

Esther Devotionals

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NEXT

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For Other Devotionals on this Page Click:

[Today in the Word](#), [C H Spurgeon](#), [J R Miller](#)

1a

Esther 1:1, 12-18

Behind The Throne - (Daniel 2:21) During my lifetime I have seen evil men rise to political and military power, make colossal blunders, and pass off the scene. Even good leaders leave a record that includes mistakes and weaknesses.

The first chapter of Esther shows us the pride of King Ahasuerus, head of the mighty Persian Empire. He hosted an elaborate festival designed to display his riches and splendor. After 7 days of partying, the king gave orders to his servants to bring Vashti, his queen, before the revelers so they could see her great beauty. But Queen Vashti refused to come, humiliating the great king of Persia (vv.12-18).

Ahasuerus was furious and sought counsel from the wise men of his kingdom. They advised him to remove Vashti as queen and "give her royal position to another who is better than she" (v.19). God used these unusual events to place a Jewish girl in a strategic position to preserve His people from destruction.

God's name is not mentioned in the entire book of Esther, but the message in chapter 1 comes through loud and clear: God can bring good out of everything, even when flawed and mistake-prone humans are involved. He is the real power behind the throne.—Herbert Vander Lugt ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

We comprehend Him not,
Yet earth and heaven tell,
God sits as sovereign on the throne,
And ruleth all things well. —Gerhardt

The most powerful ruler is but a pawn in the hand of the King of kings.

No Bad News - The unwillingness to listen to bad news has been blamed for everything from space shuttle disasters to corporate collapses to the spread of terrorism. Lengthy studies aren't needed to determine why this happens. Bad news reveals problems; problems require solutions; solutions cost time, money, and energy we would rather spend celebrating past successes.

This isn't new to our century. In the 5th century BC, King Ahasuerus of Persia refused to allow mourners to enter his gates (Esther 4:1, 2). One commentator suggests that he preferred to surround himself with people who were awed by his wealth and were eager to attend his lavish parties (Esther 1:4). His reluctance to be bothered by bad news nearly resulted in the annihilation of the Jewish people.

Contrast the leadership of Ahasuerus with that of Jesus, who said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Ahasuerus ruled his kingdom by allowing only happy people to enter his presence. Jesus builds His kingdom by welcoming the burdened and sorrowful into His presence. What's more, Jesus not only invites us to tell Him our bad news, He has the willingness and the power to turn our most troubling circumstances into a celebration of praise. — Julie Ackerman Link ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

I walked life's path with worry,
Disturbed and quite unblest,
Until I trusted Jesus;
Now faith has giv'n me rest. —Bosch

**The gospel is bad news to those who reject it
and good news to those who receive it.**

Esther 1:1-5,9-12 Respect

You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. —Psalm 8:5

In 1967, American vocalist Aretha Franklin topped the charts with her hit single “Respect.” The song became an inspirational anthem for the civil rights movement and for others who demanded to be treated with respect.

Long before Aretha’s hit record, Queen Vashti topped the Persian charts with her own version of “Respect.” The book of Esther begins with King Ahasuerus hosting a great celebration. In addition to displaying his wealth and power, he also wanted to showcase his wife’s beauty. So he commanded that Queen Vashti be brought before him and his guests.

If she obeyed, she would have allowed the king to degrade and dis-respect her. If she refused, she risked losing her life. She refused. What courage! Vashti didn’t want to compromise her character by being reduced to a piece of property. Her desire for respect led to her banishment. We have no record that Vashti feared the Lord. But her courage shows that she understood the God-given dignity accorded to every human being.

God created us in His image and crowned us with glory and honor, having made us “a little lower than the angels” (Ps. 8:5). Out of love and reverence for Him, let us treat ourselves and others with honor, dignity, and respect. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Man’s crowning glory lies in this:
God stamped on him His image rare;
No other creatures have that gift,
Nor living things with man compare. —D. De Haan

Even the most difficult people we know bear the image of God.

1

Esther 3:1-7, Esther 7:1-10 Danger!

The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the perversity of the unfaithful will destroy them. --Proverbs 11:3

Haman had enormous power in Ahasuerus’ kingdom, but he wanted more. When Mordecai the Jew would not bow to his arrogance, Haman was not content just to get even. He wanted to destroy all the Jews in Persia. But his lust for revenge cost him his own life (Est. 7:10).

So too, we today can self-destruct on our own pride, selfishness, greed, lust, or thirst for revenge.

