

Title TBD. Esther 5-6

CELEBRATE: Thanksgiving Meal Giveaway - 150 Families were served! People were blessed, prayed for, invited to join us in-person or online. Thank you, RHC, (CHECK OUT THESE PICS!) for how you served and how you gave generously. We saw over \$6,000 given to support families in our community. COVID can't stop KINDNESS!

AND... COVID can't STOP CHRISTMAS! We're going to be celebrating with two celebrations on Sunday night, December 20th at 4p & 6p. We're hosting two services, not only to create more room for our friends and family in socially distanced and worshipful environment, but for two other specific reasons.

1) Our 4pm experience is going to provide an enhanced kids experience. The service will not only be shorter, but it will have elements added specifically for kids, so if you've been hesitant to bring your kids because they might be disruptive, please do not let that be a barrier (really any Sunday, but especially for this celebration). And #2...

2) We're going to hard cap our seating at 100 people for both services to be at roughly 25% capacity, which is well under the 50% capacity required by the State for religious gatherings.

Go ahead and RSVP TODAY (APP)

Introduction: Pg. _____

- As we turn our attention to the Book of Esther today, we are going to turn our attention to "The God of Reversal"

"The God of Reversal" Esther 5-6

- I want to publicly say what I've already communicated privately, which is a big thank you to Pastor Jon, for his excellent teaching through the first four chapters of this book over the past three weeks.
- He helped us see how God is Invisibly Present in the demotion of Queen Vashti through the injustice of King Ahasuerus in chapter 1, and in the promotion of the Jewish woman Hadassah in chapter 2, known by her Persian name as Queen Esther. And then he showed us God's invisible presence in Mordecai, not only saving the king from assassination at the end of Chapter 2, but how he sent word to Esther to make an appeal before the king to thwart Haman's wicked attempt to annihilate the Jewish people as he plotted in chapters 3-4.
- Look back at 4:14-17 as we remember Esther's courageous resolve to risk her own life that she might save her people from genocide

Now, chapter 5.

Read 5:1-8

Here we come to THE MOMENT OF TRUTH.

3 Movements in the Story

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH: ESTHER BEFORE THE KING (5:1-8)

We saw in chapter 1 how Vashti risked her life by refusing to appear before the King. Now, ironically, Esther risks her life by breaking kingdom law and appearing uninvited before King Ahasuerus (probably known in your World Civ by his Greek name: Xerxes).

- It is not insignificant that Esther dons her “royal robes.” In fact, for the first time in the story, Esther as “Queen.” While identifying with her people as a Jew, she fully embraces her role with a display of her royal authority and beauty, perhaps reminding the king of his choice in making her queen.
- The text tells us she “won favor in the king’s sight” as he holds out the scepter of pardon, not only sparing her life, but says he will fulfill her request “even to half my kingdom...” a common exaggerated expression used to say: “ask me anything you want!”
- In an interesting move of wise political leadership, she does not immediately ask for the deliverance of the Jews but for a feast to be held with Haman (a feast notably already prepared - by faith).
- But then, we encounter an unexpected twist. Rather than making her request at the feast, she uses a delay tactic by asking the king and Haman to be her guests at second feast the next day where she will reveal her request.
- WHY does she do that? Most of us would be thinking: this is my moment of opportunity, and what if the whimsical king’s mood shifts! Maybe she sensed the time wasn’t right. Maybe it was part of oriental custom to build anticipation for an important request.

T: The suspense builds as we wonder what will happen to God’s people in exile, and the story grows more complex in the next scene. Verse 9.

Read 5:9-14

3 Movements in the Story

- **The Moment of Truth: Esther Before the King (5:1-8)**
- **A Dreadful Encounter: Haman & Mordecai - Part 2 (5:9-14)**

Now the author zooms back in on wicked Haman. The camera follows him strutting out of the king’s palace, and just when we think the tension cannot grow stronger, BOOM... he sees his greatest enemy, Mordecai.

