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Esther

ESTHER 5:1-14 (THE GOLDEN SCEPTER)

I am guessing that only a complete psychopath goes to bed and sleeps well night after night without ever losing any sleep. We all seem to lose sleep for one reason or another. At times, we might lose sleep over anticipation of something exciting which lies ahead for us. We might lose sleep over a family feud. Maybe we lose sleep over an argument with a close friend.

A guilty conscience will rob us of sleep. A sick baby will too. Like Mordecai, we might lose sleep over an imperial edict that says that our people group is set to be destroyed. Or, like Esther, we might lose sleep over being married to the king and finding out that he has authorized this to be done.

A complete jerk like Haman might lose sleep over pride because he was not being honored by Mordecai. Or, he might lose sleep over the joyous prospect of having him hung on a tree to writhe until dead. The Jewish people are already marked out for destruction. Their time is set, and they will be eliminated. But Haman can no longer stand the punishing embarrassment of being snubbed by Mordecai, and so he miserably looks for comfort with his friends. He has a hope deferred, and the Bible tells us what that means...

Text Verse: "Hope deferred makes the heart sick,
But when the desire comes, *it is* a tree of life." Proverbs 13:12

Taking the passage that we will look at today, it's almost ironic that the desire-fulfilled is compared to "a tree of life." One person is supposed to be hung on a

tree, and that is intended to give life, at least quality of life, back to another. But in the Bible, concepts such as life and death are often so intermingled that we think we have one, and then we find that we actually have the other.

Haman thinks he will find life through death, but that will be turned upside down. And the opposite will then be true. But if we think that one through (as we will at the end or our time together today) we will find that the life that is granted ends up in death once again, and that death leads to life... once again.

The mysteries of the Bible are so vast, and deep, and rich, that it is hard to get them all straight in our heads. How much worse for us when we get them wrong in our doctrine. Paul alludes to that in Romans with the words, "Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful."

If that sounds complicated, it is. But with a little thought, or with a bit of paying attention in Bible class, it becomes clear. The point is that we need to be careful as we think through the larger issues found in the Bible. If not, we can go from one small error into many larger errors very quickly. That is why we need to carefully, systematically, and faithfully evaluate the word of God.

It may be tough, it may be mind numbing at times, but it will always prove to be the most sound and reasonable path to follow in looking into this magnificent gift of God. Yes, it's all to be found in His superior word. And so let's turn to that precious word once again and... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. She Found Favor in His Sight (verses 1-7)

¹Now it happened on the third day

This is now the third day as was recorded in verse 4:16 –

"Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which *is* against the law; and if I perish, I perish!" Esther 4:16

It is to be noted again that the term, “three days, night or day,” is to be taken idiomatically. It is actually not the fourth day now, but the third. The Hebrew says *b'yom ha'shelishi*, or “on the third day,” not “after three days.” It is an important clue when referring to Jesus’ words of His being “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” It is an idiom referring to a period inclusive of, but not necessarily wholly, three days. It is on the third day then...

^{1 (con't)} **that Esther put on her royal robes**

va'tilbash esther malkut – it literally says, “that put on Esther royalty.” She had been in mourning garments, indicating woe, affliction, and misery. She could not come before the king in this manner, and so she put on her royalty – meaning the garments and crown of royalty, but also the airs of royalty. She changed her countenance, she lifted herself up from her state of lowness, and she walked in confidence instead of mourning in misery. Everything needed to enter the presence of the king was put on in order to come before him in an acceptable manner.

^{1 (con't)} **and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, across from the king's house,**

These words introduce another set of two's. Queen Esther will appear before the king in an unauthorized manner twice. The first is now, and the second will be in verse 8:3. The two contrast. Here, she will bravely stand before the king's presence without approval in order to begin the petition to save her people. In the second, she will mourn with tears before the king, which is not authorized, in order to have the decree of destruction revoked. The two accounts contrast, but they are both confirmed in the action of the king extending to her the royal scepter, signifying his favor. In this verse, the wording is specific. She has placed herself in a position of the inner court of the palace where she would be directly in front of the king's house in order to attract his attention...

