

"A Time for Justice"

Esther 7: 1-10

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Okay, a quick review of the story so far...

Our setting is about 500 BC in the city of Susa, in what would now be Iran. It is a capital of the Persian Empire, the great world power of that time under the ruler King Xerxes, AKA Ahasuerus. Through a series of remarkable providences, a Jewish orphan girl becomes the queen, and her cousin Mordecai helps foil a plot to assassinate the king.

Haman is the top political figure in the empire, next to the king. He is a wicked man and a descendent of Agag, and ancient enemy of Israel. He comes up with a plan to exterminate all the Jewish people in the empire. Neither the king nor Haman know Queen Esther is Jewish, so Mordecai begs her for help. She agrees and risks her life by approaching the king without being summoned.

The king chooses to receive her and asks what her request is. She says, "If you and Haman come to dinner tomorrow, I will tell you." The king and Haman do that, and Esther's request is that they come back the next day. That seems kind of strange, but that night something happens that changes the whole equation. Again, there are some remarkable providences. The king learns Mordecai the Jew had not been rewarded for discovering an assassination plot, and thus he is intent on doing just that. This brings us to our text today. Let's pause and pray the Lord would enable us to hear and heed His word for us today.

Esther 7:1,2 So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. (2 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.") Esther's desire is pretty simple. She wants the king to put an end to Haman's evil plan to exterminate the Jews. Yet, she has to be careful for two reasons. First, Haman is the king's top advisor and probably closest friend. She has to make sure her case against Haman is very strong. And second, an even bigger problem is that Haman's decree of death had been sealed by the king, indicating his approval. Her goal is to accuse Haman without incriminating the king.

As we noted a couple of weeks ago, Esther is seeking to be very wise with her words and God is graciously giving her the ability to do so.

In verse 3 Ester introduces her request with the proper language and then tells the king, **Esther 7:4a For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated.** This is the first time Esther reveals to the king that she is Jewish.

She also points to the financial motive behind this plan. People will kill the Jews and then be able to confiscate their property. **Esther adds 7:4b If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have been silent, for out affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king.**" She appeals to the king's self-interest, which was likely his top priority. If the Jews were only made slaves, he would benefit from the free labor. But if they are killed, it is a tragic loss. The king realizes this.

Esther 6:5 Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?" Strangely Esther's description of the edict doesn't seem to ring a bell with the king. He maybe had never read the decree he has signed with his seal.

Esther doesn't remind the king of that, but answers **Esther 7:6a "A for and enemy! This wicked Haman!"** he is the man who wants to annihilate me and my people. **7:6b Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.** As indeed he should be, because all of the sudden it is not the Jews, but Haman who is in great danger.

Esther 7:7a And the king arose in his wrath from the wine-drinking and went into the palace garden. I suspect he was pondering his dilemma. How can I punish Haman when I gave him approval to his plot? I am the king; I cannot just admit I was wrong. Plus, any law I have sealed is irrevocable. I cannot simply cancel it.

But Haman's next action solves the king's problem. **Esther 7:7b Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that**

harm was determined against him by the king.

Esther had begged the king to save her and her people from Haman. Now Haman begs Esther to save him from the king. However, **Esther 7:8a The king returned from the palace garden to the place where they were drink 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?”**

It was unlikely that sexual assault was Haman's intent, but the angry king wasn't inclined to give Haman any benefit of the doubt. Besides, Haman was clearly violating court protocol, which said that a man must not come within seven paces of any woman in the king's haram, much less the queen.

Esther 7:8b As the word left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face. That is what they did to a man being arrested. **Esther 7:9 Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, “Moreover, the gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, is standing at Haman's house, fifty cubits high, or about 75 feet high.”**

Folks, there is a great deal of irony in this chapter. It begins with Esther begging the king for mercy, and soon Haman is begging Esther for mercy. He falls before a Jew, a Jewish woman, whom he unknowingly condemned to death. Haman falls all the way from his exalted position as the king's right-hand man, to a shameful death as a traitor. In fact, he is executed on the very gallows that he had prepared for a man he hated, Esther's cousin, Mordecai, the Jew.

