

"A REVERSAL OF FORTUNES"

I. Introduction

- A. When you stop and think about it, it is utterly astounding that God would hitch his plan of redemption to the nation of Israel.
1. The nation wasn't even in existence when God called Abraham.
 2. And from that moment on, the covenant people were almost always on the brink of either annihilation or absorption back into the world.
 3. Again and again, the Israelites failed in their calling as God's covenant people and brought God's judgment upon themselves.
 4. From an earthly perspective, it seemed like God's plan was doomed to fail from the very beginning.
 5. But that is just the point.
 6. God's plan of redemption is not brought about by virtue of human strength but by God's power alone.
- B. This is a point that comes across loud and clear in the story of Esther, especially in the chapter that we are studying tonight.
1. There are a lot of coincidences in this passage.
 2. Think about how many times the phrase "It just so happened" can be used to describe what takes place here.
 3. "It just so happened" that the king couldn't sleep that night.
 4. "It just so happened" that he decided to deal with his insomnia by having the book of memorable deeds read to him.

5. “It just so happened” that the story of how Mordecai had saved him was what was read to the king that night.
6. “It just so happened” that Haman appeared in the court at the precise moment that he did.
7. “It just so happened” that Haman answered the king’s question thinking that the king wanted to honor him.
8. Of course, in the biblical worldview, there is no such thing as a coincidence.
9. And for this reason, even though God is nowhere mentioned in this chapter, there is no doubt that it is his hand that is guiding the events taking place here.

II. The King’s Sleepless Night

- A. We saw in the previous chapter that Esther was carrying out her plan very deliberately and very shrewdly.
 1. We also noted that she was not acting according to her own wisdom but in reliance upon the Lord.
 2. Nevertheless, there was something that Esther did not know.
 3. She knew about the decree that ordered the destruction of all the Jews in the Persian empire on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month.
 4. What she did not know was that Haman was planning to have Mordecai hung from a gallows that very day.
 5. Esther thinks that she has more time than she really does have.
 6. She may succeed in saving her people, but it looks like her efforts will be of no help to Mordecai.

- B. There is an important lesson for us in this.
1. Our experiences are often very similar to what happens to Esther in this passage.
 2. Esther knew what she had to do in the situation that was before her.
 3. We too can discern what God would have us to do in the situations that we face, because God has revealed his will to us in his Word.
 4. At the same time, there are many other things that God does not reveal to us, just as he did not tell Esther about Haman's plan to have Mordecai killed.
 5. This passage shows us that we do not need to worry about the things that God has kept hidden from us.
 6. This passage helps us to fight anxiety, because it tells us that our confidence does not need to rest upon our own exhaustive knowledge of all contingencies.
 7. Your responsibility is to be faithful in the things that you have been given to do.
 8. You can trust God to take care of everything else.
 9. He will order all of the things that are beyond your control, as well as the things that you think that you have under control, according to his most wise providence.
- C. As we have already noted, God's control over what takes place here is evident by the way in which things unfold.
1. It was not just a matter of chance that the king could not sleep that night.
 2. Nor was it a matter of chance that he chose to deal with his insomnia in the way that he did.

3. There was no television or internet in those days, but there were plenty of other activities in which the king could have engaged that night.
 4. But instead of entertaining himself, he chose to catch up on some work.
 5. It was important for the king to keep up with the royal diary, to make sure that he wasn't overlooking anything.
 6. At the same time, there may be another implied dig at Ahasuerus here.
 7. Could it be that one of the reasons why he chose to have the the royal diary read to him is that he expected it to put him to sleep?
- D. Amazingly, the king did not fall back to sleep that night.
1. Instead, the book was read to him all through the night.
 2. And in another clear example of God's sovereign control over what was happening, one of the passages that was read was the account of how Mordecai had uncovered the plot on Ahasuerus' life.
 3. This got the king's attention, and he wanted to know how Mordecai had been rewarded for performing such an important service to the king.
 4. When he was told that nothing had been done for Mordecai, he was extremely troubled.
 5. Now, we should not think that the king was upset with himself for failing to express his gratitude.
 6. His concerns were much more pragmatic and self-centered than that.

7. Persian kings were famous for rewarding those who helped them, but there was a good reason why they had this policy.
 8. If Mordecai's actions went unrewarded, what motivation would the other people in the empire have for foiling future plots against the king's life?
- E. Notice how this shows us that God's sovereignty even extends over people's motivations.
1. Ahasuerus did not want to reward Mordecai because he wanted to make sure he properly expressed his gratitude.
 2. He wanted to reward him so that people would know that good deeds done on behalf of the king do not go unrecognized.
 3. Ahasuerus was thinking of himself in what he was doing here, but God used the king's self-centered motivations to accomplish his purposes.
 4. This principle is just as true today as it was then.
 5. The Lord remains sovereign not only over the actions of men, but also over the things that motivate their actions.

