

“Remarkable Providences”

Esther 6: 1-14

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One Sunday, almost 30 years ago, Sue sat listening to Pastor Joe preach a sermon. As she did, she thought, this is good, but it sounds familiar. And sure enough, when she got home, she looked at one of her devotional books, and there was the sermon written, not by Pastor Joe, but by a well-known author. Sue had been at Pastor Joe's church because she was part of the Pastoral search committee. Realizing that she had heard a “borrowed sermon” it confirmed in her mind that, no, Joe should not be the church's new pastor. Instead, she thought, I think God wants us to call that guy from Wisconsin, Dan Erickson. And folks, the rest is history.

Outside of the name changes, for Joe and Sue, not me, that is a true story. And it makes me think, what if Sue would not have read that chapter? Or what if she would have visited that church not that Sunday, but a week earlier or later? It is possible I would have never become the pastor of Chisholm Baptist Church. I cannot imagine how different my life would be, and how many blessing I would have missed out on.

Friends, as we continue our journey through the book of Esther, we come to chapter 6. Here we see how seemingly insignificant events are used by the Lord in very significant ways. Let's pause and pray the Lord would enable us to hear and heed His word today.

Okay, quick review... Haman the Agagite, the most powerful political figure in the ancient Persian Empire next to King Ahasuerus, plans to exterminate all the Jews. Queen Esther, a woman who has kept her Jewish identity a secret, decides she needs to act on behalf of her people. She bravely approaches the king who gives her an audience. He asks what her request is, and she says, “I want you and Haman to come for dinner and then I will tell you what I want.” They do that, but Esther asks them to come back the next day and then she will reveal her request. Meanwhile, Haman is very angry with Esther's cousin Mordecai, and has prepared gallows to execute him. This brings us to the night, with the king and Haman planning to have a meal with Queen Esther the next day. **Esther 6:1 On that night the king could not sleep. And he gave orders**

to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. Reading when I cannot sleep has been my habit for decades. One shared by the king of Persia 2500 years ago. **Esther 6:2 And it was found written how Mordecai had told about Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, and who had sought to lay hand on King Ahasuerus.** In chapter 2 we read how Mordecai had overheard these two men plotting to assassinate the king, had reported it and saved the king's life. **Esther 6:3 And the king said, “What honor or distinction has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?” The king's young men who attended him said, “Nothing has been done for him.”** This apparently had happened because of some type of administrative error. Learning about this mistake was troubling to the king. In the volatile politics of the Persian courts, he certainly wanted people reporting assassination plots, not planning them. The king wants to correct this failure, in order to motivate people to report subversive activity. He is asking, “How can I honor this Mordecai?”

At that point, Haman comes in and the king asks him, **Esther 6:6b “What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?” And Haman said to himself, “Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?”** Haman assumes the king wants to honor him. Because he already holds the highest office in the empire, next to the king, a promotion is an option. So, Haman decides he wants to use the king's clothes and horse and to be treated *like the king*. He says, **Esther 6:9 Let (the Royal officials) dress the man whom the king delights to honor, and let them lead him on the horse through the square of the city, proclaiming before him: “Thus shall it be done to the man who the king delights to honor.”**

This would be like the President of the United States elevating one of his cabinet members, maybe the Secretary of the Interior, by having him/her fly everywhere on Air Force One or maybe having “Hail to the Chief” played whenever that person walked into the room. Haman longs for this type of prestige that will make him feel superior to everyone around him.

But... **Esther 6:10** Then the king said to Haman, "Hurry; take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Leave out nothing that you have mentioned." Wow. Can you imagine the shock Haman feels at that the best reward, the highest honor Haman can think of is going to be given to Mordecai. The same Mordecai that Haman hates and is planning to have executed. **Esther 6:11** So Haman took the robes and the horse, and he dressed Mordecai and led him through the square of the city, proclaiming before him, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor." Haman has to be seething with anger as he does this.

Esther 6:12, 13 Then Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered. And Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men (who were not all that wise) and his wife Zeresh said to him, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him." Remember, a day earlier their advice was, "What are you waiting for Haman. Just get rid of Mordecai, have him killed." A very big change has occurred very quickly.

Esther 6:14 While they were yet talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried to bring Haman to the feast that Esther had prepared. Chapter 7 tells us what happens at that dinner and that will be our topic next week.

