

Esther 2:19-3:4 'Integrity, Truth, And A Line In The Sand!'

Last time we looked at Esther we opened up chapter 2:8-18 in a sermon I called 'The Choosing Of The Queen, God's Queen'. We continue to see the unseen Hand of God working through Esther, Mordecai, and all of the events that surrounded them. We saw in v8 that all of these young women were "taken," they had no choice in the matter. Even though it may well have been considered an honour for them to be "taken", yet "taken" they were!

V9 "Esther pleased Hegai and won his favour." As the commentator Duguid calls it, a sweet compliance spirit. But she was not passive in this, she was active in winning his favour. And she went to the head of the queue of the hundreds of young women. Special food given to her and her 12 months of beauty preparations had begun. With seven maids and the best place in the harem! And I explained that what we see is that mysterious, that unfathomable way that God works through and even despite what we might call, the misadventures of His people. Philippians 2:13 "For it is God who works in you to will and act according to his good purpose."

I also said that in v10 we get no explanation for why Mordecai gave the command to Esther to keep secret her nationality. I suggested that we have one reason only: that Mordecai was moved by God! Then in v11, we saw him in his fatherly love, "Pacing back and forth every day" for years in his love for his adopted child. Clearly a reflection of our heavenly Father's love for us!

And finally with the crown upon Esther's head and another feast, for years after the first one from which these events entailed v18, we asked the question of ourselves: if these young women had to endure those year-long preparations for their one providence of being chosen by the king, then what are we prepared to endure for our King, Jesus? Not to be chosen, but because we already have been chosen. Yes if our king endured the cross for us, what are we prepared to endure for Him? Will we even praise Him in the storm?

And so we now continue in the narrative. Esther 2:19-3:4 'Integrity, Truth, and A Line In The Sand!' Friends in the following account, we find as it is within many histories of kings, Queens or rulers. We find intrigue, conspiracies, and assassination plots. And as we do examine these things, let us always continue to keep an eye upon the unseen hand of God, orchestrating them all, as He now will ready His queen, to soon act on the behalf of His people!

V19 "When the virgins were assembled a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate." Now brothers and sisters, we are given no insight into this gathering of the king's women. Why they were there. Who was actually there. Or what it even means. The NIV footnote suggests that there may well have been some connection between this gathering and the ensuing conspiracy. That perhaps these two men were supporters of the former queen Vashti. And when seeing queen Esther crowned in all her royal glory, they were infuriated and their murderous intent ensured!

Now this may well be true it's not farfetched by any means, but I just don't know. What we are privy to though, is the knowledge that there continues to be this intimate bond between the Queen, and her adoptive father Mordecai. As Matthew Henry explains, Mordecai at this point actually has quite an important position. He calls Mordecai one of the "gatekeepers" or doorkeepers. These were the men who gave access to come and go from those parts of entry throughout the city. In king David's time, there was a team of 4000 of them who guarded the city and the temple of the Lord. They were in effect the king's outer watch or guard! Now had Mordecai been elevated to this position since

Esther had been made Queen? I don't know but perhaps most likely. And we find him during this "second gathering of the virgins at the king's gate." And you know, it may well even be that though the new Queen had already been chosen, the virgins continued to be brought to the king! And if you remember our studies in the book of Ruth, the "king's gate," is where the movers and shakers met.

That's where the important requests were made. Legal decisions formalised and disputes were brought between people to be ruled over. There was that infamous one when king Solomon ruled between two women over a disputed baby. If you remember, two women each had a child, and one accused the other of stealing hers, when she had slept upon her child and the baby had died. And if you also remember, Solomon said, "let the child be cut in half and half given to each woman." But then of course horrified at such a thing, the true mother cried out let the baby be given to the other woman. So Solomon knew that only the love of a true mother, would rather the child be given away, then he ruled in her favour!

Well that's where we find Mordecai taking his position as one of the gatekeepers, with his ear to the ground so to speak, in the defence of the king. Then in v20, the author yet again makes mention of that close and intimate relationship between Esther and her adoptive father Mordecai. And also, that she had kept secret her nationality and her family background. "For she continued to follow Mordecai's instruction as she had done when he was bringing her up." Yes we continue to get this picture of the godly influence that the older man had upon his adopted child. Even though she is now the reigning Queen and even under the king's own roof!

Beloved, how tragic it is today, that the wisdom of years along with many other biblical principles, has been cast aside for what we might call, modern or progressive thinking. Yes the idea of true wisdom, (which can only be born of years and is not merely intelligence, should be that by which we are governed) is sadly gone. That wonderful picture of a grandmother or grandfather with their children and grandchildren and perhaps even great grandchildren all gathering around them. The young ones listening in to the funny or exciting stories, but also to the recounts of the trials, hardships and heart breaks that the family has endured to arrive at where it is today. All of the things that the family has learned because of those collective experiences. And how they can now look back and see God's Hand in it all!

