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Haman's Ego

Esther 5:1-14

Prayer: *We pray this again this morning, Lord, for our gathering here. We just thank you for those who could make it. Again Lord, all those who are stuck snow-wise and ice-wise, we just pray again you would bless and pray you would continue to guide, guard and watch over your word. We pray for your Holy Spirit's presence this morning as we open up your word once again. May it be of permanent value, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we are doing the book of Esther; and when we last left Esther and Mordecai, if you recall things were about as bleak as they could possibly be. And again just to recapitulate what's been taking place, Esther and Mordecai are two Jews who are living anonymously in Persia, actually the anonymous part was their heritage as Jews. It was something they had managed to keep hidden as they settled into a foreign and potentially hostile culture. But they had done extremely well for themselves. Mordecai held a minor position of authority in Susa which is really the equivalent of Washington, D.C. for them. Esther had managed, with her cousin

Mordecai's approval, to so impress the king with her beauty and charm that she had become queen. And when we last left Mordecai and Esther, their secret lives as Jews was coming to an end in the worst possible way. Mordecai had managed to insult Haman who was the second most important political figure in all Persia by refusing to bow to him. Now Mordecai's refusal to bow proved quite costly because Haman was someone who happened to have the king's ear. And through clever manipulation, Haman was able to paint not just Mordecai but his entire Jewish community as a threat to Persia that needed to be addressed. Haman even offered to undertake the financing of an operation designed to -- quote -- "annihilate, kill, and destroy" every Jewish man, woman and child in all of Persia on one appointed day. According to an edict that was issued throughout the entire nation, on one day in the month of Adar which was twelve months in the future, every Gentile in Persia was to take up arms and slaughter whatever Jew he or she knew as neighbor, as friend, or as associate. Well, Mordecai learns that this edict has gone out and he's absolutely distraught. He tears his clothes, he dons sackcloth and ashes and he runs screaming into the town's center taking his complaint all the way to the gates of the palace itself.

So we pick up at *Esther 4* starting at verse 1. It says: *When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes*

and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry. He went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes. When Esther's young women and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed. She sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was. Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her and command her to go to the king to beg his favor and plead with him on behalf of her people. And Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. Then Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say, "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the

inner court without being called, there is but one law -- to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live. But as for me, I have not been called to come in to the king these last thirty days." And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than any of the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such time as this?" Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish." Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

Well, desperate times call for desperate measures, and Esther and Mordecai were obviously both desperate. As we follow the stories of Esther and Mordecai, we see unfolding before our eyes God's sovereign control over something that seems to be completely out of control. But that's not the half of it. The story of God's sovereignty has to be understood within the context of a battle

that really started in the Garden of Eden, and it continues to this very day. We speak often about the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness and how Jesus Christ literally stepped out of the kingdom of light to enter into this kingdom of darkness in order to destroy the devil's work and to ransom and rescue us. And the battle lines were actually quite simple, I mean, the kingdom of darkness detested the crown of God's creation, the creatures who alone would bear God's image, and that of course would be us. He even went so far as to enter into the garden of Eden disguised as a serpent so that he might tempt the very first humans into siding with him in the very first insurrection of mankind. And you know, the whole point of the exercise was not to get Adam and Eve to eat an apple. It was to tempt them into disobeying the one command that they were given. You see, if the devil could succeed in getting humanity's fountainhead to disobey, well then he would pollute humanity at its source and cause every subsequent offspring of Adam and Eve to share in his fallenness and his imperfection. This the devil succeeded in spectacularly. It marked the beginning of an ongoing war between the kingdoms that would end at a cross and would start with a curse. We pick up on that curse in *Genesis 3:14*. It says: *So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the*

woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Now Adam and Eve certainly could not have known what God was referring to when they heard that curse spoken in the garden of Eden. I mean we know that God was telling Satan that his undoing would not come through a man but through God's own spirit bearing human flesh through a woman, that there would be a major battle in which the woman's offspring, Jesus, would be bruised, while he, Satan, would be crushed. Jesus would enter human flesh as a child born to a peasant woman and a carpenter, he would go on to lead a flawless existence, accomplishing everything that the law demanded by obeying God perfectly, and then having lived a perfect life, he would then go to a cross which was arranged for by the kingdom of darkness, and on that cross, instead of being a victim of Roman justice and Jewish prejudice, he would instead proclaim the ultimate victory of the kingdom of light over the kingdom of darkness. And he would do that by offering up the perfection of his life as payment for sin, not to Satan but to God's own flawless justice. See, when Jesus said, "It is finished" on the cross, he understood precisely what it is that he had accomplished. The spotless son of God had voluntarily become sin itself on the cross and God punished the sin that he had become on our behalf. Jesus allowed the holiness of his father's justice to be fully satisfied

by directing God's just wrath towards sin not onto our heads but onto his own beloved head. And that's why we look at the cross as a total victory for the good guys. And that's why God says in *Colossians 2*, he says: *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*

See, the first conflict in the garden set the stage for the spiritual battle that was ultimately won at the cross. But that doesn't mean that Satan is willing to suddenly assume the role of a defeated foe. In fact he has been raging ever since the cross, even to this very day. And the reason why Esther is such an important part of God's story is that it really shows us the outworking of the conflict of two different kingdoms. Esther and Mordecai's story is just another installment in a series of stories all about wars and battles and skirmishes that have taken place between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light ever since that day 2,000 years ago when Jesus *"made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."* Esther's just part of the process that God chose to keep the Jews miraculously alive long

enough to produce the Messiah known as Jesus. Jesus came to this earth as Messiah through a group of people who were the offspring of Abraham who we all know were known as Jews. Jesus came in essence to lead an assault against the kingdom of darkness and the prince of that kingdom, who was also referred to by Jesus himself in John 12 as the prince of this world, that king didn't exactly put out a welcome mat. The first reaction of Satan to the birth of Jesus takes place as the Jews begin to form a nation of slaves in Egypt. Moses has this great conflict with Pharaoh. And Moses' conflict with Pharaoh is really just two representatives of two different kingdoms engaging in battle. And again, Moses probably had no idea that he was protecting a people who would eventually produce the Messiah, Jesus. And Pharaoh, he just merely wanted the cheap labor of the slave population. But in actuality they both represent opposite sides of a proxy war that had started in the garden of Eden and the battle rages constantly. You know when the Jews finally leave Egypt, they're instantly attacked by the Amalekites. And the Amalekites were a group that Satan had clearly raised up in order to destroy the Jews to prevent Jesus from ever arriving on planet earth. And when we get to the story of Esther, we've already been through countless clashes between these two kingdoms, so we're no longer surprised when we see that the two opposing parties in this story are the Jews and people who want to eliminate them. I mean the story of Esther is just another story

of how God works his will through human freedom against the wiles of the prince of darkness and his best attempt at stopping the reign of Jesus before it even starts. The story of Esther is the story of how God, working completely behind the scenes, plays out exactly what he has in mind rather than what the devil or the humans he employs thinks he's going to accomplish. It's the essence of *Proverbs 19* which says: *Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.* And the amazing thing is he does it all without violating man's free will.

So we've been looking at this story and we see that everything in this story emanates from the biblical principles laid down in *Romans 8:28*: *All things work together for good to those who love God and who are called according to his purpose.* And we see that God is so all-powerful, so all-encompassing, so completely sovereign over the events of man that no matter what man does, intending evil, God can superintend for good, and that includes motives as well. I mean we're looking at Mordecai. We looked last week at his motive. We don't know if Mordecai refused to bow to Haman because he knew that Haman was a congenital anti-Semite or simply because he resented the fact that Haman had risen to power while Mordecai had not; but regardless the motive, we understand that God is still sovereign. And we do know that one of the most

prevalent things about the story of Esther is that God is really never mentioned at all in the book. In fact, God is never even referred to. So the book of Esther really serves as a testimony to what God is able to do behind the scenes with his superintending power.