III. Haman's Bad Day

- A. After telling us about what happened during the king's sleepless night, the writer moves on to tell us about Haman's bad day.
1. Normally, none of the king's counselors would be at court so early.
 2. But Haman came earlier than usual that day because he wanted to ensure that he would be first in line to meet with the king.
 3. Haman had an urgent request, a request that could not be put off any longer: the request to do away with Mordecai.

- B. When the king asked Haman, “What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?”, Haman assumed the king was talking about him.
1. This was a reasonable assumption given how the story has gone thus far.
 2. Haman is clearly the king’s favorite.
 3. He is the chief official in the empire.
 4. Who else could the king be talking about here?
 5. Because Haman thinks that the king is talking about him, the things that he suggests as he answers the king’s question are the things that his own heart craves.
 6. The text in verse 6 literally says, “Haman said *in his heart*, ‘Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?’”
 7. We are given a window into Haman’s heart here.
 8. The desire of Haman’s heart is public recognition and honor.
 9. He is so bold in his request that he even asks for the king’s robes and the king’s horse.
- C. Can you imagine how the expression on Haman’s face must have changed when the king told him to go and do all of these things for Mordecai?
1. One moment, Haman was picturing what it would be like for him to be paraded through the city in such a glorious manner.
 2. But the next moment, he was confronted by his worst nightmare come true.

3. If Haman were not such a villain in this story, we might even feel a little sorry for him.
 4. Instead, we laugh at him because his folly in opposing God's people is finally being exposed.
- D. Try to put yourself in Mordecai's shoes when he sees Haman marching out to him that morning with such a sour expression on his face.
1. Perhaps Mordecai has heard about the gallows that was constructed that night.
 2. Perhaps he has begun to put two and two together.
 3. Perhaps he thinks that this is how he will meet his end.
 4. What a surprise it must have been for Mordecai when Haman clothed him in the royal robes, put him on the king's horse, and led him through the square of the city shouting, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor."
 5. It was simultaneously Mordecai's vindication and Haman's downfall.
 6. This is a picture of how it will be on the last day for all of those who set themselves against Christ and his church.
 7. Our enemies will be clothed with shame, but we will sit with Christ on his throne.
- E. After having to endure all of this, Haman went back to his home.
1. And notice how he is described in verse 12.
 2. He is mourning and covering his head.
 3. He is doing the same things that the Jews did when they learned of the king's decree for their destruction.

4. The reversal is complete.
- F. When Haman arrives back at his home and relates all that has taken place to his wife and his friends, they have no words of consolation for him.
1. Instead, they call attention to the futility of Haman's efforts to destroy Mordecai and his people.
 2. They say to him, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him."
 3. Of course, they knew that Mordecai was a Jew before this, but only now has the significance of this dawned on them.
 4. They were essentially saying to Haman, 'Don't you know that the Jews always seem to survive? People are always trying to wipe them out, but it never works.'
 5. As one commentator observes: "The way in which the Jewish people had survived deportation and preserved their identity had not escaped notice, and this in itself witnessed to the power of their God (cf. Ezek. 38:23). The deliverance of the individual, Mordecai, just though it is, needs to be seen as part of this wider purpose of God to bring glory to his own name and to establish his kingdom. That this was no accident could be shown by reference to Edom, a nation of similar size, which did not survive the Babylonian experience even though it was not deported (Mal. 1:2-5)." [Baldwin, 91]
 6. The covenant people could not be destroyed, not because of their own strength or their own cunning, but because God would not allow his purpose to be thwarted.

IV. Conclusion

- A. The experience of Haman in this passage really is a picture of what every foe of Christ will have to endure on the last day.
- B. Because the church of Jesus Christ is indestructible, all of her enemies will eventually meet an end that is far more humiliating and far more devastating than what Haman went through.
- C. So let us press on in our faith, brothers and sisters, trusting in the Lord to preserve us and to vindicate us in the end.
- D. The words that we sing are entirely true:

*The Church shall never perish!
Her dear Lord to defend,
To guide, sustain, and cherish,
Is with her to the end:
Though there be those who hate her,
And false sons in her pale,
Against both foe or traitor
She ever shall prevail.*