I have no doubt that in years to come both Esther and Mordecai would have recognised this. Yes how sad it is, that such scenes are more and more a thing of the past in many ways. Because now you just open up your phone and you are an expert on everything. But Beloved information is not wisdom. And yet that is how it seems to be perceived today. Isn't it? But as we have seen many times before: Proverbs 9:10 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One, this is understanding." Well we find the wise older man at his post as gatekeeper, and being diligent in it. V21 "During the time Mordechai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the door way, conspired to assassinate king Xerxes."

Now was it that they resented Esther's being chosen as queen? Was it that they had some kind of allegiance to queen Vashti? We don't know. But what we do know is that they had hatred upon their lips and murder within their hearts. Well did Jesus explain that anger is in effect the root of murder. Listen to the way Solomon in Ecclesiastes 10:20 describes the way that God makes known those words of evil, that people speak in secret: "A bird of the air shall carry their voice." It conveys the idea that the ear and presence of God is everywhere. Ecclesiastes 12:14 "For God will bring every deed into judgement, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."

So friends if not in this life, then certainly in the next, all manner of wickedness and evil will be revealed and accounted for, if it has not been repented of and washed and paid for with the Blood of Christ! Yes Brethren, how those slanderous words, those words of gossip, hurt, and evil intent always somehow seem to come to the surface and be found out. Even like the ocean giving up the dead. Yes "A bird of the air shall carry their voice." It's even as though such things have a life of their own and cannot remain secret!

Well so it is in this case with Bigthana and Teresh. And that "little birds" name is that man of integrity, Mordecai! Now whether they sought to draw him into their plot being one of their fellow "gatekeepers," or he simply over heard them speaking their murderous designs, the outcome is the same. V22 "But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai."

Friends let's step back and recognise the Hand of God here. A King's drunken vanity. The obstinance or propriety of his queen. One voice amongst seven counsellors that speaks out. One young woman among hundreds wins the favour of everyone who sees her, and ultimately the king. One man sitting doing his duty, a murderous plot is uncovered and in time, as we will see, it will be used by God to deliver His people. Again not chance, not coincidence. Only the power, the divine Providence and the orchestration by God in and through all things! So Mordecai discovers the plot, and because of his intimate relationship with the Queen he takes what he has learned to her. Then she reveals it to the king and these things are accredited to Mordecai. This would have happened for one of two reasons. If it were true, Mordecai would have received a reward of some kind from the king at some level. Not that this was his motive. I believe that he was simply seeking to be a dutiful public servant and citizen of the king. Would it not be wonderful if our politicians acted in the same manner!

The other reason though, would have been that if it were untrue, he would have been found guilty of spreading malicious lies. And there would have been a heavy penalty to pay. It may well have cost him his very life! Beloved, there is a saying which basically goes that standing up for the truth is its own reward. We are indeed warned in the 9th commandment of God that "you shall not bear false witness against your neighbour." In a trial to bear false witness is not only a crime against the state, it is a crime against God, for which we will give an account, again lest we repent of such things and we are washed in the Blood of the lamb. But yes standing up for that which is true is reward in itself because in this we are honouring God. But how much more so then, when we are standing up for The Truth. God's Truth about Jesus!

But brothers and sisters with this comes also dangers and costs. Because we live in a world that is founded upon lies. And doesn't want to know truth, particularly God's Truth. Even many Christians today want to sidestep the very Word of God when it brings with it some discomfort. They want to explain away the first six chapters of the Bible! *So it is not "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." They may say No, the six days were not six days. There was no Adam and Eve. There was no original sin into which we are all born. There was no Cain and Abel. There was no worldwide climate changing flood through which the God of love destroyed all of life upon the earth, save 8, and the animals that were with them. These are all just myths and fairy stories!*

But as I heard John MacArthur say recently, "At what point of the Bible will they jump in?" But yes for truth Beloved, we stand up regardless of the cost. And how much more so, for God's Truth! Well v23 an official inquiry is made. It's investigated and found to be true, and those two officials were hanged on the gallows, because to speak of the king in a seditious way had dire consequences. And as I explained at the start of this series for good reason. Because in a mere 14 years from this point, the king would indeed be assassinated!

So these two men were impaled and exhibited for all to see, lest anyone else got similar ideas. And notice 23b: "All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king." Yes "all this." The discovering of the plot. Mordecai bringing it to Esther. She in turn taking it to the king. The investigation that ensued. The two men hanged and the credit of such loyalty to the king given to Mordecai.

And yet brothers and sisters it seems as we enter chapter 3, all of these things are all but forgotten. And they will be for a time in God's plan. Mordecai may well have been justified in thinking to himself, 'Well is that it? Is that all I get for saving the king's life? No pat on the back? Nothing? Well that's the last time I stick my neck out'. But no, standing for the truth is its own reward. Because it's what we are called to do by God in obedience to Him. He does not promise us heaven on earth, though some do. Our reward awaits us!

