

Esther 5:1-14 'Pride And Arrogance: The Danger Of Mountaintop Experiences'

Last time in Esther we looked at ch 4:12-17 'Reluctant servants. And who knows?' as we saw Mordecai (and yet ultimately God) lay the situation down at Esther's feet. Her father has called Esther to act, but she is still reluctant to get involved. Action would come at great risk, even her very life! And yet Mordecai replies in v13b: "Do not think that because you are in the King's house you alone of all the Jews will escape," he tells her. *You will not be able to hide who you are anymore.* And I made the point that we can all be reluctant servants of God at times. But He is patient, kind, merciful and loving. "His love endures forever" the scripture says.

Yes Mordecai was calling on the Queen to do what Jesus our King has done for us. Put herself between destruction and her people. But she is reluctant because of the all too real cost involved! As Matt.16:24-27 explains, the cost of the Cross! And Mordecai puts it to her v14b "Who knows, but that you have come into royal position for such a time as this?" No, Mordecai didn't know and Esther didn't know. But God did know! Yet this called for faith. That transforming faith in our God who saves!

And then like Ananias in Acts 9, (who was himself transformed into this lion for the gospel) Esther replies v15-16 Get everyone together to fast for me and petition God with me "for three days night and day. When this is done, I will go to the king even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." I explained that Esther was having a garden of Gethsemane moment. Even as Jesus called on Peter James and John to "keep watch" in prayer as He went to ask the Father. "If it is possible take this cup from me, yet not my will but thine be done" because in His humanity Jesus could not do this thing alone. So too, in effect, Esther asks everyone to "keep watch" with her. Yes, let them all join her and commit this situation to God. "And if I perish, I perish." I am in your hands; "Thy will be done" O Lord!

And so we pick up the narrative in ch 5:1-14 in our sermon which I have entitled 'Pride And Arrogance: The Danger Of Mountaintop Experiences!'

V1 "On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall facing the entrance." Brothers and sisters, I just want to underline the gravity of this life and death situation and the fickle nature of this king, as we have already seen. The commentator Ian Duguid explains that excavations of ancient Persian ruins reveal king Xerxes depicted as sitting upon his royal throne flanked by armed guards, and with a soldier upfront wielding a large axe, to cut the head off anyone who approached the throne unlawfully.

So this was not merely a hollow threat. We saw what happened to Bigthana and Teresh for their treachery earlier in the series. And also with what little care this king had signed the death warrant for hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions of Jews! And yet having committed her people's plight to God through the fasting and prayers of all of the Jews in Susa, (being a woman of her word) she then goes to appeal to the king. Having in her heart I believe "Thy will be done." Oh Lord "if I perish I perish."

Friends what a tremendous challenge this is for us of our own commitment to Jesus and our living this life for Him. I know we often pray the words, and yet I wonder how often we actually have in our hearts O Lord "Thy will be done?" Yes having in our hearts, "if I perish, I perish." Not literally,

physically, (although for many Christians around the world today this is indeed their reality) but being prepared to take a hit for our faith in Jesus! As I've mentioned before, to stand up for the holding on to those biblical truths and the moral standards that God's Word declares; to be ready to profess what we believe if needs be; to say with Paul "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." Yes it is the "dunatos." The dynamite of God that explodes upon people's lives for the salvation of their souls and the deliverance from sin's curse. And yet I wonder how often that mindset is in our hearts, as we put one foot in front of the other each day? Yes "And if I perish, I perish." "Thy will be done" O Lord!

V2 "When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold sceptre that was in his hand." So the initial danger has passed. Today the king "was pleased with her." You would think that this being the case, she would breathe a sigh of relief and then given this Providence from God, lay her plight before the king, but no. There is an elaborate plan, which I believe God has revealed to her while she and her people in Susa were fasting and praying. "So Esther approached and touched the tip of the sceptre." Then in v3, (notice the over the top words) "then the king asked, "What is it Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half of my Kingdom?"

Now again you would think that she would think, *this is Providence from God I'm going to lay it all out there*, but now she doesn't. Again the only conclusion that we can come to is that during those "three days of fasting and prayer," God has laid a plan in her mind and that's how she proceeds. Remember, this is not merely about the saving of her own life, this is also about saving Mordecai and all of her people, the Jews! She knew what the king's decree through Haman was. And she also knew that the law stated, that once the king had issued such a statement, it was public record and it could not be repealed. And I don't believe she knew how it would all play out for deliverance in the end, but she knew what her role now was, and the steps she was going to take as long as God kept opening doors before her!