^{1 (con't)} **while the king sat on his royal throne**

Of this throne, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown states –

"The seat he occupied was not a throne, according to our ideas of one, but simply a chair, and so high that it required a footstool. It was made of gold, or, at least, inlaid with that metal, and covered with splendid tapestry, and no one save the king might sit down on it under pain of death."

¹ (con't) in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house.

The king is in the royal house. It would be a hall with pillars with the throne at the end of the hall at the far end, centered between the pillars. From this vantage point, he could look out of the house and see anyone standing in the inner court. There would be a sight for his eyes to behold on this most momentous morning...

² So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, that she found favor in his sight,

Proverbs 21:1 says –

"The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord,
Like the rivers of water;
He turns it wherever He wishes."

This is a true statement, seen throughout Scripture, and also seen here. We could question if this is active or passive, but there is no need. The Lord doesn't need to actively change the heart of the king. We learned this in Exodus with the process used to harden Pharaoh's heart. The Lord sets the stage for the turning of the king's heart. It is passive, and it brings about the intended outcome. The beauty of Esther, the amount of time the king has been without her, the disposition of the court on this particular day, the time and moment of her appearance... all of it has been used to bring *khen*, or gracious favor, out of the king and direct it towards his queen...

² (con't) and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand.

Here two words introduced in verse 4:11 are brought into the scene again. She had told Mordecai that unless the golden *sharvit*, or scepter, was *yashat*, or extended, the penalty would be death. With the Lord directing the king's heart

towards his chosen queen, the scepter is extended, and both pardon and favor are granted. Of this golden scepter, we again turn again to Jamieson-Fausset-Brown –

“This golden scepter receives an interesting illustration from the sculptured monuments of Persia and Assyria. In the bas-reliefs of Persepolis, copied by Sir Robert Ker Porter, we see King Darius enthroned in the midst of his court, and walking abroad in equal state; in either case he carries in his right hand a slender rod or wand, about equal in length to his own height, ornamented with a small knob at the summit.” Jamieson-Fausset-Brown

What is recorded in the Bible is supported by various monuments of antiquity, verifying that the story is reliable.

^{2 (con't)} **Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter.**

It is this act by which the thankfulness is demonstrated, and in which the pardon is received. And yes, a pardon is something which can be turned down, both by man towards God in Christ, and by man towards the governing power. The touching of the scepter is as much a part of the process as is the extending of the scepter in the first place. Before going on, it would be good to remind you that a pardon has been secured for you through Christ, but it must be received. Have you touched the relief extended to you by God through confession that Jesus Christ is Lord?

Of this verse, the Latin Vulgate translation signifies that the touching of the scepter occurred through kissing the orb. The 2nd Psalm admonishes God’s people to “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way.” Should we not heed the call of God in Christ, and kiss the Son while the time allows His favor?

Finally, if you are the studious sort, you might have noticed that the footnotes in your Bible say that the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, adds many extra details into verses 1 & 2. It appears as if they have been added in by some overzealous scribe at some point after the original writing.

³ **And the king said to her, “What do you wish, Queen Esther?**

There is an understanding that Esther didn't just come before the king to see how his day was going. Rather, she came with purposeful intent, and placed herself in a dangerous position to do so. Understanding this, he makes what might otherwise seem like a foolish or unwise statement...

^{3 (con't)} **What is your request? It shall be given to you—up to half the kingdom!"**

The word "request" here has been seen only once in the Bible, in Ezra 7. It will now be seen seven times in Esther, and never again. It signifies a petition or entreaty. The king is obviously aware that a great need exists, or the queen would in no wise have dreamed of coming before the throne unannounced. Especially after a full month of time had passed. Understanding this, he not only asks what she wants, but he follows up his words with a most liberal statement indicating she has received his complete favor...

^{3 (con't)} **It shall be given to you—up to half the kingdom!"**

Some scholars chide the statement of the king, including its repetition, but the king already knows she has something on her mind. She did not come before him to ask for half the kingdom. She came for something specific which could still be refused if it had nothing to do with half the kingdom. Further, the statement is to be taken as hyperbole. It is the king's court, and it is his way of showing the liberality of the court. Such is seen again in Mark 6 at the time of Herod –

Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief *men* of Galilee.²² And when Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give *it* to you."²³ He also swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom." Mark 6:21-23

Unfortunately for Herod, his promise was in the presence of people whose value of life was wanting, and so a magnificent bestowal of a request would cover what the girl then asked for, the head of John the Baptist. It was a request that could not be refused. As for Ahasuerus, what grand thing would Queen Esther now ask for?

