

Esther 6:12-14 'It Is God Who Lifts Up; And It Is God Who Tears Down!'

Last week's message was from Esther 6:1-11 'Man Proposes But God Disposes', and we saw, similarly to God sending that little worm to chew away at Jonah's vine, God sending a little worm of the mind so to speak, to gnaw away at king Xerxes' peaceful sleep! V1 "That night the king could not sleep." If you remember I said it had to be "that night," because tomorrow Esther would reveal that she was a Jew and was destined to be killed by Haman's decree, and Mordecai was to be publicly executed!

And friends I said similarly, that God is not only concerned with the huge, the monumental, and the enormous things, but even the small and the miniscule things within each of our lives. Psalm 139: "You knit me together in my mother's womb." "Your eyes saw my unformed body." "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."

God would use the king's sleepless night to bring about the redemption of his people. Yes what men intend for evil God has predetermined for the good of His people! So behind it all, the building of the gallows and the evil intent of Haman. The king's sleepless night, the discovering of Mordecai's defence of the king but no commendation given to him. The king asking in v4 "Who is in the court?" At that hour? And Haman just happening to the entering at that very moment. So he is called for and with the king asking him verses 5-6 "What should be done for the man the king delights to honour?" *Well it's got to be me; Haman thinks to himself.* V7-9 Get a garment the king has worn and a horse he has ridden on, give them to the man and have one of the king's most noble Princes proclaim the King's pleasure in him as he is led throughout the citadel. Great plan the king says, now go and do it all for Mordecai the Jew! And so he does in v11. Yes what Haman had intended for evil God had predetermined for good. Indeed Man Proposes But God Disposes. Not luck. Not chance, because Romans 8:28 "For we know that God works all things for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose!"

And so now we continue with the downfall of this enemy of the Jews, Haman, as he is confronted with the simple and yet profound truth that he is not in control. Esther 6:12-14, and I've given this sermon the heading 'It Is God Who Lifts Up; And It Is God Who Tears Down!'

V12 "Afterward Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman rushed home, with his head covered in grief." Brethren, what a tremendous contrast we have presented before us here. In Psalm 7:5-8 we read "Do not lift up your horns against heaven, do not speak with outstretched neck. No one from the East or the West or from the desert can exalt a man. But it is God who judges. He brings one down he exalts another. In the hand of the Lord is a cup filled with foaming wine mixed with spices, he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs." You see the Psalmist warns us of in effect shaking our fists at God in defiance. "Stretching out our neck" in our pride and vanity because the reality is, that it is God alone who lifts someone up and brings others down. Yes He alone is indeed the great choirmaster, the eternal conductor of all of humanity! So we must not shake our fists at Him and stretch out our neck against Him, "God will not be mocked," the scripture says. And also that He "will not contend with man forever."

Yes what a contrast we have before us. Mordecai, (whose fate seemed certainly to be sealed) and yet had now been paraded throughout the entire citadel of Susa before all who lined the streets, even being heralded with Haman's own lips with the words "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honour." Has not allowed this thing to go to his head. Look where we find him. Back

“at the king’s gate.” Simply back at his post, back at work. There is not even one single word recorded that he spoke amidst any of these exaltations either during or after the events. And I feel that it is simply because he hasn't let it all go to his head! He'd seen the rising by God of Esther out of obscurity. He'd experienced Haman’s despising him and now being forced to honour him. *Beware of the mountain top experience*, perhaps he was thinking. I have no doubt that he was fully aware of Psalm 75 that it is the Lord alone who lifts up and brings low. To think of such things any other way is to fall into the Satan’s trap. May I suggest, that he was most likely thinking something like ‘*Wow, how amazing, what a tremendous honour. But now it's time to get back to work!*’ Even as I mentioned last time, we must be careful not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought. We are not to measure ourselves against other people, no. We are to compare ourselves against the Lord Jesus Christ Himself!

So Mordecai goes back to work, but Haman is now looking for a hole in the ground that he can crawl into! It says, “his head was covered in grief.” You see he was mourning because there has been a death in the family. His pride, arrogance and vanity are now all but dead and buried. And there remains yet a far greater danger which is hanging over his head. There is still the banquet with the king at the Queen’s palace! *What if the king has heard about the gallows*, he must have been thinking. *He has honoured Mordecai but I have made preparations for his execution. What can I do? How will I face him?* Haman needs some advice and he needs it quick! V13 “He told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him.”