According to Daniel Schaeffer in his book *Dancing With A Shadow*, the Eskimos devised a way of killing wolves. They planted a knife in the ice with the handle buried. Then they put chunks of fresh meat on the blade and let it freeze. The wolves would smell the blood from afar and come to devour it. As they licked the frozen meat, they worked themselves into a frenzy. Soon they cut their tongues on the razor-sharp blade and began feeding their hunger with their own blood. They would lick until they slowly bled to death.

When we fail to recognize the danger of sin and allow ourselves to become obsessed with it, we are in danger of self-destruction--as was Haman. To avoid that end, let’s daily open our hearts and lives to God’s examination, and ask Him to forgive us for the sin He exposes. --D C Egner ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

O Lord, if I am full of self,
I can be blind to danger;
I would be free from pride and greed,
To anger be a stranger. --Hess

Self-indulgence leads to self-destruction.

Esther 3:1-6 Refusing Orders

According to a recent study among doctors, their most common aggravation (next to patients who do not pay their bills) is patients

who refuse to obey the doctor's orders. It is estimated that as many as 90 percent of all patients leave half-used prescription bottles, cheat on diets, continue to smoke, or never return for checkups. Often this neglect proves detrimental to the patient's health. Sometimes it's fatal. There was an incident in Israel's past which had a similar effect on the nation. In 1 Samuel 15 we read that God commanded Saul to eradicate the decadent Amalekites, including their livestock and their king, Agag. Saul chose to obey God halfway, defeating the Amalekites, but sparing their leader with some of the populace and the choicest of the livestock. Through His prophet Samuel, God condemned Saul's disregard for His command, and rejected Saul as king. Samuel then executed Agag, though apparently some of the king's subjects and descendants escaped to parts unknown.

And so it is in the Book of Esther, some 400 years after Saul failed to eradicate a people bent against the people of God, that Mordecai is confronted with a descendant of Agag (Haman) who is equally hostile to God's people. Today in the Word, May, 1989

Esther 3:1-11; 7:1-10 Poetic Justice

"Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. —Romans 12:19

For nearly a year, a former publishing colleague lived under a cloud of fear that he would be fired. A new boss in the department, for reasons unknown, began filling his personnel file with negative comments. Then, on the day my friend expected to lose his job, the new boss was fired instead.

When the Israelites were taken as captives to Babylon, a Jew named Mordecai found himself in this kind of situation. Haman, the highest noble of King Xerxes, expected every royal official to kneel down and honor him, but Mordecai refused to bow to anyone but God (Est. 3:1-2). This outraged Haman and he set out to destroy not only Mordecai but every Jew in the whole Persian empire (vv.5-6). Haman convinced Xerxes to sign a decree authorizing the destruction of all Jews and started building a gallows for the execution of Mordecai (5:14). But, in a startling turn of events, Haman was executed on the gallows he had built for Mordecai, and the Jewish people were spared (7:9-10; 8).

In literature, this is called poetic justice. Not everyone gets justice in such dramatic fashion, but Scripture promises that God will one day avenge all injustice (Rom. 12:19). While we wait, we are to do what we can to work for justice and leave the results in God's hands. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

The call for justice must be strong
To show what's right, to thwart what's wrong,
But let's reject the smallest part
Of vengeance harbored in the heart. —D. De Haan

The scales of Divine justice always balance— if not here, then hereafter.

2

Esther 4:10-17 The Price of Freedom

I will go to the king... and if I perish, I perish. --Esther 4:16

When I talked to young men shortly before D-day during World War II, I observed that they were scared. None of them wanted to die. However, the vast majority expressed their conviction that the cause for which they were fighting was right and worthy of the risk.

Queen Esther had similar feelings. She didn't want to die. She called for a 3-day fast to acknowledge her need for God's special help. According to Persian custom, if she went uninvited to the king and he was displeased, he could order her execution even though she was his wife. Yet Esther loved her people enough to take that risk.

Today in the United States, we honor the men and women who died in the service of their country. Their sense of patriotism compelled them to put their lives on the line. Whether they had volunteered or had been drafted, they joined in the defense of their homeland. Sometimes they traveled to faraway places to support other countries in a fight for freedom. They risked their all and died.

Just as we are indebted to those who died to make freedom possible, so we ought to thank God for His Son who died to set us free from the bondage of sin. On this day we have much to be thankful for. --H Vander Lugt ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord, keep us mindful of the cost,
The price of liberty--

Brave men and women gave their lives
To conquer tyranny. --DJD

The price of our freedom from sin was paid in blood.

