is going to work in ways that Esther doesn't even know about. And that's what we're about to see here.

Because when Haman goes out and sees Mordecai, and all of his joy turns to ashes in his mouth because his happiness is so unstable, and one little thing can upset the apple cart, he's got accomplishments that took years. It took him years to work his way into the favor of the king. It took him years to raise his sons.

It took him years to accumulate his wealth. And everything that he's got by way of riches and promotion. And all it takes is Mordecai failing to do what Haman wants, and Haman is completely unhappy.

That is the crummy nature of happiness in this life when it doesn't come from God and the things of God. So, Haman's wife has an idea. She says, she and all the friends second the motion.

You get the idea. This is Zeresh's idea. And all the friends say, oh yeah, good plan.

Let a gallows be made fifty cubits high, and in the morning, suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it. Then go merrily with the king to the banquet. Well, we could do our whole second lesson here just on this one verse.

Verse 14. The thing pleased Haman, so he had the gallows made. Right away on that day, he told his servants.

Now, let's think about this. First of all, his wife Zeresh comes up with this idea. Bad company is never a good thing.

How many times in the Bible do we see a wife coming up with a bad idea? Remember the book of Job? Who was it that said curse God and die? Remember, this is a little bit lesser known. That's a real obvious example. But do you remember King Ahab? Remember his wife's name? What was Ahab's wife's name? Frankie Lane sang a whole song.

Jezebel. Ahab was king of Israel. He had great riches.

He had great holdings. He had all kinds of stuff. But he looked out his window one day and he saw something that he didn't have.

What was it? It was the vineyard of Naboth. The Jezreelite. Naboth had this vineyard and Ahab wanted it.

And he became sullen and unhappy and discontent. It didn't matter that he was king. It didn't matter that he had this beautiful yet totally evil wife.

It didn't matter that he had all of the riches and that he had armies and had courtiers and people groveling at his feet. He wanted that vineyard and it wasn't his. So, he went to Naboth and he said, Naboth, I really like that vineyard.

I want to buy it from you. What did Naboth say? Sorry, oh king, it's not for sale. So the king was rough and unhappy and distressed and he went home and he was pouting and discouraged.

And Jezebel said, don't fret yourself. We'll get it for you. And Jezebel has Naboth killed and appropriates the thing.

And so, that was Jezebel's contribution. And of course, because of this, all kinds of bad things end up happening to Ahab. King David, man after God's own heart, blessed with great successes and great advances and great prosperity and everything else, got lazy, got lax, let his spiritual life slip.

And one day when he ought to be out with the army in battle with Joab, instead, he wakes up in the afternoon after sleeping all day and he walks out on the roof of the palace and he sees Uriah's wife. One little thing makes him unhappy and he has to have it. That's what we have going on here.

So, Zeresh plants this idea in his mind. Build this gallows. This is actually a scaffold or a stake.

In Hebrew, it's literally a wood or a wooden thing. We don't know. I mean, hanging was not really the fashion in ancient Persia.

But this was some sort of scaffolding. Now, you already know about cubits, don't you? How high in modern terms is 50 cubits? What's one cubit? It's the measure from the elbow to the tip of the finger, right? Roughly 18 inches. It's a foot and a half.

So, 50 times a foot and a half is how many feet? 75 feet high? There are five to seven-story buildings that are this high. 75 feet high. This, by the way, the ark that Noah built was not this high.

Do you remember how high the ark was? It was 75 feet wide. But the ark that held all of the animals was only 45 feet high. This is 75 feet high.

Now, how high does something have to be to hang someone's carcass on it? Just slightly higher than they are, right? Mordecai is 5'6 or 5'7, which would have been a reasonable height for a man in his day. You only have to have a stake that's like six or seven feet tall,

right? 75 feet? Why does Zeresh suggest a scaffold that gallows this high, do you think? Mordecai is the leader that all of the Jews look up to, right? So, she says, let's let them look up to him. Let's show them what's in store for them.

How far away do you think you could be in Susa, in Shushan, and be able to see Mordecai's dead body 75 feet up? This is sort of like the Goodyear blimp or something. Remember when they used to have the blimp come over and have those little rolling messages on the side made out of lights and they could advertise stuff on it? You put the blimp up there. In the ancient world, I mean 75 feet, this is way on up there.

And we know that it was some sort of a scaffold that could be constructed quickly because Haman has it essentially built in a day. Because they're planning to hang Mordecai's body on it the next day. She says, get the king's permission and hang him on it and then you can go merrily to the feast.