⁴ So Esther answered, “If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him.”

Esther speaks to the king in the third person, “If it pleases the king,” and “let the king.” She will continue to speak to him this way until her actual appeal is made in Chapter 7. Her words, *im al ha’melekh tov*, or “if to the king good,” are identical to the words of Memucan in verse 1:19. She has placed herself in a position as if one of the king’s advisers, making a recommendation for his benefit, as much as a petition for his approval.

Further, this is the first time she has spoken Haman’s name, and it is also in the third person. For both, she speaks of having a banquet and desiring them to be in attendance. Instead of stating what she actually desires, she finds an excuse to delay the request. However, the king immediately knows that the banquet is not the request. This can be determined because in verse 6, he will again make the same offer of half his kingdom that he just made.

The word used here is the same as several times previously, *mishteh*, or a banquet, rather than merely a feast. It implies it will be centered on the wine rather than the food. It is a wise choice on her part, understanding the effects of wine, and having those effects displayed at a time when she had Haman alone with him.

Further, it is known that the king and queen normally dined and banqueted separately. To call the king for a banquet would then be a special occasion. For a third person, not even a relation, to be invited would then be considered the highest of honor. It was honoring of the king who had placed Haman in his high position, and it was honoring of Haman who is acknowledged as such by the queen. But higher honor now will lead to greater dishonor ahead.

In this verse is contained the second acrostic bearing the Divine Name, Yehovah. It is formed by the initial letters of the words *yavow ha’melekh v’haman ha’yom*, or “come the king and Haman this day.” The initial letters reading, YHVH.

Using the initial letters while going forward indicates the action is being initiated by the Lord through His chosen servant, Esther, and that He is the determining force which is resulting in Esther’s actions. It is the first movement, leading

towards the final, marvelous, result. Though the banquet will be held by Esther, and though two men have been invited, making three, a fourth Presence will be at this banquet as well. The unseen, but ever-present Lord, is secretly, and yet visibly, acknowledged as such in this verse.

⁵ Then the king said, “Bring Haman quickly, that he may do as Esther has said.”

We cannot know if Haman actually knew of Esther's lineage at this point or not, but she couldn't take that chance. In inviting him, she would prevent any suspicion on his behalf, and he could not openly accuse her before the king when she had placed him in such an honorable position. And now that the king has accepted the date, and included Haman in his acceptance, the matter is all but settled in regards to her chance of success in the mission set before her.

^{5 (con't)} So the king and Haman went to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

The two went together based on the invitation of Esther, but there could be no doubt that the banquet was not the intent of her petition. Instead, it is the means to bring her to stating her intent. This is without a doubt based on the next words...

⁶ At the banquet of wine the king said to Esther, “What *is* your petition? It shall be granted you. What *is* your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!”

Here, *yayin*, or wine, is specifically mentioned. Esther would have known what happened to Vashti, and how the king made his decision while at a banqueting feast of wine. She is using wine as the Bible uses it in symbolism. Wine symbolizes the merging of cultural expressions into a result. The thing that ought to happen can happen, symbolized by wine. It is as if an act of reasoning is occurring, and an intended result is realized. Solomon uses wine in Proverbs 9 as a result of the workings of Wisdom. Wine represents our reasoning and that which will change our mind. This is exactly what Esther is intending to do; change the mind of the king.

And it appears that her perfect time has come to do so from the repeated words of the king, her petition is promised to be granted, even up to half the kingdom,

so it shall be done. But instead of stating it immediately, she once again delays the effort in order to come to the perfect time and occasion...

⁷ Then Esther answered and said, “My petition and request is this:

The unseen Lord's direction is evident in the room at this point. Instead of coming out with an answer, another delay is brought forward. It will be a delay which will, literally, change the entire course of what might otherwise have occurred if she had stated her petition now, as requested by the king. And so, instead of answering, she once again defers the answer...

⁸ If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, then let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said.”