Esther 4 Your Place In Time

Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this? —Esther 4:14

During a visit to the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, I was intrigued by an exhibit called "Your Place In Time." It was a nostalgic and revealing walk through displays of national and world events. This included popular entertainment and living conditions in the United States for people in the War Generation, the Eisenhower Generation, the Baby Boomers, and beyond. I left with the inescapable conclusion that though you and I cannot choose the period of history in which we live, we must decide how we will live during our place in time.

This truth is illustrated by the courageous actions of young Queen Esther and her cousin Mordecai. When a hate-filled man named Haman sought to destroy their people, Mordecai urged Esther to risk approaching the king on their behalf. He said, "Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14). It's an important question that every Christian should consider.

Like Esther, each of us is a unique individual in history. Our birth was no accident and neither is God's call to be His representatives wherever we live, work, or go to school. It's a great privilege to belong to Christ and a high calling to stand boldly for Him during our place in time. —D C McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

All things work out for good we know—
Such is God's great design;
He orders all our steps below
For purposes divine.
—Peterson © 1961 Singspiration, Inc.

Every child of God has a special place in His plan.

For Such A Time As This - When Sha'ri Eggum was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia, doctors told her that only a bone marrow transplant from a blood relative could save her life. Complicating matters, Eggum, 32, was adopted and didn't know anything about her biological family. But a private investigator tracked down her brother, Mike Ford, who was a perfect match. Today, Eggum's leukemia is in remission. Ford was the right person for the right moment.

The book of Esther tells another story of love, sacrifice, and God's timing. Mordecai, a Jew in exile, refused to bow to Haman, second in command to King Ahasuerus. Haman became furious and plotted to destroy Mordecai and all the Jews. So Haman deceived the king and persuaded him to issue an edict condemning the Jews to death. When Mordecai told his cousin Queen Esther about the edict, he urged her to intervene. "Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" he said (Esther 4:14). Approaching the king uninvited was punishable by death. But Esther seized the moment to save her people!

When we are able to rescue others, we should do so at all costs. Ask God for His direction and act! He may have placed you here "for such a time as this."— Marvin Williams ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

O for a faith that will not shrink
Though pressed by many a foe,
That will not tremble on the brink
Of any earthly woe. —Bathurst

Courage is not the absence of fear—it is the mastery of it.

Esther 4:13-17 The Adventure

When I was about 7, I was in the car with my mom and two sisters when my mother pulled over to the side of the road to study the map. "Are we lost, Mom?" I was worried.

"Oh, no," she replied cheerfully, quickly folding up the map. "We're on an adventure." My sisters and I exchanged doubtful glances as one of them whispered knowingly, "We're lost."

Adventures can be fun—and scary. They usually involve a bit of the unknown. As we walk in fellowship with God, it's likely that our lives will have many unique adventures—opportunities to serve Him. If we're reluctant or scared and we turn down an opportunity, we miss out. Will God still get the job done? Of course. But someone else will receive the blessing.

In Esther 4, Mordecai encouraged the young queen Esther to help rescue her people. He cautioned: "If you remain completely silent ... deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14).

Esther was naturally frightened to take this assignment. But God used her courage and faith to deliver her people. Trust God to show you the way. Adventure ahead! — Cindy Hess Kasper ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

For life's adventure, Lord, I ask
Courage and faith for every task;
A heart kept clean by high desire,
A conscience purged by holy fire.
—McDermand

Courage is fear that has said its prayers.

Esther 4:13-17 **The Greatest Honor** -

The king of Persia had signed a document calling for the extermination of all Jewish people under his rule. When the Jewish captive Mordecai heard the news, he challenged his niece, the newly crowned queen Esther, to plead for the lives of her people.

To approach the king uninvited could bring a sentence of death. Yet, for the sake of God's people, Esther took that risk.

During the 20th century, millions of Christians died as martyrs. This is a terrible tragedy, but we can take comfort in the knowledge that those who are killed for their devotion to Jesus die with the highest honor.

Corrie ten Boom's father saw this truth clearly. During WWII, a Dutch clergyman refused shelter to a baby, saying, "We could lose our lives for that Jewish child." Father ten Boom took the baby into his arms and said, "You say that we could lose our lives for this child. I would consider that the greatest honor that could come to my family."

Most of us will never face a test like the ten Boom family and like Esther did. But all of us can take courage from their example. They knew that there is a fate worse than death.

To die for our service to God and our love for Him is indeed the greatest honor. — Herbert Vander Lugt ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Life's labor done, as sinks the clay,
Light from its load the spirit flies,
While heaven and earth combine to say,
"How blest the righteous when he dies!" -Barbauld

"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body."

