

Setting the Stage for Deliverance

Call to Worship: Psalm 29

Hymn #81- *A Mighty Fortress*

1st Scripture: Psalm 33

Hymn #109- *This is My Father's World*

2nd Scripture: Esther 1

Hymn #94- *Whate'er My God Ordains is Right*

Introduction:

There are indeed times in history when God reveals His power and reality in a most profound and world-wide way, as if He were pulling back the curtain of the life that we think is held tightly in our grasp, only to say, "Ummmm, folks...I am right here, this is My creation and My story; this is all about My glory...to put it in the short form, let me leave you with two words that best describe Me, 'I Am.'"

The Egyptians, with their many gods; the god of the land, the god of the sea, the god of the forest, the god of the harvest, the god of lightning, the god of this and the god of that, witnessed a time such as this, when God brought the Israelites out of Egypt with a mighty and outstretched arm. All of the miraculous plagues were, in fact, directed at their so-called gods, proving the great "I AM," to alone be the One true and living God. And the whole world heard of the fame of YHWH at that time, such that the people in the land of Canaan had feared the Israelites, even many years later, when they began to enter the Promised Land.

Well, the Book of Esther takes place during one of those times, when the Lord steps out, and speaks, as it were, revealing His infinite power in the awesome and wonderful deliverance of His people. God has a habit of bringing things right to the cliff, before stepping in to reveal Himself, in such a way that He will not easily be forgotten. And as we begin the Book of Esther this morning, having the privilege of looking back at a nice section of history in its totality, we will observe what none of the people of that day could have seen coming, right at its infant stage. We will find God setting the stage for bringing about a great and marvelous deliverance of His people, with the use of a few of His mortal creations. And hopefully, as we do this, we will, by

faith, recognize and lay hold of a critical principle that is found here, which we must extract from the time of Esther, only to carry it over and to insert it into our own time, understanding that the same all-sovereign God is at work, right here in our own day and in the lives of every one of His precious people. You see, when God speaks throughout history; when He reveals the active movements of His mighty outstretched arm, it is not to indicate that He is only moving at certain times. No, we are to look at the most evident times unto the end of understanding that, though it may not be so evident in the present, our God never sleeps nor slumbers, but rather He is ever moving and working all things out unto the accomplishing of His glorious will.

And here is the great kicker in all of this. If you are in Christ; if you have let go of the world and have laid hold of Christ, then your good, must be right in line with the divine will. Let me say this another way. Nothing in your life is by chance. Everything is being carefully governed, guided and directed by the sovereign hand of God, as He is prepping you for His glory, and using you to reveal His power to those who are around you. God is determined to be glorified in you...and you must believe this and lay hold of this by faith, wherever you are in the wilderness of this life. Your wilderness is His factory of blessing, and when you come out, you will be as silver refined; you will look more and more like Christ, your Savior, the very Son of God.

I. Setting the Stage for Deliverance

"Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this was the Ahasuerus who reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia), in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the citadel, that in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials and servants..." (vs. 13). Right in the capital of the ruling empire of nearly the whole world, God was preparing to speak, and His voice would penetrate all one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia.

And it all starts; the stage is beginning to be set, during a time of festivity and celebration, as the good and generous King Ahasuerus, King of Persia, reveals the majesty of his

glory to all of his officials and servants; "the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces" for six straight months (vs. 4).

Now brethren, for the remainder of our time, in working toward a life-changing conclusion, I want us to view the events of chapter one from two different angles. First, I want us to view chapter one, from the standpoint of its historical context. In other words, let's treat it as if we are right there, and the events that follow have not happened yet. We are among those who are feasting and celebrating in the king's generosity. And then, after this, we will pull back and view these events from our true standpoint, as those who are able to observe and analyze these events, having an understanding of the rest of the Book in mind.

1) Here we are, gathering together to daily discuss all that we have seen over the last several months. The present for us is as follows: "Wow, the king has been so great to us. Not only has he shown us his great wealth, which to be honest, has caused me to drop my jaw on many occasions---I mean, the luxurious, large white and blue linen curtains, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple on silver rods and marble pillars; and the couches of gold and silver, resting on the mosaic pavement of alabaster, turquoise, and white and black marble---how can you even begin to weigh the wealth and majesty that surrounds him. I mean, I don't know about you, but when I was given a golden vessel to drink from, and then to see that everyone else had a unique custom golden vessel out of which they drank, I nearly fell over and spilled my wine. And he let us drink all the wine we wanted--no pressure to drink or to stop drinking; and the food...the garden, did you see the garden...there is no kingdom like this kingdom, and there probably will never be one like this one. Our king basically rules the world! He is the most powerful person on our planet! And I for one, am so grateful that he has been so kind to us! And we have been given this privilege for several months, and the feasting continues yet again tomorrow, with no end in view!"