It's hard to imagine all the things on her mind at this time, but we can suppose that she was not yet sure of the success of her request based on a single meeting. To ask for another banquet would give her more standing to state what was on her mind. And more, in promising that she would respond to the king in the next meeting, it would make the anticipation even greater for him, as he would now wonder what great thing would cause her first to appear before him unannounced, and then cause her to delay revealing it twice.

Such a scenario might even keep him from sleeping, something which will actually take place, as verse 6:1 notes. Her desire to keep him in anticipation for one reason, will lead to his heightened state of anticipation being used by the Lord for another, related reason. The remarkable events which lie ahead are all perfectly timed and orchestrated by the Lord who knows both the mind of man, and the tendency of those who are affected by various circumstances they face. In the case of Haman, who is being invited for a second time, she will be in a greater position to charge him before the king, and he will be all the more overthrown by the charges so leveled against him. This is evidenced by the words of verse 9...

*What is your request, precious queen?
What is your petition that it might be granted you?
Would you like this half, or this half of my kingdom
-----or something in between?*

Tell me my queen what for you am I to do?

*My king, if it is pleasing in your eyes
And if it sounds right for you to join in a banquet with me
Come with Haman, to the banquet; my surprise
We can eat and drink, everything is set, and all is tasty*

*And then, if it is pleasing to the king
And if I have found favor in my king's eyes
Then come to another banquet tomorrow; if you will do this thing
Then I will reveal to you my heart; my petition I will apprise*

II. Filled with Indignation (verses 9-14)

⁹ So Haman went out that day joyful and with a glad heart;

One can almost imagine Haman walking along whistling the tune, “Top of the World” by the Carpenters at this point. He was only behind the king in importance in the realm, he was the only one invited to the banquet held by Esther, he had certainly enjoyed himself at the banquet, and he was invited to another one the next day. Everything was blue sky and bright. Except...

⁹ (con't) but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate,

The words here are important. Mordecai is once again in the king's gate. He had obviously set aside his garments of mourning, and he had once again donned the garments of normal life which allowed him to sit in the king's gate. This would have galled Haman. How could he be so content when the edict was written, and his people were yet awaiting destruction? But there was more...

⁹ (con't) and that he did not stand or tremble before him,

This was mandated by the king, as noted in verse 3:2. They were a sign of respect for the office held by Haman, but Mordecai refused to grant them to him. He would not stand, acknowledging his presence, and he would not tremble, acknowledging his greatness. The word *zua*, or tremble, is new and rare. Here, it is intended to convey “showing fear in the presence of a superior.”

⁹ (con't) **he was filled with indignation against Mordecai.**

Because of Mordecai's lack of respect for Haman, and the position he held, he was simply consumed with his hatred of the man. This is shown to be in contrast to the king, whose wrath is noted as rising twice in the book of Esther, but then whose wrath is appeased. Instead, Haman's wrath was raised first in verse 3:5, and it continued to be raised, and intensified, here in this verse. It shows the depth of the ancient hatred which dwelt within him, and which, perversely, would not subside.

¹⁰ **Nevertheless Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and called for his friends and his wife Zeresh.**

It's the object of much speculation as to why he specifically restrained himself. The Jewish nation was set to be destroyed, and so punishing or killing one Jew would hardly matter at all. It may be that he relished in the thought of Mordecai's misery in the months to come, as the day of their destruction drew near. Or, he may have been concerned that by violating the *purim*, or lots which had been drawn, he might negatively affect the outcome of the Jews' destruction. Numerous other explanations have been given, but the Bible focuses on his purposeful restraint. Instead, he returned home and called for his friends and wife. This was ostensibly to boast, but it will become apparent that more so, he needs consolation.

As far as his wife, she is introduced here. The name Zeresh has no meaning in Hebrew. It may be derived from a Persian word for gold, and thus it may mean "Golden."

This verse introduces another set of two's. Here and in verse 6:13, he will consult his friends. The two contrast. Here, he is consulting them to brag and to seek consoling. His friends will counsel him in how to destroy Mordecai. In the second of the two, he will call them for mourning and they will reveal that it is Mordecai who will destroy him. The two accounts contrast, and yet they confirm that the enmity between the two will end in destruction.