Well, there is a lot to learn here in terms of what your happiness is built on. In Ahab's case, if you go to 1 Kings 21 where that story is that I told you about, it says Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because Naboth wouldn't sell the vineyard. Sullen and displeased.

All of his happiness wiped out by one circumstance. Proverbs 10, verse 2 gives us the principle, the treasures of wickedness profit nothing. Now, people don't like to believe this.

They don't like to think about it. They don't like to dwell on it because they keep thinking, well, it was just that particular wickedness that didn't yield me treasure. Next time it will be different.

Next time it will be better. But the Bible says the treasures of wickedness profit nothing. It is righteousness that delivers from death.

Proverbs 10, verse 2. Remember in Ecclesiastes chapter 1, talked about how all things go on under the sun. And in verse 14, Solomon says, I have seen all the works that are done under the sun. And indeed, all is hevel, vapor, and dining on the wind.

Feeding on wind. Now, what is the contrast for a believer? Paul talks about this in Philippians chapter 4, 11 and 12. Paul says, I'm not speaking in regard to necessity or to need.

For I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. This is a wonderful gift. That your happiness does not depend on your outward circumstances.

It is a great thing to be a thermostat and not a thermometer. In our soul, we can have a climate that's always 72 degrees. Doesn't matter if it's hot.

Doesn't matter if it's cold. If we do not avail ourselves of the power of God to dictate what our happiness is going to be, then we are like the thermometer. And when it's cold, we're cold.

And when it's hot, we're hot. Philippians 4, 12, Paul says, I know how to be abased. And I know how to abound.

Everywhere and in all things, I have learned both to be full and to be hungry. To abound and to suffer need. Doesn't matter what my outward circumstances are.

I have learned to be content. I am stable. God is sufficient for every need and every circumstance.

And that's where they get that old gospel song that says, I shall not be moved. Like a tree that's planted by the waters. Well, this is the difference between Mordecai and Haman.

So, when she makes this suggestion, the thing pleases Haman. And he sends the command out immediately to the servants to have this scaffold constructed. And you know he's a powerful man if he can get a 75 foot scaffold built in a day.

He's got a big staff. He's got a lot of clout. He's got a lot of money.

And he just gives the order. They start that afternoon. And by the next morning, they've got the thing built.

Well, this brings us to chapter 6. Because you figure, well, Mordecai's goose is cooked. If you didn't know this story in advance, you'd think, well, see, Esther should have said something to get the Jews delivered. She should have said something to get Haman out of the way because now Mordecai's going to die.

She delayed. She had this second banquet deal. And that was a bad idea because now Mordecai is essentially under sentence of death.

Well, that's not the case because God is in His heaven and God is paying attention and God is active in the affairs of men and particularly when it comes to the lives of believers. So, look at chapter 6. That night, the king could not sleep. And it says literally in the Hebrew, that night the king's sleep fled away.

Something chased the king's sleep away. So, one was commanded to bring the book of the records of the Chronicles. This is the daily doings in the court of the king.

And he figures, if anything will bore me to death and put me to sleep, it's listening to this dead, dry, dull, you know, the ambassador of none such came and brought so many animals and so many pieces of silver and so many pieces of gold. And the emissary from such and such came and brought this. And the request for that was made and on and on and on.

You have all of these court doings that are just deadly, dull, dry, boring, insignificant. And he says, just read this to me. Well, the poor scribe sits and reads this stuff all night long.

And the king is still wide awake because God has chased his sleep away. So, it was found written, at some point, they hit this, and the king is still wide-eyed and bushy-tailed. It's found written that Mordecai had told of Big Than and Tiresh, two of the king's eunuchs, the doorkeepers who had sought to lay hands on the king.

We saw this back in chapter 2, verse 21, where Mordecai uncovered this plot. So, the king said, what honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this? So, read on down. Tell me what we did to honor him and reward him.

What did we hang around his neck? What villa did we give him? Where is old Mordecai now? Well, the king's servants who attended him said, we didn't do a darn thing. Nothing was done for him. And the king says, what? Nothing was done for him.

And immediately, as is this king's pattern, he says, I need some advice. We need to do something, but I can't think what. So, who's in the court? Who's out there that can advise me? I need an idea man.

I need somebody to tell me what would be best. So, he says, who's out in the court? Now, Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace. What did Haman said? What did Zeresh and Haman talked about the previous day? In the morning, go and ask the king if you can hang Mordecai on your 75 foot high pole.

So, he has showed up. So, this is probably, you know, 8, 830 in the morning the next day. And the king's been up all night long and they just got to the Mordecai part.