- Just as we saw in chapter 3, Mordecai continues, with great resolve out of a love for his God, to not succumb to the pressure of “bowing down or paying homage” to Haman (3:2).
- The end of verse 9 tells us Haman restrained his wrath, implying he wanted to kill Mordecai that very moment.
- To console himself, as only an incredibly selfish, exceedingly arrogant, and extremely insecure man would: he invites people over to recount his greatness.
- Can you imagine if this dude lived in 2020? He’d be blowing up Instagram with pictures of himself complete with robust captions detailing his greatness.
 - We’d see him flexing his Audemars and Bentleys - “the splendor of his riches.”
 - We’d see the great number of sons, securing his lineage that they might tell of his fame.
 - We’d see multiple posts about each of his royal promotions.
 - And now, riding home on his royal horse, he’s got his iPhone 15 out making a fresh post about the exclusive feast he just enjoyed... with the beautiful Queen Esther and King Xerxes, with a heads up about his exclusive invitation for tomorrow. #Feastsonfeasts #feastfordays #thatroyallife #hamansgreatness
 - Everyone knew about HAMAN’S fame, because HAMAN made sure they knew.
- Haman clearly missed the memo of Proverbs 27:2 - “Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.”
- But even with ALL OF THIS... he is not content. Why?
 - Verse 13 - Yet all this is worth NOTHING to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.”
 - WOW...!!! What a picture of the human heart!! Left to ourselves, our hearts scream: NEVER ENOUGH.
- So he follows a plan proposed by his wife and friends, to hang Mordecai on a 75 foot stake.

T: Just when it seemed his life (and the lives of all the Jews) would be saved by Esther, the gallows are being constructed for his death. Chapter 6...

Read 6:1-14

THE TURNING POINT: THE KING HONORS MORDECAI (6:1-14)

3 Movements in the Story

- **The Moment of Truth: Esther Before the King (5:1-8)**
- **A Dreadful Encounter: Haman & Mordecai - Part 2 (5:9-14)**
- **The Turning Point: The King Honors Mordecai (6:1-14)**

This chapter is absolutely LOADED with intrigue and drama. Esther is a literary masterpiece (which I'll explain in greater detail in the coming weeks).

- First, the king can't sleep, so to help him go to sleep, he has one of his servants read to him out of the "book of memorable deeds." Perhaps, like Haman, he wants to hear of the greatness of his own kingdom. Perhaps, it was because these encyclopedic entries were more effective than 500mg of melatonin to help a brother sleep.
- Whatever the case, they JUST HAPPEN to stumble upon the record from 5 YEARS earlier when Mordecai saved the king from an assassination plot. Surprisingly, no "honor or distinction had been bestowed on Mordecai for this." (6:3) "This would have absolutely shocked the king. [Because] Persian kings were famous for generously rewarding people for their service." (Cain)
- Upon learning this, the king suddenly hears footsteps outside.
- It's Haman, and Haman is on a mission. He is coming to ask the king's permission to kill Mordecai, but before he can speak a word the king says...
- "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?" And Haman, NATURALLY THINKS TO HIMSELF, "Self, he's talking about you!" ... so he NATURALLY comes up with the most robust plan self-suited for his vain ambitions.
 - Break out the royal robes - the king has worn!
 - Break out the royal horse - the king has ridden! (The highest honor a kingdom citizen could experience)
 - His mind is really turning now...
 - Let them dress the man (he's too important to robe himself). And Let them lead him with one of the highest ranking officials of the king with them shouting: "This is the king's man. The king delights to honor him!" To which the watching crowd, thousands upon thousands in Susa would have cheered and joined in the shouts of acclaim to this individual.
- And as Haman exits out of his narcissistic daydream, he is perplexed and pierced to the heart to hear the king say in verse 10: "Hurry; take the robes and the horse, as YOU HAVE SAID, and DO SO TO _____ MORDECAI THE JEW. Do it ALL and Do NOT DELAY."
- What an amazing, unbelievable reversal of events. Haman comes in plotting the death of Mordecai the JEW (5:13), but the KING provides the highest honor to "Mordecai the JEW." The fall intended for Mordecai turns into the pending downfall of Haman. Even his wife and wise men tell him, "If Mordecai, before you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him."

T: That's the story. What does it teach us about God? Why does this story matter for our story?

T: This is not mere coincidence!! This is providence! God working behind the scenes. He is...

THE GOD OF REVERSAL

We see this in three distinct ways.

1. God turns ordinary moments for his extraordinary purposes.

Look at all these ordinary moments in these 2 chapters.

- In 5:9, Haman happened to walk past Mordecai again, which incited his rage and plan to see to his death.
- At the beginning of chapter 6, on this fateful night for Mordecai, the king JUST HAPPENED to not be able to sleep.
- But not just that... "Servant, JUST HAPPENED grab the "book of memorable deeds."
- And not just that... he JUST HAPPENED to turn to the record of Mordecai the Jew.
- And not just that... Haman JUST HAPPENED to stumble into the king's court the very moment the king is working on plans to honor Mordecai.
- And this simple act of Decision-Making TURNS INTO a great IRONY and REVERSAL of FORTUNES!

Just one of those instances could point to the hand of God, but when you ADD THEM ALL UP... The invisible God IS UNMISTAKABLY PRESENT in the lives of Mordecai, Esther, and his people, AND OH YES, King Xerxes and wicked Haman.

God is the God who turns ordinary moments for his extraordinary purposes!