¹¹Then Haman told them of his great riches, the multitude of his children, everything in which the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and servants of the king.

The word translated as “told” here is *saphar*. It comes from a root meaning to mark as a tally or record; thus to count. In this then, he is recounting all of his achievements and his accumulations. He first speaks of his great wealth, showing that his love of money came first, before all other things. This alone shows his immense hatred of the Jews. He was willing to deposit an extraordinary amount into the hands of those who would carry out the slaughter of the Jews in order to eliminate them.

He next notes the multitude of his children, there being ten recorded in Chapter 9. Herodotus says that next to prowess in arms, the greatest proof of a man’s excellence in Persia was to have many sons. It is something the Bible also speaks highly of –

Behold, children *are* a heritage from the Lord,
The fruit of the womb *is* a reward.

⁴ Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
So *are* the children of one’s youth.

⁵ Happy *is* the man who has his quiver full of them;
They shall not be ashamed,
But shall speak with their enemies in the gate. Psalm 127:4, 5

After his sons, he mentions his promotion, even above the other officials and servants. The king favored him, and thus he was highly favored. What other man had such marvelous esteem, possession, position, and wealth? But such bragging inevitably leads to pride. And from there...

“Pride *goes* before destruction,
And a haughty spirit before a fall.” Proverbs 16:18

Haman’s priorities were wrong, and the things he boasted in were mere vapor, ready to vanish from his grasp as his feet dangled in the Persian sunlight. But he couldn’t imagine that, and so the boasting continued...

¹² Moreover Haman said, “Besides, Queen Esther invited no one but me to come in with the king to the banquet that she prepared; and tomorrow I am again invited by her, along with the king.

Here the word *aph* is translated as “moreover.” It is a word which signifies accession as one thing leads to something more elevated. In this, he is noting that all of the greatness he possessed and attained had led to his invitation to the banquet of the queen. She (and therefore certainly everyone else!) had acknowledged that he alone was worthy of such honor after the king himself. The author is setting up the very concept of the notion, “The greater the ascent, the greater the fall.” Haman assumes that he will continue to rise, even to unsurpassed greatness. But the author shows that he will fall, even to everlasting shame and derision. And with the irony of the ages, the very cause of his downfall is mentioned as the only source of his present unhappiness...

¹³ Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.”

A single bitter herb, buried in a plate full of tasty pleasantries, robbed Haman of any delight of soul. He had no joy while Mordecai was present in his daily life. He had to pass him anytime he ventured through the king’s gate. But more than just being one loathsome individual, he was a Jew. The hatred of the man led to hatred of the people. It possessed him and consumed him, stealing his joy, and robbing any sweetness from entering his soul. Everything else was unbalanced and maladjusted because of the presence of Mordecai.

And what a perfect verse this then makes for the third acrostic of the Divine Name to be hidden. The name is spelled backwards, and it is spelled with the final letters of each word, *zeh enenu shoveh li*, or “this nothing avails to me.” It had just said in verse 9 that he was joyful and with a glad heart. The Lord is overruling his gladness. Further, though not yet known to him, the Lord is turning back his counsel upon himself. These things are expressed by the backward spelling of the name, and the use of the final letter in each word. The Lord is there, and He is attentive to working for His people and against the wicked.

¹⁴ Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him,

The verb is singular, and so it more accurately says, “And Zeresh his wife said to him, and all his friends...” It is his wife who leads the advice of what is to be done. One can infer from this that she held sway over him to some extent. What is ironic is that in the garden, the devil had gone to the woman in order to deceive the man. He listened and it led to the fall of man. In Esther, Haman listened to his wife and it led to his own downfall. The lesson isn’t that women give bad advice. The lesson is that we are to obey the law, especially God’s revealed law, above all else.

^{14 (con't)} **“Let a gallows be made,**

The word is *ets*, a tree. Saying “gallows” implies hanging by the neck, which is probably not the case. It is the same word used in Esther 2:23 and which probably signifies hanging by crucifixion. The Greek translation uses the word, *xulon*, which is used in Acts 5:30 & 10:39 when speaking of Jesus being hung on a tree.