And we've spent a lot of time in the last few weeks looking at this character Haman. This is a guy whose motive was anything but good. And we looked first at his history and we saw that he was an Agagite which means he was a long-term descendent of King Agag who was king of the Amalekites who attacked the Jews from the very start. Haman plays a pivotal role in the story and really Haman is the ultimate bad guy. He's full of bad intent and he wants nothing more than the ultimate destruction of the entire Jewish nation. He's convinced that this people group is silent, that they're powerless, and that they're worthless, and he has convinced the king to remove them. And now the king is so indifferent and so unaware that he gives permission to Haman, not realizing that he's just signed his own queen's death sentence because she was a Jew as well.

We looked at Haman's murderous intent and we saw present day parallels in New York's Governor Cuomo. Here's a man actively authorizing the killing of children in the womb up to the day of

their birth. So we identify the governor as a modern day Haman, simply reckoning another people group to be silent, powerless and worthless. We also identified the people, the rank and file people as parallel with the king. These are us, fellow citizens who are either too lazy or too indifferent to care about this evil and thus complicit in allowing it to flourish. And next we went on to examine Haman the anti-Semite, and again we saw his anti-Semitism as against the backdrop of a conflict between the kingdoms. See, prior to the birth of Jesus anti-Semitism was simply a means to an end. The end was to prevent Jesus from successfully being born. That was the enemy's plan from the start, and years later at Jesus' actual birth, when that takes place, we see that Herod's trying to prevent Jesus from being established on earth by slaughtering all of the babies that he thought was close to his age. But once again we see God's sovereignty prevailing. So for the next 33 years we see God successfully protecting his son precisely so he could go to the cross. But even today after Jesus has successfully won his victory at the cross, there still lingers in the enemy and in his kingdom a profound hatred for the people group through whom Jesus came. And so even today we have a virulent form of anti-Semitism that seems to be growing even stronger as the enemy knows that his days are growing shorter. But in the end, we know that God's victory is a forgone conclusion, yet there's still lessons to be learned from this character Haman. And today we want to look back

at Haman and his ego. And we want to look at that understanding that God used even Haman's evil intents and his evil motives superintending them for our good.

So we pick up at *Esther* 5 starting at verse 1. It says: *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. When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter. Then the king asked, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given." "If it please the king," replied Esther, "let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared for him." "Bring Haman at once," the king said, "so we may do what Esther asks." So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared. As they were drinking wine the king again asked Esther, "Now what is your petition? It will be given you. And what is your request? 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 favor, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill 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."*

Haman went out that day happy in high spirits. 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. Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home. Calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored 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. But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate." His wife Zeresh and all his friend said to him, "Have a pole set up, reaching to a height of fifty cubits, and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai impaled on it. Then go with the king to the banquet and enjoy yourself." This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the pole set up.

Well, this should have been the best day in Haman's life. I mean you think about it, everything has gone according to plan. The king has approved his plan to annihilate the Jews and now the queen herself has invited him to this exclusive banquet attended only by himself the king and the queen. There's only one fly in the ointment though, and it serves notice on all who rely on their egos

for satisfaction. See, Haman is at his greatest height in life while Mordecai is really in his deepest pit. But even there Mordecai has refused to bow to Haman and that simple act of defiance, it destroys everything for Haman. Haman sees Mordecai's refusal, he goes home and he gathers all of his friends and his families and associates and he regales them with his accomplishments. But none of it mattered. And none of it matters simply because Mordecai had refused to bow to him. See, it turns out that Haman wasn't actually the second most powerful man in Persia. In fact it turns out that man was Mordecai. It was Mordecai who happened to be living rent free inside Haman's head. We've spent a long time looking at Haman because in actuality Haman has much to teach us. Haman is demonstrating for us three things about the human ego that we can take away from this section of scripture: Number one, ego is always famished; number two, it is incredibly fickle; and number three, it is extremely fragile. Famished, fickle and fragile define that little voice that's in every single one of us. And Haman gives us an outstanding example of what happens when you refuse to deal with it.