Okay, those are words from the God inspired writer, describing events in ancient Persia, about 500 years B. C. That means these are God's words for us in this room today. What is the Lord saying to you and me this morning.

First, God works through the seeming coincidences of life to accomplish His purposes. Commenting of this chapter, Karen Jobes writes this in her commentary. *The mighty Haman is rendered powerless by a "chance event" when the king just happens to have a sleepless night. He just happens to have the chronicles of his reign read to him. The story of Mordecai's loyalty just happens to come to his attention at the same moment when*

Haman just happens to be plotting Mordecai's death.

Yes, there are a lot of "just happens" in this chapter. One of them, maybe even two of them occurring, might be chalked up to coincidences, but there is clearly something more going on here. There are other "just happens" that impact this event. The big one was... years earlier, in chapter 2, when for some reason, Mordecai was not rewarded for foiling the assassination plot. If he would have been honored at that time, who know how thing would have turned out? The answer: God does and this is all part of His providence, His governing of human affairs, where **Ephesians 1:11** **God works all thing according to the purpose of His will.**

Folks, in one sense this is a fairly simple concept. God's is in control. He is the ruler of the Universe. There is not (Matthew 10:29) a single one of the estimated 1.6 billion sparrows in the world today, that falls to the ground apart from His will. Yet, when we think about how God exercises His providence, things can get pretty complicated and amazing. I have spent considerable time thinking about and discussing this topic over the years and there are parts I understand and parts that are still a mystery to me. And that's okay. I know there is a God and I know I am not Him. I don't expect to always understand why and how He does things, and you should not either. However, I do know, because of what the Bible teaches, that God is omniscient, He knows all things. That includes exhaustive foreknowledge. God not only knows everything about this world at this moment, but knows everything about what will be tomorrow, or 100 years from now. He knows what will be, and even *what could have been.*

God is omnipotent, all powerful. As **Psalm 115:3** says, **Our God is in heaven; He does whatever pleases him.** Nothing is too difficult for God. The Lord uses His infinite knowledge and power to accomplish His purposes, which includes His glory and the ultimate good of His people. Yet, specifically How God does this is a little more complicated. For example, in our text today, how does it happen that King Ahasuerus cannot sleep that night and reads about Mordecai? Remember, if the king would have slept through the night, Mordecai would have likely been executed the next morning.

Did God simply know the king would be unable to sleep? Or did the Lord intervene and wake him up somehow? Or did he inspire the royal cook to make some extra spicy food to give the king indigestion and keep him awake? Or did God just know the royal cook would do that? We don't know. We often don't know how God accomplishes His purposes; we only know that He does. And that involves orchestrating all sorts of events, situation, and people toward that end. The more I think about that, the more I realize how amazing it is!

Jobs puts it this way. *Our God is so great, so powerful, that He can work without miracles through the ordinary events of billions of human lives through millennia of time to accomplish His eternal purposes and ancient promises. God delivered an entire race of people in Persia because the king had a sleepless night, because a man would not bow to his superior, because a woman found herself taken to the bedroom of a ruthless man for a night of pleasure. How inscrutable are the ways of the Lord!*

Second, this means, the lesson #2, your life is not an accident. The events and details of your life are not accidents. Those things are all under the umbrella of God's providence. There is a reason, a purpose, for every aspect of your life, even the most mundane and boring parts.

Romans 8:28 tells us that, **And we know that in all thing (all things!) God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.** That includes seemingly insignificant things that appear quite unimportant at the time, but actually form a chain leading to a great blessing.

For example, thing about how you met your spouse and ended up getting married. You maybe were not even planning on going to your cousin's wedding, but then your mom asked you to go with her because your dad had to work. And it was at that wedding you met the gal who would become your wife. One couple got married after she slid through a stop sign and hit a guy's car. They didn't get married that day, but it is how they met. The Lord often uses seemingly insignificant events to bring about good things in our lives. And folks, it is healthy and important to believe that there is a purpose behind what happened in your life this past week.

The other day I was reading a novel, Ken Follet's, "Winter of the world" where a woman in Berlin has a baby right after World War 2 has ended. It was a very difficult time for anyone living in that city. When the baby was born, her friend quotes from the book of Job, "The Lord gives, the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord." The baby's mother says, "Even though I don't believe in God, there is something comforting about those words. It makes me feel that maybe there is a purpose in all the things that have happened."