^{14 (con't)} **fifty cubits high,**

Fifty cubits is about 75 feet high. This may be a form of hyperbole to signify “way up there.” However, the number 50 in Scripture has its own meaning. Bullinger defines it as “the number of jubilee or deliverance. It is the *issue* of 7×7 (7^2), and points to deliverance and rest following on as the result of the perfect consummation of time.” Haman is looking for deliverance and rest from Mordecai. Despite the casting of the *purim*, they are indicating that this is the perfect consummation of time for his enemy to be destroyed.

Regardless of the actual height, in an exceptionally high hanging of Mordecai, it would make the punishment more conspicuous, and stand as a warning to anyone else who challenged him. It would also increase the disgrace of Mordecai, and thus it is assumed that Haman’s glory would be proportionately increased. In their next words, there is an urgency to the matter. And so the gallows should be erected this same day in anticipation of the approval of the king. It would be erected and waiting...

^{14 (con't)} **and in the morning suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it;**

All that would be needed is the final approval of the king. By the time it came, it would simply be a matter of having the guards arrest Mordecai, and then hang him up on the tree. With that simple task completed, Haman could rejoice in his accomplishments without grieving over his wounded pride any longer. From there...

^{14 (con't)} then go merrily with the king to the banquet."

With Mordecai alive, the meal would be bland, the fruit would be bitter, and the wine would be flavorless. His time at the banquet would be consumed with thoughts of rage at the wretched Jew who sat smugly at the king's gate, waiting to torment him with his contemptible attitude. But with Mordecai hanging high, he would be filled with joy as he tasted the delights and drank the ambrosia of victory. The prospect was far too delightful to let pass by...

***^{14 (fin)} And the thing pleased Haman; so he had the gallows made.**

The tree for hanging Mordecai was prepared because Haman rejoiced in the thought of the destruction of his enemy. The destruction of the Jews would soon follow, and he would be freed of this scourge which haunted him and robbed him of his contentment. Or so he thought. The very tree of his rejoicing would become the tree of his own execution.

Of this verse, Adam Clarke comments –

"In former times the Jews were accustomed to burn Haman in effigy; and with him a wooden cross, which they pretended to be in memory of that which he had erected for the suspension of Mordecai; but which was, in fact, to deride the Christian religion. The emperors, Justinian and Theodosius, abolished it by their edicts; and the practice has ceased from that time, though the principle from which it sprang still exists, with the same virulence against Christianity and its glorious Author."

Isn't that interesting? There is in this, then, tastes of Messiah even though He is never alluded to in the book of Esther. It is through this people whom He would

come, and it is to this people that He would return. But it is also this people who rejected Him in the interim. Mordecai is of the tribe of Benjamin, and was directly related to Saul, of whom the Bible records that he fell out of favor with the Lord. In fact, Samuel said to Saul –

“So why do you ask me, seeing the Lord has departed from you and has become your enemy? ¹⁷ And the Lord has done for Himself as He spoke by me. For the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David. ¹⁸ Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord nor execute His fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you this day.” 1 Samuel 28:16:18

Saul had become the Lord’s enemy because of his disobedience towards the command concerning Amelek. Now, a descendant of Amalek, the enemy of the Jews, was set to destroy Mordecai, Saul’s relation. But the Lord will rescue him and his people, who would again become His enemy because of their rejection of Him. The tree for Mordecai, which became the tree of Haman – whose death resulted in the salvation of the Jews – symbolically became the tree of Christ. His death resulted in the salvation of the Jews, if they would receive it, but they did not. Instead, they continued to fight against Him, even trying to turn away those who had come to Christ. In Galatians 4, we read the amazing parallel –

“Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” Galatians 4:16

Paul, the spokesman for the Lord, had become the enemy of the Lord’s people in Galatia because the Jews had come in and demanded that they turn from the salvation of Christ, and back to the bondage of the law. But the ironic thing is that Paul is from Benjamin, the same line and heritage as Mordecai. The ironies running through the Bible never seem to cease.

Saul became the Lord’s enemy in order to maintain favor with his people. Paul became the people’s enemy in order to maintain favor with the Lord. And in between them is Mordecai and Esther who are living out of favor with the Lord in Persia, and yet are being used by the Lord to save His people, the same people who would reject Him and do to Him what they asked to be done to Haman. If this isn’t confusing, what is!

