

Since Jesus has already accomplished our salvation, Christians ought to humbly rely on the Savior’s strength to cultivate courage when the “hour of decision” arrives, trust God for another opportunity if momentarily overwhelmed by fear, and guard against the pride that often precipitates a ruinous fall.

Introduction – Story about 1955-64 USSR Premier Khrushchev. Anyone can act with “courage” when there is no personal risk! How did Esther find the courage to risk her life before the king? What is the key that unlocks the mystery of courage? Quotes about courage.

I. Relish the Story: Esther vs. Haman

A. Stark contrasts (vv. 1-2, 8-10)

Esther contrasted with Queen Vashti (vv. 1-2), Haman (vv. 8-10), and Salome (cf. Mk 6:22-25). Esther restrains herself (perhaps in fear and humility) and in the course of subsequent events it leads to a perfect opportunity to make her request (7:3-10). Haman restrains himself (in anger and pride) and in the course of subsequent events it leads to a perfectly inopportune time to make his request (6:6-10). At the moment Esther was taking up the cause of her people (the Jews), she was claiming the rights and privileges of her royal position as queen (of the Persians). Esther did not seize upon the king’s gracious offer by asking for Haman’s head on a platter (like Salome the daughter of Herodias did later; cf. Mk 6:17-29)!

B. Tense “chess match” (vv. 1-2, 4, 8, 9-10, 14)

Imagine Esther as the ivory queen, Xerxes the ebony king, and Haman the ebony knight. The plot turns on whether Xerxes will have mercy on Esther who has put herself “in check” by appearing in the throne room uninvited. Xerxes grants favor to Esther, who patiently begins maneuvering to eliminate Haman. Will Haman be outwitted by Esther’s covert strategy because of his shortsighted focus in seeking vengeance on Mordecai? Will Mordecai survive another day while Haman recklessly pursues him and Esther stalls her big move? The lives of Mordecai, Esther, the Jews, and the promised messiah yet-to-be-born now hang on who has greater influence with the king. The stakes couldn’t be higher. Will God be “check-mated?”

C. Delicious foreshadowing (vv. 2-4, 14)

(1) Esther’s *deliverance* in the throne room foreshadows the deliverance of the Jews at the end of the book (celebrated during Purim). (2) The king not only pardons Esther, but also shows her *favor* as his queen, graciously promising to grant her request. This foreshadows the king’s favor extended to Esther, Mordecai, and all the Jews to permit them a favored position over their enemies. (3) The *feast* Esther makes for the king foreshadows the great Feast of Purim which annually commemorates the deliverance Esther won for her people. (4) The *gallows* Haman prepares for Mordecai foreshadows the gruesome reversal of fortune for Haman, who will be impaled on a stake of his own making!

II. Rehearse the Proverbs: Humility vs. Pride (Prov 11:2; 15:33; 16:18; 18:12; 22:4; 29:23)

A. Godly humility cultivates wisdom and courage (vv. 1-5)

1. Wisdom: Esther didn’t chicken out by extending the dinner invitation. She carefully planned her course of action. By inviting the king to a feast made for him, she obligated him to herself. By inviting Haman to come along, she flattered his pride and set him up for his fall from grace.

2. Courage: The king has displayed his graciousness; now Esther displays her humility. Esther is referred to as “Queen Esther” 14 times in the book, and only once before 5:2. For just the second time in the story (so far) Esther is addressed as “Queen Esther,” implying the importance that her royalty played at this point in the narrative. Esther identifies herself with her people the Jews now that they are under threat of extermination. Only now does she truly grow into the role of queen. God has prepared her for such a time as this (4:14). Humility cultivated courage.

B. When fear of man overwhelms courage (vv. 6-8)

Sometimes the fear of man, fear of death, or fear of conflict stifles you. You shrink back defeated, afraid, and wondering if you lost your last chance to act. Esther certainly felt the fear of man, and she may have succumbed to it at her first feast (the text is not explicit). But take courage: God is in control of our failures and is able to strengthen us again (Prov 29:25).

C. Sinful pride cultivates foolish confidence (vv. 9-14)

1. Haman waited impatiently with blinded eyes for the first moment to strike with his request at no perceived risk to himself. He requested judgment for Mordecai and for the Jews. Haman’s self-restraint was of a type that revealed his foolishness and selfishness. Haman had 10 sons (9:7-10) and boasted about his glory displaying his enormous pride. The biblically-informed reader knows this likely spells doom for Haman.

2. Haman is the archetypal “overreacher.” His personal ambition is too excessive to succeed, although he is lulled into a sense of invincibility when he considers the glory and position he has managed to achieve. Now Haman appears to be controlled by the decisions of his wife and friends. He is confident that the king will grant his request to execute Mordecai tomorrow morning. But unbeknownst to Haman, he is actually being led to the slaughter. Poetic justice!

III. Rely on the Savior: God vs. Idols of this World

A. The king’s favor on Queen Esther pictures God’s favor on Christ as our redeemer (v. 2)

King Xerxes protected Queen Esther from the law when he extended the golden scepter to her. She touched its head and accepted his pardon. This is the turning point in the book, prefiguring the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the turning point of redemptive history, and foreshadowing the general resurrection on the last day.

B. Haman’s pride pictures the foolish confidence of those who rely on false gods (v. 11)

People rely on “false gods” whenever they cease to trust in the Savior. False gods take many forms. Haman trusted in the idols of position, power, and influence. He worshiped the gods of happiness and honor, coveting them above his riches and glory. Haman is an example of what a lack of humility ultimately cultivates—a heart puffed up with pride, a foolish confidence in ourselves and others, and a life that teeters on the precipice of ruin (Prov 14:12, 27). All who rely on false gods walk in darkness (Eph 5:3-8) and will fall (1 Jn 2:11).

Conclusion – Esther is first and foremost a savior, and secondarily an imperfect example of humility, wisdom, and courage for us. The Jews celebrate the Feast of Purim to *celebrate* Esther their redeemer, not to *imitate* her. Celebration precedes imitation. Humility precedes courage. This is why you need humility to cultivate courage. Only people who rely on Jesus the Savior in humility will cultivate the courage to follow and obey him. God the king extends his scepter today to you. That scepter is the cross of Christ. Jesus is the only way for you to gain God’s favor. Won’t you humble yourself, reach out, and take hold of him? May God give you courage to do so!