So let's look first at ego being famished. I mean ego really is more like a wild beast than a friend. It's got this insatiable appetite, so it needs to be fed constantly. We go back to verse 11, it says: *Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many*

sons, and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials. His vast wealth and his huge family, his position and power, they were still not enough to keep his ego fed. There's one thing I've noticed about ego. It's another name for what the Bible calls "self." It's that little voice inside you that tells you that you are the most important person on the face of this earth. It tries to give you the impression that it's looking out for you. In reality it wants nothing more than to be fed, even if it results in your destruction. It's an appetite that demands to be fed and yet it is never fully satisfied. It demands to be fed but feeding it really only makes it grow. The first way to deal with a famished ego is to recognize that what controlled Haman is really what's trying to control you and me.

Here's how its hunger operates, at least this is an example based on my experience. You know, if two persons were to approach me after church and tell me what a wonderful message I just gave, my first gut reaction, one that I really have no control over is to wonder how it would feel if four people said that, and if four, well then, what would eight feel like? And if eight, maybe twenty. Wouldn't it be amazing to have twenty people say that? If twenty, a hundred, and if a hundred, a thousand. See, it doesn't matter how the numbers shake out, the fact is ego, by its very nature, is

insatiable. If you had a thousand people tell me how wonderful you were and that number dropped back down to eight, you'd be devastated. You'd be devastated even though at that one time you knew that number was supposed to be immensely satisfying. You see, it's a fools errand to think you can feed ego without growing ego and paying a higher and higher cost. I know for a fact that if you don't put the brakes on at the very beginning of your ego's quest, it will be constantly looking for more and more and more. And not that a greater number satisfies to a greater extent but that a greater number makes it so that any lesser number is no longer satisfying at all. And believe me, this does not apply simply to preachers. It is in fact the operational principle behind the success of things like Facebook. You know, the folks who designed Facebook recognize that likes were a form of ego strokes that actually produced a very tiny and very fleeting form of satisfaction that in the end could be literally addictive. In an article in *Ad Age* by Garrett Sloane, this was published in November of 2017, he says this:

Shawn Parker Says Facebook Was Designed To Be Addictive. Sean Parker, the billionaire early Facebook investor and Napster founder says Mark Zuckerberg knowingly created a monster with addictive social media. Parker, speaking at an Axios event, pulled back the curtain on Facebook's early days, saying it was designed to consume

people and all this time everyone thought it was designed for people to consume. Nope, all the sharing and liking were used like a drug to get people hooked on checking Facebook non-stop. "How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible," said Parker, referring to Facebook's earliest mission. "God only knows what it's doing to our children's brains," Parker said. The candid interview wasn't the first time a Silicon Valley insider had sounded the alarm on the digital dangers of social media and the Internet. The whole social media experience is designed to deliver pleasure in the form of validation from family, friends, and likeminded strangers. Every notification ding, colorful app icon, touch screen gesture is designed to entice more use. Parker, speaking at an Axios conference in Philadelphia on Wednesday, talked about how Facebook in particular is engineered for peak compulsivity. "It's a social-validation feedback loop ...exactly the kind of thing that a hacker like myself would come up with, because you're exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology," Parker told Axios. "The inventors, creators -- it's me, it's Mark [Zuckerberg], it's Kevin Systrom on Instagram, it's all these people -- understood this consciously. And we did it anyway," Parker said. See, they did it and they did it successfully because they knew, they knew that our famished egos need to be constantly fed.