The point of what we are seeing is that despite unfaithfulness, the Lord may judge and pursue the individual, but He will never break His covenant with the collective. His judgments are intended to bring them back to Him, not utterly destroy them. In His workings, we see the most beneficial attitude towards the masses, while displaying His absolute righteousness and justice in the process.

And the highest marker of that truth is found in the cross of Jesus Christ. In Haman's coming death, there will be salvation for the Jews. In Christ's death, there will be salvation for those who receive what He has done, and condemnation for those who reject it. In the death of Haman, we see a good thing in that the enemy of the Jews will be destroyed, but his death is only a mere drop compared to that great enemy of all – Jew and Gentile – which is sin. In the death of Jesus, the true enemy is destroyed. The Bible says that Christ Jesus who knew no sin was made sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Let us remember that the story of Esther, though being dramatic, ironic, numerically complex, hidden with secrets, and delightful in its climax, is only a picture and part of what God is doing for the world in Christ Jesus. He is the center and focal point of all that we must focus on, or the story has no true final purpose and meaning. And the same is true with our lives. We need Christ. We all need Christ. In the end, it is all about Jesus Christ our Lord.

Closing Verse: “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree”),¹⁴ that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” Galatians 3:13,14

Next Week: Esther 6:1-14 *Haman thinks it is him, but it is someone else, and Haman will be a goner...* (The Man in Whom the King Delights to Honor) (8th Esther Sermon)

The Lord has you exactly where He wants you. He has a good plan and purpose for you. At times, you might feel as if he has no great design for you in life, but he has brought you to this moment to reveal His glory in and through you. So follow Him and trust Him and He will do marvelous things for you and through you.

The Golden Scepter

Now it happened on the third day
That Esther put on her royal robes, instead of some regular blouse
And stood in the inner court of the king's palace
Across from the king's house

While the king sat on his royal throne, not expecting his spouse
In the royal house, facing the entrance of the house

So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther
Standing in the court, that she found favor in his sight
And the king held out to Esther the golden scepter
-----that was in his hand
Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter
-----knowing that things would be alright
And the king said to her
“What do you wish, Queen Esther?

What is your request? A royal sum?
It shall be given to you—up to half the kingdom!”

So Esther answered, “If it pleases the king
Let the king and Haman come today
To the banquet that I have prepared for him
Please do this thing, I pray

Then the king said, “Bring Haman quickly
That he may do as Esther has said
So the king and Haman went to the banquet
That Esther had prepar-ed.

At the banquet of wine the king said to Esther
“What is your petition? It shall be granted you
What is your request, up to half the kingdom?
It shall be done!” My word is true

Then Esther answered and said, not wishing her chance to miss
“My petition and request is this:

If I have found favor in the sight of the king
And if it pleases the king to grant my petition
-----and fulfill my request in the hours ahead
Then let the king and Haman come to the banquet
Which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do
-----as the king has said

So Haman went out that day joyful and with a glad heart
But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king’s gate
And that he did not stand or tremble before him
He was filled with indignation against Mordecai
-----indignation and hate

Nevertheless Haman restrained himself and went home
-----for a little family life
And he sent and called for his friends and Zeresh his wife

Then Haman told them of his great riches
The multitude of his children, which made his heart sing
Everything in which the king had promoted him
And how he had advanced him above the officials
-----and servants of the king

Moreover Haman said
“Besides, Queen Esther invited no one but me, a nifty thing!
To come in with the king to the banquet that she prepared
And tomorrow I am again invited by her along with the king

Yet all this avails me nothing; I am filled with hate
So long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate

Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him
“Let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high
And in the morning suggest to the king

That be hanged on it Mordecai

Then go merrily with the king to the banquet, be not dismayed
And the thing pleased Haman; so he had the gallows made

Lord God, thank You for Your presence that is with us
Even when we don't realize that You are there
Because You sent Your own Son Jesus
We can know that You truly do care

And so Lord, be real to us in a wonderful new way
Open our minds and our hearts to seeing You always
Through every step we take, and throughout every day
Be real to us, O God, and to You will shall give all of our praise

Hallelujah and Amen...