We will see this explicitly in the language of chapter 9 where it speaks of "reversal" (verse 1) and "turning" (verse 22).

T: Every ordinary moment holds the potential to be extraordinary in the invisible hands of God. #2

2. God humbles the proud and honors the humbled.

If you make yourself high, God will bring you low. If you humble yourself before God, God will bring you high. That's what James 4:6 tells us:

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." James 4:6

We saw the immense pride of Haman in chapter 5, and it's easy too make fun of his abject pride. It certainly was ALL ABOUT Haman, but pride is a "protean evil" (as Octavius Winslow taught me about 12 years ago) in all of us.

Why do I say pride is a "protean evil"? Proteus was a Greek god of the sea capable of changing his form at will. That's pride in our hearts. It can show up in any situation, any day of the week. Something goes great (LOOK AT ME). Something goes great for them (WHY NOT ME?!?). The elevation of self is at work in both circumstances.

We need to hear now, what Haman needed to hear then:

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18)

T: But just as sure as God humbles the proud, he honors the humble! He honors those who HONOR HIM!

Let me give you one more verse. I want you to write this down. I want you to meditate on it this week.

“... those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly. Esteemed.” (1 Samuel 2:30)

How did Mordecai & Esther honor God?

- Seek God: Where was Mordecai while Haman was boasting of all his achievements? That dude was praying! That dude was on his face! That dude was still getting the ashes off his head.
 - Mordecai, Esther, and the Jewish people fasted & prayed for 3 days. Seeking God is honoring to God!
 - When we pray, we're saying: God, we honor you! We depend on you!
 - When we open the Book, we're saying: God, we honor you! Your voice is the greatest voice in our lives!
 - When we fast, we're saying, we're saying: God, we honor you. We NEED YOU!
 - When we praise and sing, we're saying: God, we honor YOU! You are the KING of kings.
 - When we take risks by faith, we're saying: God, we honor YOU! You are better. You are worth it!! Which is how we also see Mordecai and Esther honoring God.
- Action: They both stepped out in bold action. They both risked their lives on behalf of God's glory: Esther before the king & Mordecai before Haman. Which required...
- FAITH. We trust you God. You can show up and even if you don't now for us, you will eventually for your people.

And God says, "I see you, and I LOVE a humble heart!"

Don't miss this: In their example we see: effective prayer and fasting ignite faith and action! How far will your faith and faithfulness take you? How deeply do you desire to honor God with your life?

Here's the great news of the gospel: because of the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf, AND because of his resurrection from the dead (THE GREATEST REVERSAL THE WORLD HAS EVER SEEN OR WILL EVER SEE), we are now welcomed into God's family. We are sons and daughters of the true and greater KING. He calls us "beloved." He says, "I am delighted to honor you." You are royalty. My robes are yours. Never again will you be put to shame. You will bear eternal honor, while your enemies will run and hide in shame, like Haman.

I don't know where you might feel shame today. I don't know what you feel like you have to hide, but God is saying, if you humbly identify with me, THE HONOR IS YOURS.

“... those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly. Esteemed.” (1 Samuel 2:30)

T: And #3...

3. God turns man's glory into a platform for his glory!

Throughout the book of Esther, Haman and King Ahasuerus, flaunt their earthly glory and fame, but the KING OF KINGS is the one who ultimately writes the story and the one who ultimately gets the glory.

“The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.” (Proverbs 21:1)

All earthly power bows before God's omnipotence.

God is the invisible HERO of the Book of Esther. God is the HERO we can HOPE IN, which is what I want to call us to today.

The Point: Hope in the God of reversal as he writes your story for his glory.

God is still writing your story. This chapter may be filled with sorrow and lament, pain and regret, but please listen to me. Your story is not over! The God of reversal is working in ways you can't see.

In Christ - our Story is never over!! All enemies who stand ready to accuse us will bow before our Advocate, Jesus Christ. He won our place of honor. He won our new identity as royalty. And...

In Christ - our Story will keep getting better.

Conclusion:

I love the words of C.S. Lewis in the final book of his *Chronicles of Narnia*. Speaking of Aslan, the Lion typifying King Jesus, Lewis wrote:

"And as He spoke, He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before." - C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*

PRAY

**God, I look to you. I won't be overwhelmed.
Give me vision, to see things like you do.
God, I look to you. You're where my help comes from.
Give me wisdom, to know just what to do.**

**I will love you, Lord, my strength.
I will love you, Lord, my shield.
I will love you, Lord, my rock.**

Forever all my days, I will love you, God.

Hallelujah, our God reigns. Hallelujah, our God reigns. Hallelujah, our God reigns.

Forever all my days, I will love you, God.