So again as we enter chapter 3, it seems as though all this is forgotten. Chapter 3:1 "after these events king Xerxes honoured Haman, son of a Hammedatha the Agagate, elevating him and giving him a seat of honour higher than all of the other nobles." Brothers and sisters notice how it reads. Mordecai saves their king's life chapter 2, chapter 3:1 "after these events, king Xerxes honoured Haman." What? As my beloved brother Robert Marshall when telling a story often says, what is going on here? Something is not right. This just does not add up! But Brethren, that's just how life is at times isn't it? We are not Privy to the ins and outs of the workings and council of God. We are simply called to be faithful and obedient to Him as he orchestrates and governs all things. So not Mordecai but Haman is honoured in an amazing way. In a similar way to that which Joseph and Daniel were, he is elevated above all the other officials in effect second only to the king. And as we will find out what kind of man this Haman was, we must further question the king's judgement! V2 "All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honour to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him."

We've seen before that this king loves to micro manage his kingdom. So far we have seen him "command that you could drink as much or as little as you like." He has "commanded" that queen Vashti come and parade herself like some kind of common harlot. He has "commanded that all men must rule over their wives" and now he has "commanded, that everyone must bow down before Haman." "All of the royal officials" no less. Yes clearly, this man though a powerful warrior, was no leader. It does seem that he foolishly concerned himself with what were trivial matters, and yet when it came to things of importance, he cast aside his responsibilities! So everyone "must kneel down to Haman." Well not Mordecai! V2b "But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honour.

But Beloved the questions must be asked, Why would he not do this? And what did he find so offensive? Duguid explains that it is not as though he had not made any efforts to live in harmony within Persian society. He was part of the officialdom. He happily submitted to the king and accepted the king's authority. He'd sought to be a good citizen when he uncovered and reported that plot on the king's life. No there is something else going on here that Mordecai just could not and would not tolerate! But for us to understand this we need to remember who Mordecai was. He was from the same tribe as that of king Saul, he was a Benjamite. And this Haman is descended from the house of the king Agag who was an Amalekite. These people were the sworn enemies of king Saul and of Israel. God had commanded soul to destroy, to annihilate the whole nation for the king's defiance, when God first delivered Israel out of Egypt and Agag refused to let them pass through. Under the threat of war, they were forced to travel a far greater distance and to go around that nation. But Saul disobeyed God keeping the plunder, the best of the people and taking Agag alive! So because Saul disobeyed God, the Amalekites' descendants, had been a thorn in their side, and we're perpetually sworn enemies of Israel.

And that's who this Haman was, and it was all too much for Mordecai! V3-4 "Then the royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, Why do you disobey the king's command? Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether or not Mordecai's behaviour would be tolerated (and there is the key for us) for he told them he was a Jew." Yes "day after day." Now how long this went on for I'm not sure. But it does seem to convey, a decent period of time. And there is no doubt, that every time he refused this honouring of Haman, the contempt, the anger and hatred between the two men grew. Even day by day. Yes, Haman's hatred for the Israelites, and Mordecai's contempt for Haman, goes back nearly 1000 years. It runs so deep, that he is even defying the command of the king himself, which could have very well resulted in his own death!

Brothers and sisters it does seem that in this conflict God has forced Mordecai to draw a line in the sand. And he had revealed himself openly to be a Jew. You know perhaps, it may well have been for the very first time. I hadn't thought about it before but this may well have been the case. Because there is no doubt, that his unveiling of his ancestry inflamed the situation between him a Jew, and that descendant of Agag, Haman! No there would not be any burying of the hatchet of the past wrongs of their nations, between these two men. Unless it be in one another's back.

You know friends, that's the trouble with trying to live in two worlds. The time comes when by God we are forced to fish or continue to cut bait, as the saying goes. And I guess really, that is when the true test of our metal begins! In his great confrontation between the prophets of Baal upon Mount Carmel, and the spineless floundering of the then people of Israel. Elijah put it to them this way in 1 Kings 18:21 "Elijah went before the people and said, How long will you waiver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him. But if Baal is God, follow him." No you cannot have it both ways. Yes there is but one God, and you must decide amongst yourselves as to who it is. You cannot have it both ways. For Mordecai, that time for a line in the sand had come. He would stand up and be counted.

We will see that Esther also would be forced into making that same decision. The reality is, that there is no such thing as the secret Christian. We "must not waver between two opinions." Like Martin Luther, despising the murderous threats of the Papacy and Romanism, as he nailed his declaration to the door of that church centuries ago. We too must nail our colours unashamedly, to the Cross of Jesus Christ. And all the more in these days of evil, as we see the day of his coming draw near! Yes Integrity. Truth, God's Truth, and our line in the sand, Jesus! To these we must ever cling.

Let's pray!