Secondly, ego is incredibly fickle. You know, Haman wasn't just an ordinary run-of-the-mill bureaucrat, I mean, he was someone who had managed to become the vice regent in all of Persia, and you don't get that by being a slacker. I mean you think that someone who's arrived at a position so vaulted and so honored that everyone is required to bow in your presence, well that would be someone who would enjoy the deep satisfaction of having arrived. But that's not how ego works. There is no arrival. There's only the journey. And all along the journey, each new step negates the value of the last step, so that you're driven constantly upward with no chance at a pause, no chance for a self-reflecting plateau. I mean if there was any genuine self-reflection, it would become obvious how fickle ego is, and what gave an immense but extraordinarily temporary satisfaction now gives none. I mean Haman gave ample testimony that all along the way he had been able to feed his ego with his political accomplishments, with his wealth, and with his family, but look at where he is now. I mean now his ego is demanding something far more sinister than simply wealth and power, I mean, Haman now knew that the only thing that would truly satisfy his ego would be seeing the ultimate destruction of Mordecai and his people. But again, that didn't happen overnight. Nobody makes jumps from wanting political power to wanting to murder a whole race of people in one giant leap. It's always accomplished in tiny little steps, in increments that are so small that you would hardly

even notice them, and that's the point, you're not supposed to notice them. That's because ego is that little voice inside you that pretends to want only the best for you but ultimately wants nothing more than your destruction. I mean ego told Haman that each step along the way was only a stepping stone to something bigger, something grander. And before he knew it, the only thing that mattered to him was destroying Mordecai and his people so much so that he's willing to risk his entire fortune in order to secure the destruction of the Jews.

Go back to *Esther 3:9*, it says: "*If it pleases the king*" -- this is Haman saying: "*Let a decree be issued to destroy them and I will give ten thousand talents of silver to the king's administrators for the royal treasury.*" See, Haman was driven by an appetite that was constantly famished. Secondly, it was so fickle that it changed from merely wanting wealth, power and recognition to a place where he would never be satisfied with anything less than the genocide of the Jews.

And thirdly, Haman's ego, like all egos, was incredibly fragile. See, Haman's self had told him to risk everything to feed his ever-increasing ego because all of his previous accomplishments, they now meant nothing. All of his life meant nothing because one single Jew refused to bow. One single low level bureaucrat named

Mordecai was able to wipe out every bit of satisfaction that family, friends, fortune and power had provided. That's how fragile ego is. Again back to verse 13. He says: *"But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate."* I doubt very much that Mordecai realized the power that he possessed. I mean everything that Haman had accomplished, his vast wealth, his huge family, the power and the prestige that he clearly and obviously enjoyed, it was all gone. It was all for naught just because a newly condemned victim of Haman's own personal power and cleverness refused to bow to him. The very bottom of the power totem pole had all the power in the world to destroy Haman's happiness because ego is literally that fragile.

So we ask, where does this little voice that's inside all of us, this little voice that really wants only our destruction, where does it come from? Well, Jesus tells us. He tells us it comes from within. He says it comes from someplace defiled long ago in the garden of Eden. In *Mark 7* Jesus said this, he says: *"What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person's heart that evil thoughts come."* Jesus went on to specify exactly what those thoughts were. He said, among other things, *"greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person."*

May I submit to you that all those qualities were met or exceeded in that little voice that was speaking inside Haman. And as the story goes, it's that little voice that purported to be looking out for Haman that wound up in the end destroying him.

So how do we handle that little famished, fickle, and fragile voice that's inside all of us? Well, God actually gives us some very simple instruction. He says in *Philippians 2:3*, he says: *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.* You know the old joke, the guy goes to the doctor and he says, "Doc, it hurts every time I do this," and the doctor says, "Well, I can fix that." The guy says, "Oh, really? How can do that?" And he says, "Don't do that." Well, God says when it comes to your ego being famished and fickle and fragile, I can fix this. He says don't feed it. It's really that simple. I mean so how do you avoid feeding your own ego? Well, again, God gives us another insight. He says very plainly, he says in verse 4: *Not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.* You see, you stop feeding your own ego when you concentrate on feeding others instead of yourself. And I've seen this work on a practical level. I have a relative who's not a believer as far as I know but she has the same approach every time I see her. I only see her a couple times a