Beloved, in any given situation of uncertainty, if we want to know what God's will is for us all we can do is like Esther here, prayerfully commit the way ahead to Him and then proceed to knock on doors. And if those doors continue to open before us, we walk through them. That's all we have. There isn't some secret formula or biblical code that points the way ahead or opens up the council of God to us, no. We prayerfully commit our way to the Lord, knock on doors and if they open before us we prayerfully walk through them. And that is exactly what Esther is doing here! She's prayed, she's put on her best gear, and approached the king. He has "pointed the golden sceptre at her" and she walks toward him. So one door opens after the other and she faithfully keeps walking through them! And friends we can't help but be struck by the amazing way that she implements this God inspired plan.

And also notice, that he has basically made yet another public decree, because the king's word was law! "Esther what is it that you want? Even up to half the Kingdom?" V4 "If it pleases the king, together with Haman, come to a banquet I have prepared for him." Clearly Esther knows the king very well. She certainly knows how much he likes to feast and party. She also knows how loath to make any decisions of his own he is, but rather is swayed this way or that way by those around him who have his ear. And yet did you notice that the Queen doesn't actually answer the king's question at that time. Obviously all part of her plan. And as the commentator points out even humorously, What has happened to the king's decree that all men must rule over their women? "Esther what is it that you want? Even up to half my Kingdom?" The king has asked the question but the Queen doesn't answer it. Interesting don't you think?

Beloved how often our words come back to bite us. Those foolish things that we've said come back to haunt us. As in James 1:19 "My dear brothers, everyone should be quick to listen slow to speak and slow to become angry. Because anger does not produce the righteous life that God requires." And yet how often are we quick to speak, slow to listen and quit to become angry? Friends, how clearly we see what James speaks of in the person of Esther. She acts with genuine humility. She speaks with the wisdom of words well chosen. And most importantly, she commits her way ahead to God in prayer! Yes there is much that we can learn from her. Jesus tells us that we are "to be wise as serpents but gentle as doves." I take this to mean that we must act with wisdom, stealth and purpose, but also always with gentleness and humility. No pride and arrogance must not mark our way. But fools we are not called to be!

Well the partying king loves this idea. *Me and my bestie, Haman, feasting together in my number one woman's house, what could be better than that?* V5 "Bring Haman at once," the king said, "So that we may do what the Queen asks." So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared." Brothers and sisters think about it. If Haman had of been thinking and feeling good about life before, (even with the King's own signet ring upon his finger) now he must have been riding high in the clouds. He alone was invited to go with the king to the Queen's own palace, at her request. *Wow! How good am I*, he must have been thinking. *Second only to the king, and even feasting with him in the Queen's own palace. Does life get any better than this?* Yes he surely was riding one of life's mountaintop experiences.

But friends the only problem with those mountaintop experiences is that there is only one way to go. Down! Yes arrogance and vanity have but one outcome. And the book of Proverbs speaks widely of that outcome. Proverbs 8:12-13 As the writer personifies wisdom as the speaker here. "I, wisdom dwell together with prudence, I possess knowledge and discretion, to fear God is to hate evil, I hate pride and arrogance." Prov.11:2 "When pride comes then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom." And v7-8 "When a wicked man dies, his hope perishes, all he expected from his power comes to nothing. The righteous man is rescued from trouble, and it comes on the wicked instead."

And finally 16:18 "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall!" Esther 5:6-8 "As they were drinking wine, the king again asked the question, "Now what is your petition? It will be given you. Even up to half the Kingdom it will be granted." Esther replied, "My petition and my request is this: If the king regards me with favour and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfil my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king's question." (Again where is the king's decree about all men ruling over their women? It was a foolish decree, as the reality of it was never going to take place in real life!)

Anyway, by now Haman is flying high. Not a care in the world. He'd have even forgotten all of his Jewish problems. In high spirits the last person he would have been thinking about was that Jew Mordecai. V9a "Haman went out that day in high spirits." You can just see him, can't you. Happy as Larry with a skin full. Coming from the Queen's palace with the king's ring on his finger, having been invited to feast again tomorrow. Looking through glazed eyes and what does he see? Rather who does he see? V9b "But when he saw Mordecai at the king's gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage against Mordecai." A drunken "rage" may I suggest. We saw that Haman's "rage" against Mordecai was the cause of this whole problem to begin with, because he was a Jew and Haman was a descendant of Agag the Amalekite king. No doubt he believed that since his decree had been issued that Mordecai would either be cowering in some corner somewhere, or given Providence, grovelling at his feet, begging for mercy. But no. There was Mordecai no longer in sackcloth. No longer throwing dust and ashes upon his head and

wailing at the top of his lungs. But basically, manning his post, going about his duties as if nothing had happened!

Yes Brethren the thing about mountaintops and mountaintop experiences, is that there is only one way to go. Down! And friends for the Christian, I believe that to be aware of this reality is even doubly important. Firstly, let's say that we have been to some kind of Christian convention or study weekend, or heard a sermon through which we were greatly convicted of sin, and we are determined to rededicate our lives to God. And we walk out feeling really empowered and filled with the Holy Spirit, ready to do battle with the world and proclaim the gospel in Jesus` Name. Yes we're feeling super spiritual. But friends let me just say, that the things which will betray us the most in this world throughout our Christian life and our walk with Jesus, are our feelings and emotions!