God guided the selection of the record books so that they read all night long, read through all this drabble and drivel and insignificant stuff and got to the part about Mordecai just minutes before Haman showed up. And the king says, well, we got to do something for him. This is a terrible omission.

Who's out there? They said, well, Haman just walked in. Bring him in. And so, unsuspecting Haman came in and the king said, what shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor? Well, you just can't beat the straight account here.

Haman thought in his heart, whom would the king delight to honor more than me? So, Haman says, well, I can tell you what ought to be done. For the man whom the king delights to honor, let a royal robe be brought which the king has worn and a horse on which the king has ridden which has a royal crest placed on its head. Let this robe and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes that he may array the man whom the king delights to honor.

Then parade him on horseback through the city square and proclaim before him, thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor. Now, let me just ask you one question. In Haman's mind, who's leading that horse that he's sitting on? Old, unbending, unstanding Mordecai, right? Haman's got a perfect picture of this in his mind.

Unfortunately, he just has the personnel reversed, right? He's thinking, I'll show that Mordecai and then after he gets through leading me through the streets, then I'll hang him on the pole. So, parade him on horseback through the city square. Proclaim before him, thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.

So the king said to Haman, hurry, take the robe and the horse as you have suggested. And Haman is beaming and swelling up and he says, and do so for Mordecai the Jew who sits within the king's gate. Leave nothing undone of all that you have spoken.

So, Haman takes the robe, takes the horse. Haman arrays Mordecai and leads him on horseback through the city square, proclaiming before him, thus shall it be done for the man whom the king delights to honor. And you can imagine the pain and the rage in the heart of Haman to have been thus skewered on his own pride.

So after this, Mordecai gets off the horse, takes off the robe and goes back to the king's gate. Right back to work. No muss, no fuss.

But Haman hurried to his house mourning with his head covered. He just threw a bag over his head and ran home like, oh, I hope nobody sees me. When Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him, he had thought he would come back and say, guess what? If you look out the window there, you'll see Mordecai blowing in a stiff breeze.

Instead, he tells them everything that had happened to him. And his wise men and the wife Zeresh said to him, if Mordecai before whom you have begun to fall is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him, but will surely fall before him. And they figure out that this is the God of Israel that is making this happen.

If he is of Jewish descent, we know the history of the God of Israel. It goes back a thousand years to the destruction of Egypt and the routing of Amalek and the routing of the inhabitants of the land and the kingdom of David and all of his military victories and the God who was with them against the Philistines and against the Moabites and the Ammonites and the Jebusites and the Hivites and the Hittites and the Archites and all the other inhabitants of the land. And they can tell even more clearly than Haman that this has the mark of divine intervention on it.

It is too perfect to be an accident. You are not going to prevail against him. You will surely fall before him.

But while they were still talking and warning him and saying, you know, this is looking bad for you, here comes the eunuchs hastening to bring Haman to the banquet which Esther had prepared. Now, what did Mordecai have to do to be honored? Nothing. He just did his job.

He was faithful. He does not honor those who are vile. And God looks out for him and God honors him.

And in a situation where you expect him to be killed, he is instead honored. Now, there is a little bit of a foreshadowing here, don't you think? Where the one who was to be hanged on a tree or on a wood and suffer the pangs of death at the hands of the evil enemy is instead triumphant over that evil enemy. The plots and schemes of the one who thought he surely had Mordecai in death's grip is instead about to fall.

But not yet. He has a little more time before his execution date comes. And the same is true of Satan and his attack on the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he thought he was going to prevail over the Lord Jesus at the cross. And if Haman had succeeded, Mordecai would be hanging up there for all the Jews to gaze upon. But instead, that death is essentially swallowed up in victory on this occasion.

Well, we've had a whole chapter of delay between Esther inviting the king and Haman to the next banquet and the details of that banquet. And during that time, we see this episode with Mordecai which sets up Haman for that fall that his wife and his friends predict. And so that's what we're going to pick up next time in chapter 7. It's a short chapter.

Only ten verses. But a lot's going to happen in those ten verses. And we've had six chapters of setup and preparation.

And the denouement of this story is going to take place in these next ten verses. So that's what we'll pick up next time. Father, thank you for the example that you give us in your word.

The principle of trusting in you and relying on you and persevering even in the face of difficulty and trial. We know that happiness that is based on anything other than what you provide is transient and momentary. We pray to God the Holy Spirit will impress these truths on our hearts.

Help us to remember them in the days ahead. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.