Now I might be wrong here friends, but it would seem to me that all that has been happening to him and Mordecai throughout all of the citadel of Susa, had not been hidden from his wife Zeresh and all of his friends. Because unlike before, when we read of Haman inviting them all together, it does seem that they were already present. Again, I might be wrong, but that's how it does come across. Listen to how these men are described, and also look at the advice which they give him. There is no comfort or encouragement here for him. His advisers, (no doubt those same ones who in chapter five had advised him to build that “75 feet high gallows and have Mordecai hanged on them which delighted him (we are told) so he had the gallows built.” But now their words are not so much to his liking. “His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, “Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him, you will surely come to ruin.” Boy, have they changed their tune or what. Before it was *just kill this guy and be done with it, be happy*, and now it is basically *you've got no hope, you are doomed, you best just kill yourself!*

Brothers and sisters, what a blessing it is to have people that God has placed within our lives that we can go to who always have our back. And I don't merely mean those who will always support us in difficult times, (of course that too is a great blessing) but those who we can go to for advice and they will always speak the truth to us in love. I mean that they won't just tell us what we want to hear but what we need to hear. The truth, God's Bible truth in love, even if it hurts!

Haman’s wife and so called friends, had given him advice to go in a certain direction, but now that he has done that very thing they are basically saying, *Woah, that was a bad idea, I wouldn't have done that if I were you!* What I find interesting is the friends that Haman has are the kind of friends that he deserves. They really do appear to be simply fair-weather friends. You know the kind. When all is well and the sun is shining they're always up the front at the dinner table. But when the swell rises, and the storm threatens as the clouds roll in, they are leaping overboard like rats off a sinking ship! Proverbs 9:8 “Do not rebuke a foolish man or he will hate you, rebuke a wise man and he will love you.” Proverbs 25:12 “Like a ring of gold, or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear.” And finally, Ecclesiastes 7:5 “It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke than to listen to the song of fools.”

Can you see that is in effect what Haman has done. He has listened to “the song of fools.” *Just kill this guy and be happy.* But now it's *Woah, who told you to do that? That was a bad move.* And notice the delayed reason that they give him for those things being a bad idea: “Since Mordecai before whom your downfall has started is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him you will surely come to ruin.” As Alan has been known to say, “Well hello!” Not that most likely Haman would have listened anyway, but *hello, ‘Why didn't you all mentioned this before?’ We all knew that guy was a Jew, and yet you all convinced me to build a 75 foot high gallows and have him hanged on it no less.* And as they are pointing him toward and reminding Haman of Mordecai's Jewish origin, they also stick the knife in by reminding him of 1000 years of history. Basically saying that even Agag could not stand against the God of the Hebrews. *Like him, your fate is now sealed!*

Friends, before they had told him what he wanted to hear, not what he needed to hear and now each all too late. They should have said to him, *Haman, as you know this guy's a Jew, and as you also know we have history with his God, Yahweh. You are heading toward a cliff, so you need to turn back before it's too late. Because if you don't your ruin for this life and the next, will be assured!*

Beloved, in these things we can find some clear parallels for ourselves as Christians today. If we have unsaved family and friends that we love, that we long to see coming into a saving relationship with God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, as I said last time, we need to keep praying for them. Yes we need to pray for them that they hear and respond to Christ's gospel. But we also need to pray that God would give us Providence to speak to them. We need to pray for His Words of wisdom to speak, and also to know when to speak. We should be praying, ‘Lord, give them questions to ask, and your wisdom to answer those questions. Because we want to give glory to you.’ But we need to speak the truth, God's truth in love! Not just tell them that *God is love, love, love, and love, you can live any way you like it doesn't matter to God, He will accept you as you are.* No! They need to know that they are even sleep walking toward the cliff of hell and if they don't repent, if they don't turn around, they will fall eternally. So we seek to live lives that testify to Him, while also seeking to speak God's truth to them about Him. Who He is and what He demands from them!

The other parallel I can see here for us, is that we need preachers and teachers who will speak God's truth to us! Unlike Haman's wife and fair-weather friends, we don't want men who are simply going to ramble on and on about the love of God, (and I speak respectfully here Lord) no we don't need men who ramble on about the love of God and yet never talk about sin. Never talk about the fact that we are sinners and continue to be sinners.

In Romans chapter 7:15-25 Paul speaks of his ongoing struggles with sin. “The things I want to do I don't do, but the things that I hate this is what I do. Wretched man that I am who will save me from this body of death? Praise be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” We can't talk of biblical love without talking about the price that was paid for sin. Even the Blood of God's Own Son poured out so that we might live!

