

Esther 3:5-15 'Why Do The Nations Rage?'

Last time in Esther we looked at chapter 2:19-34 in a sermon I called 'Integrity. Truth and a Line in the sand'. In v19 we had the second gathering of the virgins. As I mentioned, we are given no insight into this gathering. The suggested connection between this meeting and the ensuing conspiracy may well be true, but we don't know. Bigthana and Teresh may well have been supporters of Vashti and that's why they planned the King's death, but again we don't know. As one of the gatekeepers, Mordecai is at the "king's gate" that place of disputes, legal petitions and important decisions! Gatekeepers gave access to and from those important places throughout the city.

V20 we are reminded of the intimate relationship between the Queen and Mordecai. She continues to keep his guidance and keep her nationality secret. And I made the observation that sadly, the wisdom of years seems to be a thing of the past. That true wisdom (not intelligence or information) is only born of years. V22 Mordecai exposes the conspiracy standing up for the truth and it's "credited to him." So that he will be held accountable if it's false and rewarded if it's true!

But in ch 3:1 it seems to have all been but forgotten, as the king honours Haman, not Mordecai. Then along with this elevating of Haman, "all the other nobles must bend the knee to him." But not Mordecai. This Jew would never bend the knee to this descendant of king Agag the Amalekite. He had drawn a line in the sand, and he would now take a stand! And I made the point that standing up for the truth is its own reward. And how much more so for God's Truth! Malachi would in effect "no longer waver between two opinions" (1 Kings 18:21). Yes he revealed who he was, perhaps even for the very first time. And he would not bow down to this hater of the Jews!

So we pick up the text in Esther 3:5-15 'Why Do The Nations Rage?' V5 "When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down and pay him honour he was enraged." It's a brutal word isn't it, "enraged." This is not merely being angry. This is an out of control burning for and even lusting after retribution. Psalm 2:1-2 "Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One." Another translation of the word "conspire" being "rage." Because there is this collective burning "rage" against God which is directed at His people as a whole. And is in reality meted out upon all who would stand for The Father, Son and Holy Spirit! And this rage is disproportionate because it finds its root not merely in the particular matter at hand, (whatever that may be) but as between Haman and Mordecai here, within old, even ancient enmities!

In Luke 10 when sending out the 72 disciples, and upon their return they "rejoiced that even demons submit to them," Jesus says in v18-20 "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and on scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy, nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

So two things we see in Jesus' words here. Firstly, that as in Psalm 2, the battle between the true church and its persecutors whether that be individuals or universally as the church, this battle has ancient origins and that ultimately, the true target is the Almighty Himself. And secondly, all of the so-called modern miraculous stuff and the demonic Babble, which so consumes much of Christianity Today even pushing Christ out of the church, and which is even used as some kind of litmus test of the true church. And though those things were genuine in those days, Jesus Himself said of such things, don't rejoice in that stuff. "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Yes rejoice that

you've been saved. Remember who you are and remember the task at hand. The proclamation of my Kingdom!

So yes friends this enmity, this hate filled warfare has ancient origins and it will continue until Jesus returns. yes until then, "the nations will rage against him" by targeting His people. As we can clearly see here in Haman! "When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down and pay him honour, he was enraged." And again notice the disproportionality of this "rage" and why it is so inflamed. V6 "But having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai, (it does seem someone has said to him, 'Just kill this guy', but that was not enough) instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all of Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole Kingdom of Xerxes."

Beloved, I do not want us to simply glance over these words quickly. Because when we examine them we see that they have deep, tremendous, even eternal implications. And I want us to consider this because it so clearly reveals what the Christian's place in this world is! This one man, has been slighted by one man. If such a thing might have occurred many years ago in Australia, the two men might have belted each other, shook hands, and then had a beer together. But not today. And not Haman! As I again call into question this king's ability as a true leader. When he has chosen such a one as this Haman as his right hand man! Yes one man has been slighted by one man, and yet it is not enough to do away with him only. Haman would annihilate, the whole nation of Israel, men women and children! And as Matthew Henry points out, since Jerusalem is now a province of Xerxes, this includes all of those who have returned from the Babylonian exile. And according to Ezra ch2, there were close to 50,000 who originally returned to Jerusalem. How many there were these decades later I don't know. But let's say conservatively speaking there were at least another 150,000 spread throughout the other 126 provinces. And because the evil pride and vanity of one man has been wounded, perhaps 200,000 men, women and children must die!