Okay, as we turn our attention to a question that troubles some folks as they read this chapter. An answer to that question will help us better understand what the Lord is saying to us in this passage. The question: Why doesn't Esther speak up and save Haman from the terrible fate of being executed on the gallows? She likely knows that he was not trying to kill or molest her. Why doesn't Esther grant Haman's request for mercy? After all, Haman did not intend to harm Esther. He may have told her, “Oh queen, I didn't know you were Jewish. I would have never proposed that edict if I would have known it would put you in danger.”

That claim would be plausible because Esther had concealed her ethnic and religious identity up to

that point. No one in the royal court knew she was Jewish. Haman's edict to kill the Jews was not a personal attack on Esther. And isn't it the Christian thing, the Godly thing, to forgive your enemies?

Friends, I think Esther's decision not to intercede on Haman's behalf can be defended on a personal level. Haman really did get what he deserved; he was planning to annihilate the entire Jewish population. That very day he intended to kill Esther's cousin Mordecai, just to satisfy his ego. *Haman was a wicked man.*

Yet, he was seemingly executed for crimes he did not actually commit. That doesn't really fit our understanding of justice. Or maybe this is like Al Capone, the Chicago gangster, going to prison for tax evasion. That was a small crime compared to the numerous murders for which he was responsible. But that is the charge the authorities could prove. Or maybe it is like D. Bonhoffer plotting to assassinate Hitler, an act that would not be legal, but would seem, at least to me, to be just. Remember Haman has already put in place an edict to annihilate the entire Jewish population. That is a crime deserving a most severe punishment.

Still, reading the book of Esther on this level, evaluating the righteousness of her actions, misses much of what the Lord is saying to us. The message of the book is not “here is what Esther did, go and do likewise.” Remember, the main character is not Esther or Mordecai, but the Lord God who is faithful to His people even when they are not faithful to Him. He is the one who providently works through both ordinary events and extraordinary miracles to accomplish His purposes which culminates in the coming of Messiah. Through the Messiah's death and resurrection, life comes to all who turn to and trust in Him.

That is the bigger picture, the big story of which the book of Esther is a part. Thus, Haman in the big picture is not merely an enemy of the Jewish people, but he is actually trying to prevent God's plan from taking place. By wiping out the Jews he will make sure no Messiah is ever born. That is why he is know as Haman the Agagite, a descendent of the king of the long time enemy of Israel, the Amalekites. As queen of Persia and a Jew, Esther is really the ruler of the Jewish people.

Including those who at that time had returned from exile to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple. The execution of Haman the Agagite, means the queen has succeeded where her ancestor, King Saul, had failed. That story is told in 1 Samuel 15.

The Lord had commanded King Saul, Israel's first king, to go into battle and destroy the Amalekites, ancient enemies of Israel. Saul does that, except he decides to spare the life of the Amalekite king, Agag. He also keeps some of the plunder for himself. When the prophet Samuel comes and finds that Saul has not followed the Lord's instructions, he is furious at Saul and executes Agag himself. Yet, according to rabbinic tradition, which may or may not be true, Agag had slept with his wife one more time before Samuel killed him. And the son conceived that night had a descendent 500 years later named Haman, who tried to use the power of the Persian Empire against the Jews, God's people, the descendants of Saul.

In the Bible storyline Esther has succeeded in doing what Saul failed to do. She has killed Haman with shrewdness, as surely as King Saul could have and should have killed Agag with his sword.

Yet, Haman's roots go deeper than that. He is part of the seed of the serpent, opposing the seed of the woman, the Jewish people. What are you talking about Pastor Dan? Well, back in the garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve have sinned the Lord says to the serpent, the tempter Satan, **Genesis 3:15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring (or seed) and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."**

That is a prediction of numerous temporary victories for the seed of the serpent, but ultimately there will be a complete victory for the seed of the woman, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Again, Haman's plan to exterminate the Jews is not only directed against the Jewish people, but directed against the Jewish Messiah, Jesus, and against God Himself. That is why Haman must be stopped. And that is what Esther, enabled by the Lord, does.

So, when looking at the big picture, the big story, there is no question about Esther's action. She was used by the Lord to defeat not only her enemy,

but also an enemy of her people, and enemy of God's people, an enemy of God's redemptive plan of salvation, an enemy of the Messiah, an enemy of God Himself.

His execution was likely a cause of rejoicing in heaven, and really a reason for all of God's people, including us, to rejoice. Okay, let's reflect on the implications of our text for us today.