This is the kind of talk that goes on among us, day after day, for months, until finally the unthinkable happens...we have come upon that day, when the King has been so embarrassingly shunned by his own wife...in front of everyone!

"I honestly cannot believe what has just happened, can you? Did you see the King's face? One moment he is rejoicing, living it up, drinking and making merry, and the next minute he is livid! From great joy to utter embarrassment to incomprehensible anger! I mean, what was the Queen thinking? Does she realize the rare privilege she has of being married to the most powerful man in the world? There we were, singing and laughing, giving thanks and honor to the King, when he stopped the music and said that he had an announcement to make. Having shown us the incomprehensible depth of his wealth, he now wanted to introduce us to his most beautiful queen, Queen Vashti. And as he sent out the Eunuchs to get the queen, who has been enjoying times of feasting among her friends as well, as of late, we all stood quietly, awaiting to behold her glory. We imagined her decked in the finest jewels and the most costly of clothing; more beautiful than any other woman in the world, and we waited to behold her majesty. Only the Eunuchs came back somewhat shaken, fearful and confused, whispering something to the King. 'Maybe she is sick or unwell,' we thought, or 'has something bad happened to her?' And then, the King threw his golden chalice down in anger. With his face beat red, he shouted, 'She what! How dare she do this to me!' And the party ended right there. Surely, the whole kingdom has heard of this by now. What will he do?"

This just happened and all of us are shocked, aren't we? I mean, you cannot even enter the king's presence without permission, lest you die, and the queen refused to come to him, when he called. She rejected him. All eyes are on the palace! How will the king handle this? How will women all throughout the Medo-Persian Empire respond to this? They may never again respect and revere their husbands. Can we see this from a current events standpoint, brethren? Can we put away chapters two and following, and plant our minds right here, as if living there in those moments. This was the current events of the day; this was the "world-news." If "1010 wins" existed then, this would be the repeated statement, following the words, "If you give us twenty-two minutes, we'll give you the world." This was the world of their day. This was their perspective. Take our current events; the unanswered questions of our present moments and bring them all right there, to that standpoint. Do you get it? World news from the standpoint of mankind.

And as we all eagerly wait to hear from our king, gossip lingers around, people are biting their nails, and we are finally presented with a decree that has gone out throughout the entire empire. After seeking counsel from the wisemen, the King has proclaimed the following decree, found in verses 19-22. [Read verses 19-22]

And so, the King maintains his dignity, authority and his dominion, and he preserves the dignity and authority of all men in the process. The decree goes out, and that is all that people understand for the time being. As created, finite beings, we cannot see beyond that historical moment. It is what it is, and it is spoken of in that way, because that is all the sense we can make of it...but, what we don't see; what the people of that day could not possibly see, and what we cannot see in our own present circumstances, is how God is at work right then and there. The hand of God is moving; His glorious wisdom is erupting, but only He knows...only He knows that all that has just happened, has been divinely ordained to set the stage for a revelation of the glory and majesty of the Greatest King of all, namely, the living God. King Ahasuerus has spoken and revealed much in those days, but a louder, divine voice is about to shatter the atmosphere of this world, as God sets the stage for the revelation of His infinite glory, wisdom and majesty, in the deliverance of His people. Let's move on then to consider these events from our true, present context, having the rest of the Book of Esther in mind.

2) What exactly is going on in these events? How are we to understand them? Well, we can just skip past all of the feasting and the partying, and the viewing of the king's majesty and wealth, and get right down to business, can't we? We have the ability to see things from God's standpoint, because after all, all of that history is past, and we can see the end, right from the beginning, and we can ponder the whole historical package as one lump, kind of like what God does with all of history. And so, what has happened? Well, God has used the king's celebrations as a means of bringing him to the point that he would want to show off the queen. And the queen...well, she doesn't know this yet, but she is going to grow a bit arrogant and proud; she is going to let her own position get to her head a bit, in front of her royal female friends, and she is going to reject the king's command to come to him. She is going to embarrass the king and show everyone just how powerful *she* really is. She can even shun the most powerful man on the planet. Who else has such power? But, what she doesn't know is that her