No we don't need men who just want to tell us nice things to make us feel good. Like we are all nice people, and that we are all going to heaven to party with all of our dearly departed loved ones. No. That's not the truth of the gospel. The truth tells us that there is a judgement which is coming and just as John the Baptist, and indeed Jesus Himself when he began to preach said in Matthew 3:17 “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near.” Yes “Repent,” turnabout face, away from the pending destruction of that cliff to which you are heading, and live. Because failing to do so will have eternal consequences!

Well, so as Haman is pondering his advisors second lot of council, (which is basically as I mentioned before to *kill yourself because you're obviously done for*) v14 "While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman away to the banquet Esther had prepared." So yes while Haman is still trying to process everything that had happened to him that day, and the unwelcome counsel of his wife and fair-weather friends, the king's messengers arrive "and hurried Haman away" it says.

Friends what struck me here is the suddenness of their arrival and Haman's unpreparedness for their coming. Perhaps it's the shock of everything in his world being turned upside down, the banquet was the last thing on his mind, or maybe more to the point, the last thing he wanted to think about. And who could blame him? But here's the thing Beloved: when the king called, there was no choice in the matter. You refused his invitation at the cost of your life. No you could not deny the king!

What a clear picture it paints brothers and sisters of the unpreparedness of people to meet with God. We can be caught up in the busyness of life. Perhaps with our sprinklings of Christianity, or indeed a genuine faith within those lives. But caught up we are, in the difficult things, or perhaps even the mundane things of life. Maybe our faith in God is even somewhat on the back burner, or has taken a backward seat to those more important things. Maybe like Haman, (prior to this day) life for us is very good right now, and there just isn't the time for God. But Beloved can you see? That when the King calls, when He demands our life from us we will have no say in the matter. Yes as with king Xerxes' messengers, when God's Angel of death calls us we will have no say in the matter. Because even as Haman could not refuse the messengers of the king of Persia, infinitely more irresistible is the authority of the King of the universe! Yes when Jesus calls, "our life will be demanded from us." The question is, Will we be prepared to meet the king? Yes what kind of preparations are we making? Are we even preparing to meet Him at all?

We read in Matthew 25:1-13 "At that time the Kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out, "Here is the bridegroom. Come out to meet him". Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, our lamps are going out.' 'No, they replied, there may not be enough for both of us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later the others also came. 'Sir. Sir.' They said. 'Open the door for us.' But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

Doctor Michael Youssef explains that in biblical times in Jewish custom, there were basically three stages of marriage. The betrothal, where they were completely committed to one another. They were in effect married but the marriage had not yet been consummated. And during the second stage of the betrothal, the bridegroom would literally go and build an extension or an addition to his father's house which upon completion, he would come and take the bride home to the wedding feast and the consummation of the marriage! Well what we have in this parable is ten young women who have been invited to the wedding feast to attend the bride, they were the bridesmaids. They did not know exactly what day or time the groom would arrive, because he was still building his house. So the bridesmaids had to remain ever ready and vigilant with enough oil to light the way, for the groom to come and to take his bride. Well finally the groom does arrive at midnight, but the women have all fallen asleep as the call goes out! Five have been wise in the provision of the oil and

the preparation of their torches, while the other five have not brought enough and squandered their oil! The warning to us is that just as Jesus Himself said in John 14:2 "In my Father's house are many rooms, if it were not so I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you." Yes Jesus, the Bridegroom, has gone to build His heavenly house as it were, to come and take His bride, (His church even us) home! So are we remaining diligent, in our preparations brothers and sisters for the King to call us home, to His wedding feast of heaven? Or like Haman, and those five unwise bridesmaids, will we be caught off guard, unprepared, and locked out of the celebrations for all of eternity? That's the question! So with thoughts of dread, Fear, Mordecai, the advice of his fairweather friends racing through his mind no doubt, and the uncertainty of his future, "Haman is hurried away." Not knowing what will await him, knowing only, that it cannot be good!

So how do we tie these things together this morning? Well we have really only looked at two things. Firstly, that all humanity is in God's Hands. For His plans and purposes in the rescuing of His people, He raises some up, and in His time He brings others down. "Men say in their heart there is no God," but then like Haman, ultimately, His reality is thrust upon them, even unbeknownst to themselves! And Secondly, we may not realise it but like Haman, our whole lives are indeed in effect preparations. The question is, Which eternity is it that we are preparing for? Because the King waits for no man!

Let's pray!