year but every time I see her, all she wants to know, she wants to know about me, she wants to know about my family, she wants to know about my wife, she wants to know about all of these different things about me, and she genuinely acts that she's interested in hearing what I have to say. And I can tell that as I'm telling her these things that she's actually listening. And the reason I know that is because she's formulating questions about the information that I'm giving her. Now have you ever tried that? You want to see your popularity just skyrocket? Try that. I mean next time you meet somebody at a social gathering, resolve to simply ask them five separate questions about who they are and what they're doing and then base those questions on what they're telling you. As you get a piece of information, formulate a question based on that piece of information and you're going to find, first of all, that everybody, and I mean everybody, genuinely loves talking about themselves. They just do. You will never fight to get an audience when you're asking people to tell you about themselves. And you will find that God's counterintuitive way of doing business works all the time. And I say "counterintuitive" because this little voice that speaks inside of us wants us to assert ourselves as the most important. And being counterintuitive is simply doing what the scripture says, not looking to our own interests but the interests of others. And believe it or not, that's what makes you interesting. There's an immediate social loop satisfaction that

comes from knowing that people genuinely are attracted to people who do that.

But that's not the only reason for refusing to feed your ego.

There's a much more important reason and that is that God not only delights in us when we do that, but he also promises us an extraordinary reward for those who are able to make it a habit.

And not only is it extraordinarily simple, but when you refuse to feed your own ego, God says I will reward you. In *James 4:10* he says: *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*

You may be thinking, okay, yeah, sure, I've tried that. I've tried to be thinking of others and every time I do that, I just wind up getting squashed. And after all, if you're not looking out for number one, nobody else is going to be looking out for you, so why bother? Well, the answer to that is that there is somebody who is already looking out for you. And he loved you enough to go to a cross for you and he wants you to understand that in this instance, timing is everything. See, Peter gives us a further piece of information about that timing. In *1 Peter 5*, he says: *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.* What God is actually saying here is that if we're willing to humble ourselves, if we're really willing to focus on the interests of others rather than ourselves, then God himself says he will be the one exalting us. And we know that

God's timing is perfect for our good and his glory. So really what God is asking for here is not so much humility as it is faith. It's not so much a willingness to put others first as it is a willingness to trust that God will indeed reward you and exalt you at the proper time if you're willing at this time to treat others first. I mean you might think is, wow, this is too difficult a task, but God says move in this direction and I'll be the one giving you the grace, I'll be the one empowering you to continue to move more and more in that same direction. Again, listen to what he says in James. He says: *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* Now I'm thankful that God gave us Haman as a perfect example of who not to be and what not to do when it comes to feeding an ego that is famished, fickle and fragile. See, God wants the exact opposite for us, and the ability to deny our ego is really directly related to how much you are willing to trust him.

And so my question about all of this this morning is really is: are you willing to trust him? I trust God. I mean it's one thing to trust God for your salvation, it's the wonderful hope that we have in the end, but do you trust him for the care and feeding of your ego? That's a different thing. See, that's a day in, day out task that happens right now in the present. And as terrible an example as Haman is, so wonderful is Jesus as our focus for how we handle the day-to-day struggles we have with ego. This is how

Jesus handled his. It's *Philippians 2:5*. It says: *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.*

See, Jesus willingly experienced the ultimate in humiliation and therefore God reserves for his own Son the ultimate in exaltation. And what God wants from us is our own version of that willingness to subject our egos to his care, looking to Jesus as our example. And again, *1 Peter* says: *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*

So the question is do you truly believe that God is willing and able to more than make up for in eternity any shortfall our egos

suffer in this life? Again, let me leave you with this practical test. You've heard it before. There's a cliché that says knowing whether or not you have a servant's heart is how you react when you're treated like one. Next time someone wants to treat you like a servant and you're tempted to feed an ego that is famished and fickle and fragile, ask yourself, am I willing to trust in him who judges justly? Just watch what God can do. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your grace, we thank you for your goodness, we thank you for using a man who is -- we cannot find anything good about Haman except as an example, but he's a wonderful example, Lord, of what happens when you constantly feed an ego that is famished and fickle and fragile. Father, give us the ability to turn to you, to trust in you, to rely on you to put our faith in you that at the proper time you will exalt us if we deny that ego its feeding, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.