Again Beloved, how insanely disproportionate is this action that Haman is going to take. The genocide of an entire nation, to satisfy his lust for vengeance and blood. Why do the nations rage? Because they are tools in the hands of the Evil One! Genesis 3:15, as God speaks to Satan of Jesus, "I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring, (and the word here is actually seed, singular) yes "I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and hers, he will crush your head and you will bruise his heel." Think about it. If Haman and his plan are indeed successful and the Israelites are wiped from the face of the earth, the promised Messiah cannot come from the tribe of Judah! Why are those endless genealogies in the Bible so important? Because they show us that God is keeping His covenant promise through the seed of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David. Wipe out the Jewish people and the line of the Saviour is finished.

But brethren here's the thing: what man intends for evil, God determines for good! Pharaoh would kill all of the baby boys in Egypt, so God puts Moses even under Pharaoh's own roof. The drunken vanity of the king, and again God places the deliverer of His people under the roof of the king. And what Haman intended for evil, God would turn back on his own head, for the good of His people!

And Beloved as hard as it is when we are in the eye of the storm to recognise, it is the same for us. Romans 8"28 "For we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose." Yes friends, I continue to reiterate that we need to keep an eye upon the unseen Hand of God, as He orchestrates all of these events for the bringing about of His plans and purposes! He's even using this murderous rage of this evil enemy of the Jews, Haman, including this raising him up into this position of authority! V7 "In the 12th year of king Xerxes, in the first month." So this is about four years and four months since Esther was made queen. "They cast

the purr that is the lot in the presence of Haman to select a day and a month. And the lot fell on the 12th month, the month of Adar.”

Again dear friends, I don't want us to just quickly glance over these words and miss the Sovereign Hand of God in it all. The decision is made to find out when the stars are aligned so to speak, to implement this murderous plan of genocide upon the people of God. And the way that this would be determined is that they would “cast the lot.” We might say today that they would roll the dice, or draw straws. And let's take note of this because it's a pivotal moment in Israel's history. The lot may well have fallen on the very next month. But no. There will be an 11 month period between the devising of this murderous plan and its implementation. But why? That's the question!

You know it's interesting, that throughout the whole of the history of humanity there have been nations which have practised similar rituals to determine the way ahead. Indeed the Israelites themselves cast what was known as the Urim and Thummim, doing this in accordance with the instruction of God. Believed to have been to stones which were worn upon the breastplate of the high priest, which would be thrown to determine the direction that God's people would take. Particularly to ascertain a person's guilt or innocence! For example, in Acts 1:26, to determine who would take Judas Iscariot's place with the apostles we read. “Then they cast lots and the lot fell to Mathias. So he was added to the eleven apostles.

Now why am I labouring this point? Well it's simply to show us that history can be determined on the role of a dice. But it is God who determines the outcome of that role! What do the scriptures say? Matthew 10:29-30 “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them shall fall to the ground apart from the will of your father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” And what is Jesus telling us? That there is no thing, which is beyond the reach and concern of the Sovereign will of God. And that His people are the apple of His Eye! Haman's fortune tellers cast the bones and “the eleventh month is chosen.” And why? Because there was much which needed to take place between that moment, and the next eleven months through which God would deliver His people!

Beloved it is so extremely difficult at times, but we do need to be able to give ourselves over to truths such as this. So that we can rest in the comfort and assurance that come from them. God is in control. He has not let go of the reigns of the world. Or of His intimate caring for and governing of our lives. Yes we need to pray that He helps us to see Him in the eye of the storms of life! Well the plan has been arrived at, the month has been chosen, and now this hate filled sleazeball of a man, (remember the King's own choice) comes to Xerxes to get him onside. V8-9 “Then Haman said to king Xerxes, There is a certain people dispersed and scattered among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom whose customs are different from those of all the other people and who do not obey the King's laws, it is not in the King's best interest to tolerate them. If it pleases the king let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will put 10,000 talents into the royal treasury for the men who carry out this business.”

Brothers and sisters, this also is something that if we just glance over, we will miss the great significance of. “10,000 talents of silver,” at today's prices in Australian dollars, would have amounted to 323 million six hundred and ten thousand dollars. And the ancient historian Herodotus (the NIV footnote explains) says this was actually two thirds of the entire tax revenue of the annual budget of the entire Persian Empire! Yes such was the depth of the hatred and murderous rage of this man against the people of God, that he is guaranteeing the King that this would be of great benefit to him both politically and financially. And that he himself would personally fill the coffers for the campaign!

I want us to take particular note of Xerxes` reply, because it really does give us yet another insight into this man. V10-11 "So the King took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. Keep the money the King said to Haman and do with the people as you please." In Genesis 41:42 we read the exact same words when Pharaoh put his signet ring on Joseph's finger. The difference is of course the character of the two men in question. Joseph the man of character and integrity, and this Haman, who is a murderous, scheming deceiving liar! He speaks of the Jewish people as being some kind of common riffraff who are sparsely scattered throughout the countryside and are of no consequence. And also of having evil intent toward the king. They live contrary to his laws and have no possibility of ever being assimilated into the Persian landscape. Which of course is all untrue! Those who had remained in Persia had chosen to do so. Mordecai himself, (which no doubt the king was totally unaware of and of course the queen) were both one of those people of whom Haman spoke.