#1 An obvious warning – Don't be like Haman. It is not hard to imagine what Haman would be like if he lived in the 21st century. In fact, you probably know some people like him. He is a very successful man, lots of wealth and prestige, but with no time for God. And he is unhappy. He is very influential in political circles, but he is always concerned that other people don't respect and admire him as much as he thinks he should be.

He spends a lot of time trying to figure how he can make himself look good and his competitors, his enemies, look bad. Through on the outside it looks like he has a good life, on the inside he is pretty empty, and that impressive shell can crack very easily and very quickly.

2500 years ago, Haman held the highest position of anyone in the Persian empire except for the king. The next day everything fell apart, he was elevated to another position, a horrible position, 75 feet above the ground, impaled on a wooden stake.

Friends, Haman's life fell apart very quickly, but that can happen to anyone who seeks happiness apart from God. Yes, everything may seem to be going smoothly, you may feel like you are living the dream, but it can all come crashing down tomorrow.

The doctor may say the biopsy is not good. It is cancer. Or maybe it is not you but your spouse, your parent, or you child who is diagnosed with a serious illness. Or there is a change of management at your company and all of a sudden you are without a job. Or there is a car accident and instead of going on a shopping trip with your best friend next weekend, you are going to her funeral. Or you think your marriage is doing okay, not great but okay, and then a friend tells you he saw your wife hand in hand with another man at a restaurant in Duluth last week. Or any one of 500

different things can happen and overnight every ounce of joy can be sucked right out of your life.

Now, all those things I just mentioned can still happen to you if you are a Christian. However, if you are a believer in Jesus even when your shell cracks into 1000 pieces, there is still something solid, something of substance, which will get you through the difficult time and lead you to a greater joy than you have ever dreamed. But for those who don't know the Lord, those not trusting in the Lord Jesus, when that shell cracks, when life falls apart, there is really nothing left to provide peace or hope. The present situation looks bleak, and the future look even bleaker.

In fact, those who refuse to turn to the Lord, are heading for a destination far worse than Haman's gallows, they are heading to eternal hell.

Maybe you are thinking, "Pastor Dan, quit trying to scare me. Just because I am not religious like you, doesn't mean I am a bad person. I try to help other people out wherever I can." That is great. But the reality is you are a bad person, just like I am.

Pride and selfishness often seep into our souls. Jesus once said, no one is good, except God. Haman's biggest sin was not that he hated Mordecai, or even that he wanted to annihilate the Jews. His biggest sin was that, in the big picture, he was working to stop God's plan.

And friends, if you are refusing to trust in the Lord Jesus as your savior, if you insist that you are doing just fine without Him, if you have rejected the salvation God has provided through the death and resurrection of Jesus, you are in the same boat Haman was. The Bible is clear, **John 3:36** **Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.**

Again, those words are not intended to scare you, but to help you realize this is very serious stuff. This is not a game. We are playing for keeps. It is a reminder that on the final judgement day, the condemned will ultimately realize that they have no one to blame but themselves. So, if you are not sure you are trusting in the Lord Jesus, please talk to me, or Pastor Mark before you leave.

#2 One more quick lesson. Do be like Esther. She is still a relatively young woman, probably under 25. We talked about how she is not really a devout Jew, nor is she someone of outstanding character. Yet, when the times comes, she really steps up. Cousin Mordecai had reminded her of how "for such a time as this" she was in the position of being queen of the Persian Empire. Yet much courage and wisdom were still required of her if Haman was to be stopped and the Jews were to be saved. By the grace of God Esther demonstrated that courage and wisdom.

Friends, the same thing is true for each of us, for such a time as this, October 2022, the Lord has called us to be His ambassadors here on the Iron Range of Minnesota. To be effective ambassadors of Jesus requires more courage and wisdom than ever. With that in mind, we need to be praying, for ourselves and for each other, that the Lord would provide the courage and wisdom we need.

We should also work at sharpening our ambassador skills. That is part of being an effective disciple maker. We need to know what the Bible teaches, understand what people around us are thinking, and figure out ways we can connect those people to the gospel. We need to remember this is serious business. You don't need to have a Bible college degree or anything, but you do need to think, think carefully, about how you can be the ambassador Jesus has called you to be.

And then we need to encourage one another. You need to spend time with other believers and use that time not just to enjoy each other's company, but to encourage each other to love God, love others and make disciples. That should be my goal and your goal, each and every day.