

When the Right Thing Is the Hardest Thing & When Doing Good Doesn't Seem To Matter

Esther 2:19-3:1 | Notes

I. Introduction

IS IT ALWAYS RIGHT TO DO WHAT'S RIGHT? Is it always right to obey the moral law of God? Are there any exceptions?

- Are there times when we are allowed to give greater weight to our personal feelings, ideas, & judgments than to the holy commandments of God?
- Most of you, I hope, are saying, "Yes, it is always right to do what is right." "It is always right to obey God's moral law." And "No exceptions."
- But this is easy to say in theory. It is easy to agree with intellectually. It is much harder to live out in the real situations of the real world where injustice abounds, where those who behave selfishly seem to always get ahead, and where sometimes the right thing is the hardest thing of all.
- **Is it always right to do what's right?** What about when doing right helps someone who has done much wrong? What about when doing right protects someone who has been a threat to others? What about when doing right serves someone who is your enemy?

We don't only struggle with this question in the extremes of evil, do we? We also struggle with it because of our short-sighted pragmatism.

- That is to say, we also struggle with this question because of our tendency to have a misguided focus on the immediate rather than the eternal, on the fleshly rather than the spiritual, and on the present benefit to self rather than the everlasting glory of God.
- **"PRAGMATISM" is a way of assessing the value or goodness of something based on our perception of its immediate practical benefits.**
- In other words, when a person is being pragmatic, they attempt to determine whether something is right or wrong, worth it or not worth it, by their own personal answer to questions like: "What good did it do?" "What benefit does it yield?" And often the assessment is even more subjective.
- People do not merely ask, "What good did it do?" but rather: "**What good did it do...for me...right now...in my personal & immediate circumstances?**"
- Pragmatism is not all bad. It can be a fine method of assessment when it comes to grocery shopping or packing for a camping trip, etc.
- **But PRAGMATISM WILL ALWAYS END UP LEADING US ASTRAY WHEN IT COMES TO MORALITY & OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S COMMANDMENTS.**
- Sometimes our obedience to God is NOT pragmatic according to human measures. Sometimes it does NOT yield perceptible immediate benefits.
- In fact, sometimes obedience seems downright inconvenient, difficult, inconsequential, or even in the way of our desires for progress & success.
- So let me ask you again: **Is it always right to do what is right?** Even when it isn't pragmatic? Even when you don't see immediate personal gains?

These are some of the struggles that Mordecai faced in the passage we will consider today: Esther 2:19-3:1.

- After his adopted daughter was forcefully taken into the harem of the wicked king to be used as his new play toy, Mordecai becomes aware of a plot against the king's life. He catches wind that there are guards who plan to assassinate the man who stole his daughter & sexually humiliated her.
- **What would you do in this situation?** Would you keep quiet? Would you hope the plan succeeded? Would you offer your help? Or would you stand for justice, even though that justice was protecting an unjust man who had done much harm to you & your family? **Is it always right to do what's right?** (Read Passage)

II. When the Right Thing To Do Is the Hardest Thing To Do (2:19-23)

v19 tells us that even after making Esther queen, King Ahasuerus continued to gather more "virgins" from across his empire to satisfy his lust.

- The author includes this detail to make sure we do not lose sight of the despicable character of the man whom Mordecai will be called to save.
- We are also given new information about Mordecai's situation. Twice we are told that "Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate". (v19 & 21)
- In ancient times, "the king's gate" was an important civic complex in which various types of governing officials would fulfill their service to king and country. This means that Mordecai was very likely a governing official, but we are not told of what kind or where he fell in the hierarchy of authority.
- What we are told in v20 is that both Mordecai & Esther continued to hide their family tie to one another as well as their Jewish ancestry.
- We need to keep in mind what we saw last week, that is, the controlling motivation for hiding their Jewish heritage was a lack of faith.
- Although they are both true believers, they are true believers who were presently in a very weak and vulnerable position. Their faith was hanging on by a thread and they were operating as if their future & hope depended completely on their own efforts and wits, rather than the promises of God.

In a strange way that only the LORD can accomplish, God sent rescue for Mordecai's failing faith. But it did not come how we might have expected.

- We tend to think that when our faith is weak, God will send us a season of ease, of rest, of comfort, of peace & of blessing—**and sometimes he does**.
- **But other times, when our faith is weak and doubts assail us on every side, God providentially sends us deeper into the fray, deeper into the pain.**
- **He does this in order to show us by TESTING, that our faith, though weak & wavering, is nevertheless a true faith, a divine & unbreakable faith, b/c even when hard pressed on every side, even when we are utterly emptied of ourselves, we still will not turn away from our God or give up hope.**
- **True faith can be assaulted & weakened. It can be caused to falter & stumble. But it cannot be finally extinguished; it cannot be truly snuffed out.**

God did this very thing for Mordecai by providentially positioning him to hear of the assassination plot being made by two of King Ahasuerus' guards.

- This situation, which was divinely ordered by God, would have been one of the most challenging tests of faith in Mordecai's entire earthly life.
- This is because Mordecai knows that assassinating the king—though he is an unjust king—is not the right course of action in the sight of God.
- Mordecai knows it is wrong to take justice into our own hands outside of the ordained courts of authority which God has given. (Church Elders Mt. 18; Gov. Rm. 13)
- Moreover, to know of this evil and to do nothing to stop it would make Mordecai complicit to murder—a direct violation of the holy law of God. (Ex. 20:13)

And yet, can you imagine anything which Mordecai would have wanted more than to see King Ahasuerus pay for his heinous abuses?

- This was the man who had abducted his daughter, taken her into his harem, lathered her in ointments and perfumes for a year, only to sexually violate and humiliate her for the satisfaction of his own lustful pleasure. And he did not only do this to Esther, he did it to "many young women". (v8)

Against this backdrop let us ask again: Is it always right to do what's right?