So we have yet another instance of this King not making decisions for himself before examining the facts, but being led by the nose by those who whispered in his ear! Beloved, as I read over these things again and again and again, I couldn't but help be struck by the callous indifference, that this fool of a king exhibited. He has basically signed the death warrant of perhaps hundreds of thousands of men, women and children, with absolutely no evidence of what Haman reported to be true. No investigation, and with no thought whatsoever about the sanctity of life! And in v15, we actually learn that he and Haman underlined this decision by sitting down and getting drunk together it seems. Yes v11: Don't worry about giving me any money Haman we`re mates. You keep your talents in your pocket I've got your back! I'll pay for the whole thing put your mind at rest. And yes this problem I will leave up to you to sort out, you do as you see fit. And when you have all of the details worked out, come around and we'll have a beer together!

Now I might be embellishing here a bit brothers and sisters, but this is what happened. And I want you to notice the contrast between the vagaries of what Haman reported to the king, and the explicit details of the decree that he would send throughout the Persian world, heralding the extinction of an entire people! V12 "Then on the 13th day of the first month the royal secretaries were summoned. They wrote out in the script of each province and in the language of each people all Haman`s orders to the king`s satraps the governors of the various provinces and the nobles of the various peoples these were written in the name of king Xerxes himself and sealed with his own ring." So it appears that only 13 days after this deadly plan had been devised, it is implemented.

Notice, "every language of each province" "all Haman`s orders," "to the governors and nobles and officials. These were written in the name of king Xerxes himself and sealed with his own ring." Yes this King casts aside his authority as easy as taking off his ring and putting it on someone else`s finger! And yet Brethren this is nothing new. When our so called political leaders are found out and found wanting, that which has occurred and failed to occur, is never their fault. Someone else is always to blame. They are just as quick to take off their signet ring and give it to someone else aren`t they.

Beloved similarly, when we get ourselves into arguments and disagreements, it's rarely our fault is it? We too take the ring of responsibility and accountability off our finger and hand it to someone else. Adam did the same thing in the garden of Eden didn't he. And where was he when he was called to account? Hiding in the Bushes. His reply to God? "The woman you put here with me. Gave me the fruit and I ate it." No it is never our fault, is it Beloved. We are so often looking for someone else to blame. Yes we take off the ring of responsibility and accountability and give it to someone else, and hope for the best.

But dear friends this is never a good thing and particularly so when it comes to the Word of God. Our searching of the scriptures we should never just leave to someone else. Now of course godly guidance, sound instruction and teaching we should always seek out. Particularly so if we are having difficulties understanding different parts of the Bible. There is no shame in this, on the contrary, it shows that we have a teachable spirit, and that we want to learn and to grow in our faith and our relationship with God! But we mustn't take off our ring and give it to someone else blindly, trusting that they will always do the right thing and honour God for us, no. We must each of us search the scriptures for ourselves. This is how we get to know God personally!

Again notice the detail and callous indifference toward the sanctity of life here. V13 "Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, women and little children, on a single day the 13th day of the 12th month." There is no ambiguity here. It is black and white. Kill them all!

And the final thing that I want us to see here this morning is that v15, spurred on by the King's command, (those words decreed by Haman himself) "the couriers speed off then the King and Haman sit down to celebrate this wondrous moment, "but the city of Susa was bewildered." And I take it to mean that the whole empire of Xerxes was confused! Why would such a decision be made? Why is this happening? Surely this can't be true. There must be some mistake!

Well aren't we all asking the same kinds of questions today about so many things Beloved? Our faith in God, all of the truths of the Bible that we hold to dearly, the morals and values that we cling to in Jesus' Name are all under attack. But why? "For I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and hers. He will crush your head and you will bruise his heel." No, surely this can't be true. Why is this happening? There must be some mistake. The Saviour of the world, the very Son of God dying on a Cross. Suffering as one who had been cursed by God. No this cannot be true. But Beloved yes it was. As unthinkable as that scene of Jesus upon the Cross was. This "bruising of the Son by Satan's seed." Because the "nations continue to rage against God and His Anointed One." And yet even so, as in the days of Esther and Mordecai and as it has always been, it is all part of God's plan to deliver His people from Satan, Sin, and death's grasp!

Yes it is all the Mercy of God, expressed through His unseen Sovereign Hand, in and through all things. Even in our lives dear friends, both yours and mine!

Hallelujah. What a Saviour! Let's pray