Spiritual highs and lows will come and go. Feeling spiritual and close to God will also come and go. But as someone once said, "If God feels far, who moved?" And yet Praise God, that our salvation and assurance of forgiveness and heaven, does not rely upon our feelings and emotions because if they did, how many times every day would we be in an out of salvation? Yes Praise God that reconciliation with him depends not upon our feelings but upon Faith alone, in Christ alone, through Grace alone! Amen! Yes in Christ alone my hope is found!

Secondly, and simply, as the scripture says; "He who thinks he stands beware, lest he fall." You see when we come away from those mountaintop experiences, (though they are a real blessing, even indeed a tiny window into heaven from God) we can be lulled into believing through Satan`s whispers, that we can even stand alone. We think to ourselves, *O I am doing really well. How spiritual am I. I am feeling pretty righteous. I'm standing firm in Jesus!* The only problem of course about feeling that we are standing firm, is that we can tend to forget upon whom it is that we are standing at all. We can even fall into that heinous sin of self-sufficiency. Ah, we don't need Jesus at all. Even as that wretched song which sadly is played at so many funerals, (my own father wanted it played at my mums funeral, praise God we talked him out of it) that song, "I did it my way!" And the great tragedy of course is that they have indeed done life their way. Empty of Jesus! Well yes Haman has just come down from the mighty mountaintop of feasting with the king and Queen no less, but now he is yet again "filled with rage."

Friends can you see that so fleeting are those emotional highs, that one moment he has his head in the clouds and the very next, he "rages" again for Mordecai`s blood. Yes his own drunken blood is boiling! Look at what it says in v10a "Nevertheless he restrained himself and went home." Listen again to the calibre of the man that the king has placed his ring of absolute authority on. In his drunken rage he rants and raves about how amazing he is. Do you remember how in Job ch1, God said to Satan "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him. He is upright and blameless. A man who fears God and shuns evil." Well, basically Haman is doing the same thing here about himself. As we read in v10b-12 "Calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways that king had honoured him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials. And that's not all, Haman added. "I'm the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me along with the king tomorrow." *Yes how good am I*, he tells everyone. *I'm on the top of the world!*

O dear friends, what is it that we crave? To be lauded by men or praised by God? To stand in front of the mirror gazing at our own loveliness, or longing to hear those blessed words from the mouth of God. "Well done my good and faithful servant. Enter into my rest." Can you see? None of the royal treatment and self-aggrandizing does Haman any good. Well did Jesus say, "For what would it profit

a man where he to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul?" Can you see, Haman has indeed gained his "whole world." But none of it does him any good because of that Jew! V13 "But all these give me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew sitting at the king's gate."

Beloved, Haman lusted after that which so many have fallen in love with, and has taken them down the road to hell. Adoration and popularity! And it has never in the history of humanity being more an idol than it is today, as people even make an idol of themselves. People build a whole life around filming what they do each day. Even the most mundane, the most personal and intimate details they just expose to the world for all to see. And as you are all aware, tragically, even young children have taken their own lives around the issue of popularity, or the lack there of. Engrossed and enslaved by what others think of them. It is a tremendous tragedy, and all in effect because of the worship of self or the need to be adored, as they open themselves up to persecution, criticism and having their lives dissected by others, even strangers. It's so sad!

Well this was Haman's chief problem. The obsession with popularity and the need to be worshipped and idolised. But Mordecai would not feed the need of his vanity. And even though Haman believed Mordecai was already destined for death, it would not come soon enough, and it would not be good enough. He needed something special for this Jew! Verse 14. "His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Have a gallows built, 75 feet high, and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai hanged on it. Then go with the king to the dinner and be happy." This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the gallows built."

So it would appear that Mordecai's fate is sealed. Haman has all the power of the king upon his finger. He can do as he sees fit. Like one of those old black and white cliff hanger serials we used to watch many years ago. What will become of one of the main characters? Such is the extent of Haman's own power and wealth, that such a structure of death could be erected in one day. 24 metres, 75 feet high! But as we will see next time, one night of a God sent sleeplessness will change everything!

In closing this morning Beloved, as Christians, we should always seek to assess ourselves with sober mind and heart. We measure ourselves by Jesus. What are the things that drive us? Are we like Haman, slaves to vanity, popularity and adoration? Do we live for praise and admiration? Haman did, and next week we will see the wages of just such a life. Or are we driven by that which is pleasing to God? The life of a humble, willing servant who is labouring toward an inheritance that is not of this world, and has been won for us by Christ! No not deep theological questions, just simple and yet profound truths. The proud, arrogant and self-sufficient, will not inherit the Kingdom of Christ and heaven!

Let's pray!