- Would Mordecai trust that God's laws are right, good, true and best?
- Or would Mordecai trust that his own sense of revenge, of justice & retribution were better than God's & more worthy of his allegiance at this time?

Likewise, what do you do when God's moral law conflicts with your own sense of personal desire, personal interest, personal pleasure or safety?

- **What do you do when the right thing to do in God's sight is the hardest thing of all? When it grates against every instinct and desire in your being?**
- It is in the place of **TESTING** that you find out if you are a person who walks by faith in God or faith in yourself. You find out if you truly believe that the Lord is God & that his will is best at all times, or whether you believe that you are wiser than God & know better than he what is best for your life.
- Those who have a true, divine faith, will discover in the hour of **TESTING** that though their souls are dreadfully weak, assaulted in every part and shaking at the knees, nevertheless, they cannot and shall not deny their Lord in full. They discover within them the sustaining hand of God at work.
- And even if, in the day of **TESTING**, their faith does falter as Peter's did at the hour of Jesus' arrest, they will never be content with such a failure, they will never think it a small or trivial thing, but will quickly be brought to a mournful repentance before the Lord their God whom their soul truly loves.
- **What have the moments of testing revealed in your heart, dear ones?** *Have the tests God has sent brought assurance of the sincerity of your faith through trusting obedience to his will? Or have they exposed the possibility that you are walking by faith in yourself over-against true trust in God?*

Sadly, in far lesser situations, professing Christians today routinely dismiss God's laws in preference to their own desires without even blinking.

- **But not Mordecai.** Like Christ, Mordecai's faith enabled him to trust & obey the will of his Father in heaven even when that will contradicted his own.
- And like Christ, Mordecai's trusting obedience even in the face of sorrow would later be turned by God to bring salvation to many others.
- **Two lessons: (1)** We must leave revenge to the Lord & not try to take justice into our own hands, but follow his ways. **(2)** We must believe at all times that God is wiser than we, and therefore, by sincere faith, obediently submit ourselves to the fullness of his holy revealed will without reservation.
- **This is what Mordecai did.** He got the message to the king. He loved his enemy b/c he loved his God. And the result is that the king's life was spared.

II. When Doing Good Doesn't Seem To Matter (2:22-3:1)

But there is just a little bit more to this story as we begin to be introduced to the 4th and final main character of the book: **"Haman the Agagite".**

- **Let's re-read 2:22-3:1.** There is some important historical context that makes the juxtaposition of these final two verses pregnant with meaning.
- While Mordecai would have felt extreme reluctance to spare King Ahasuerus' life, he would have also been fully aware that Persian kings were VERY DILIGENT about giving lavish rewards to those who committed acts of loyalty—& Mordecai's actions would have been viewed as great indeed.
- This is the significance of the author being careful to tell us that "...Esther told the king in the name of Mordecai." (v22)
- It was typical for Persian kings to give money, power, & position to those who demonstrated their commitment to the king's well-being & interests.
- So when we read in v23 that the Mordecai's deed was "recorded in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king" all ancient readers of this book would automatically be expecting the next verse to read of Mordecai's promotion, or some other generous reward. ("Duck, duck..." "Ready, set...")

It is at the exact moment when we expect Mordecai to be blessed for his obedience to God that the author instead tells us Mordecai was forgotten.

- Moreover, the author tells us that instead of Mordecai being advanced for doing the right thing, another man was honored & promoted by the king—and not just any man, but a wicked man who hailed from the ancient enemies of God's people: "Haman the Agagite". (*More on Haman next week*)
- For now, I want to focus our attention on the moral struggle which Mordecai would have been facing—and that, perhaps, we have also faced.
- Against his every inclination, Mordecai trusted God and obeyed his moral law, even when it meant loving and protecting his enemy.
- And then, instead of being rewarded, instead of being honored & receiving blessing, Mordecai was overlooked & forgotten by the very king he saved.
- **His good deed seemed like it didn't matter at all.** It brought him no benefit. It seemed like his faith & obedience had no pragmatic value for his life.
- **Have you been there?** Have you held firm to God's Word only to have it thrown in your face? Have you sought to love an enemy only to have them take advantage of your kindness & turn it against you? Have you tried to obediently honor the Lord & instead of causing things to go well it actually made your life harder? **In those moments have you asked:** Does it even matter? Why did I do the right thing? Why didn't I just take the easier road?

Like ourselves, Mordecai may have felt at this moment that his obedience didn't matter. But we know from the rest of the story that this is not true.

- Later in Esther we will see how God's timing is not like our timing, and that Mordecai's immediate reward would have been of far lesser value than the future reward which came. But I want us to face the tension of this moment and to learn a lesson from it.
- We often feel as though doing the right thing doesn't seem to matter. In fact, often times as Christians, doing the right thing comes w/ a great cost.
- Sometimes we are hated for it. Sometimes we miss out on earthly opportunities b/c of it. Sometimes we are slandered, maligned, & rejected for it.
- **But our calling doesn't change. We are called to trust God and do good even when we do not see the immediate pragmatic benefit/reward.** (1 Pt. 4:12-19)
- We do not obey for what we get out of it. **We obey b/c: (1) We love our Father in heaven (2) We trust his wisdom (3) We want to honor his name.**
- We do not know how God may use our obedience, and moreover, it is not for us to decide or demand how God might use our obedience.
- Our calling as Christians is to simply trust and obey. By faith we are called to to honor God as best as we can and leave the results to him.
- **If Mordecai judged the worth of his obedience by its immediate pragmatic effect, he would have judged wrongly. The same is true for you and I.**

Application:

Put your trust in the Lord and do what is right, even when it contradicts your desire or you cannot see its benefits.