Friends, as human being we long for that sense of purpose. I think we need that sense of purpose. Yet, if there is no God, if He does not exist, if we are just cosmic accidents as atheists tell us, then there can really be no purpose, no meaning.

That is something we need to continually remind those around us who claim to be atheists or agnostics. Without God, any so-called purpose in life is only an illusion. However, your life becomes filled with meaning, when you realize that every aspect is under the umbrella of God's providence. And that includes the tough and even tragic things that sometimes happen in our lives. The promises God has made is that ultimately even those will be used for His glory and our ultimate good, if we are believers in Jesus. In His providence takes these dark threads of our lives and then uses them to weave a beautiful tapestry.

This poem by Corrie Ten Boom beautifully expresses her confidence that there is purpose for every part of our lives.

My life is but a weaving between my God me. I cannot choose the colors, He weaveth steadily. Oft' times He weaveth sorrow; and I in foolish pride, forget He sees the upper, and I the underside. Not 'til the loom is silent, and the shuttles cease to fly, will God unroll the canvas and reveal the reason why. The dark threads are as needful, in the weaver's skillful hand, as the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned. He knows, he loves, He cares. Nothing this truth can dim. He gives the very best, to those who leave the choice to Him.

Friends, if you really believe the powerful truth reflected in those words, you will be able to find joy in any type of circumstance as you realize you are living each day under the umbrella of God's providence.

Third, be encouraged by the marvelous reversals that the Lord has done in the past, because He can still do the same today, and He will do so in the future. In chapter 5, Haman is, except for the king, the most powerful man in the Persian Empire. Mordecai the Jew is about to feel Haman's wrath and be killed. But things change very rapidly. In one night, Mordecai goes from death row to being the most honored man in the empire. Part of the book of Esther is how the lowly Mordecai is exalted while the proud and wicked Haman is brought down to the bottom.

There are other great reversals in the Old Testament. Joseph goes from being stuck in prison to being Prime Minister of Egypt. David, the shepherd boy, defeats the great giant Goliath and then becomes the king of Israel. And this all points to what happen in the New Testament. Mary, an ordinary teenage girl living in an ordinary little village, all of the sudden is mother of the Messiah. Jesus, a carpenter from that little village, is revealed as the eternal Son of God. The Jesus is cruelly executed on a cross on Friday, but on Sunday is the risen Lord.

In fact, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the pivotal point of the great reversal. At that point everything changed direction. Human history begins to move slowly, but surely, toward the point where "everything sad becomes untrue." Those were Sam's words to Gandalf near the end of "The Lord of the Rings," but it clearly reflects the Biblical view. Yes, there will be bumps, including some big ones along the road, but history is moving toward a culmination where **Revelation 11:15 "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever."** And then **Revelation 21"3b, 4 The dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."**

Friends don't ever forget: That is where we are going. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ that is your destiny. Guaranteed. As I said there will likely be plenty of difficulties. Like the rest of creation (Romans 8) we will often be groaning, waiting for our redemption. Yet, no matter what

challenges you face: serious health issues, frustration with your job, betrayal by a friend, bills you cannot pay, constant bickering with your spouse, an addiction to alcohol or porn, continual ridicule at school, or an abusive parent. The Lord may graciously turn any of those things around. You might pray to ask Him to do that. And there are usually also things you should do, steps you should take, that the Lord will use to bring that about.

For example, a couple of weeks ago at the "Every Man a Warrior" gathering one fellow said, before I joined this study a year ago, I did not have a relationship with God and my marriage seemed to be falling apart. Now, I have a relationship with God and my marriage is much better. Yes, that is a paid advertisement for "Every Man A Warrior." Pastor Mark, you can just make the check out to me.

No folks, it is just truth about how God uses small group Bible studies to change people's lives. And it is a reminder that when you focus on developing a right relationship with God, good things often happen in your life. Because as Romans 8:28 says, when you are trusting in Jesus Christ, when you are a son or daughter of the true and living God, He will always be working in your life as you live under the umbrella of His providence. He will be working to bring about His glory and your ultimate good.

May that truth, that reality, encourage us to trust and follow the Lord Jesus today, and in all the days ahead.