foolishly, proud and disobedient heart is going to lead to her own downfall and removal--the king is not going to tolerate her refusal--and all of this is going to lead to a decree that will call for the queen's position to be filled by someone else. And at just the right time, when the king's wrath has subsided, Esther, the Jewish nobody, will be in the right place at the right time--and she is indeed beautiful, according to God's design--and she will be recognized and ultimately selected to replace Queen Vashti, because the king will providentially fall head over heels for her. But...it doesn't end there! All of this will lead to the later deliverance of the people of God, when Haman sets out a plot to annihilate all of the Jews. And even Haman's designs are really only God's designs, only with good motives, because God is going to ordain that the Jews come close to total annihilation, only to deliver them at the eleventh hour, so that the ultimate divine goal will be reached, namely, God Himself will be revealed and exalted in the amazing deliverance of the Jews, and in the exaltation of the lowly Mordecai. God will bring down the proud and exalt the humble, and in doing so, He will speak, and He will reveal His glory to the whole known world.

And it doesn't end there! All of this will foreshadow a far more important and glorious deliverance that will take place in the future, namely, the great deliverance from sin on behalf of God's people, purchased and secured by the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, in the volume of the Book it is written of Him. Esther is God's story, and God's story always brings us back to Christ! But none of this could possibly be seen with the naked eye, if you were living in the context of Esther, chapter one. It could only be seen, in some sense, by faith in the unchanging promises of God. And this informs us of how we must interpret our current events, not as the world sees them; not even as we see them with the naked eye, but in accordance with the promises of a God who cannot lie. In one very real sense, brethren, we can say of everything that we face; if nothing else, we can say, "These things are happening so that God might be glorified." He is always setting the stage for that wondrous end. And again, this ought to bring His children great joy, because God's glory is always traveling parallel to our good (Romans 8:28). And so, from our present standpoint, and from the divine standpoint of Esther's day, the events of Esther, chapter one, were all much bigger than they appeared; for, they were setting the stage for God to speak in the glorious deliverance of His people.

II. Conclusive Thoughts

Brethren, chapter one may seem so insignificant to the whole picture of the Book of Esther, but it is actually quite significant. It is here that we see God working at a time when no one suspected a thing. The events of chapter one were "current affairs" from the standpoint of all who lived then, but for us, they are the setting of the stage for something far bigger and beyond the comprehension of the people of that day. God was at work, and we can see that...but we cannot always see that; in fact, often times, we cannot see that in our present day "current affairs," can we? And so, what do we do? We must transfer what we know about God, found in Esther chapter one, to our own day, in the context of what we don't know in the year 2012. And herein is the general principle that must guide our present ignorance: The same God is at work in every period of history, because God is the all-sovereign God of all of history and not just the God of single, individual time periods. God is the all-sovereign God of the year 2012, and He is guiding and directing even all of the minutia surrounding your very life context and circumstances. Perhaps, this should lead us to say with the Psalmist, "O God, what is man that you are mindful of him?" "What are we, that we would draw the attention of the living God constantly toward us!" "O Lord, your thoughts toward me are beyond comprehension and too unfathomable to process."

You see, brethren, God has given us Esther, in part, to call us to view history, our history, in light of the big picture; in light of the divine will, which focuses not so much on individual realities, but on ordering an innumerable sum of individual realities to complete a big picture. Step back and see the whole, brethren! You say, "How can we do that, Pastor?" By considering all that God has given us in this Book. For God has been so gracious to us, that He has not hidden the big picture from us. We have many, many divine promises, teachings and doctrines that can make every historical providence that we face, clear enough for us to say, "Nevertheless, not my will, but Thy will be done, Lord!" It is when we put these eye glasses down, that we become near sighted and are incapable of seeing beyond the general interpretations of the world and our natural senses. Without these glasses, redemption takes a back seat, and individual providences become everything. And then we miss the boat, and then we have no means of praying within the will of God, and assuring that our prayers are heard.

Do you see the beauty here, brethren? Lay hold of it, by faith! Look beyond the confusion of seemingly sloppily placed lines; turn the tapestry over to the divine side and see the glorious work of art, formed by God Himself. See your present reality as the one speck of grain in an eternal whole, and marvel over the big picture. Your sufferings; your trials and tribulations are producing in you an eternal weight of glory. The process often seems difficult, tedious and painful, but the outcome is guaranteed, for the cross of Christ assures us of this! God has been working in your past, and He is working in your present, to bring about great good in your future. The stage has been and is being set, and He will be glorified in you. Respond to His praise now, holding all of these assumptions by faith! The Lord's Supper ought to carry us further into grasping these realities, as we, "do this in remembrance of Christ!" We take of the set past and live off of it in the present, absolutely certain of the future!

Amen!!!