-Jesus (Mt 10:28, cp Lk 12:4)

Esther 4:13-17 **Strong Convictions**

During an interview, a former network news anchorman said that a "doctrinaire" person cannot be a good news reporter. He then defined a doctrinaire person as someone who has deep convictions of absolute truths in the areas of politics or religion.

If he meant that a reporter should present the truth in an objective manner, unaffected by personal biases, I would agree. But if he

meant in a more general sense that we must not bring convictions of right and wrong to discussions of politics and religion, I would strongly disagree. After all, none of us would have political or religious freedom were it not for men and women who had convictions for which they were willing to die.

In the Old Testament, young Queen Esther was convinced that God had placed her in the palace to be His instrument for the preservation of her nation. Because of this, she risked her life by approaching the king without an invitation. Since then, millions of believers have taken similar risks, and many have died for their faith.

It is not a virtue to be stubborn over minor issues that are not addressed in Scripture. But on the essential issues of the Christian faith we should, like Esther, be willing to die for our convictions. — Herbert Vander Lugt

Thinking It Over

Am I a person of deep conviction?

Am I willing to speak up and even be ridiculed for holding to biblical standards of right and wrong?

Take a stand for Christ or you'll fall for anything.

Esther 4:14 Timing is Everything

It was quite a few months before I realized that what I thought was a coincidental meeting had been good timing on my future husband's part.

From the balcony of the church, he had seen me, deduced which exit I might be using, raced down two flights of stairs, and arrived seconds before I did. As he casually held the door and struck up a conversation, I was oblivious to the fact that his "impromptu" dinner invitation had been premeditated. It was perfect timing.

Perfect timing is rare—at least where humans are concerned. But God has specific purposes and plans for us, and His timing is always perfect.

We see that timing in the life of these Bible characters: Abraham's servant prayed for a wife for Isaac. God answered his prayer by bringing the young woman to him (Gen. 24). Joseph was sold as a slave, falsely accused, and thrown into prison. But eventually God used him to preserve many people's lives during a famine (Ge 45:5-8; 50:20).

And we marvel at **Esther's courage as Mordecai reminded her**, "Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Est. 4:14).

Are you disappointed in the pace of God's plans? "Trust in the Lord" (Ps. 37:3). God will open doors when the timing is perfect.

Have faith in God, the sun will shine
Though dark the clouds may be today;
His heart has planned your path and mine,
Have faith in God, have faith always. —Agnew

God's timing is perfect—every time!

Esther 7:1-10 Self-Destructive Hatred

Repay no one evil for evil. —Romans 12:17

George Washington Carver (1864–1943) overcame terrible racial prejudice to establish himself as a renowned American educator. Spurning the temptation to give in to bitterness for the way he was treated, Carver wisely wrote, "Hate within will eventually destroy the hater."

In the book of Esther, we see how self-destructive hatred can be. Mordecai, a Jew, refused to bow down before Haman—a self-important dignitary in the Persian court. This angered Haman, who manipulated information to make Mordecai and his people appear as threats to the empire (Esther 3:8-9). When his scheming was complete, Haman called on the Persian king to kill all the Jews. The king proclaimed an edict to that effect, but before it could be carried out, Esther intervened and Haman's devious plot was revealed (Esther 7:1-6). Enraged, the king had Haman executed on gallows the schemer had built for Mordecai (Esther 7:7-10).

Carver's words and Haman's actions remind us that hatred is self-destructive. The biblical response is to turn hatred around and return good for evil. "Repay no one evil for evil," Paul said (Rom. 12:17). When offended, "do not avenge yourselves" (Ro 12:19).

Instead, do what is right (Ro 12:17) that you may live “peaceably with all men” (Ro 12:18). ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Harboring hatred in the heart
Will not lead to success;
But following truth and love and grace
Will lead to blessedness. —Hess

Hatred promotes self-destruction; love fulfills Christ’s instruction.

Esther 8:1-17 What Is My Purpose?

One thing I do, ... I press toward the goal. —Philippians 3:13-14

In Daniel Schaeffer’s book on Esther, *Dancing With A Shadow*, he summarizes with a single sentence the lives of each of the main characters in that wonderful Old Testament book. For Ahasuerus, the powerful warrior king of Persia, it was: “Success in life is all in the planning.” For the faithful Mordecai: “The price of obedience is never too high.” And for Queen Esther: “What I am is more important than what I have.” She proved it when she risked her crown (and life) to intercede with Ahasuerus on her people’s behalf.

I was discussing these one-line descriptions with some co-workers who were also reading Schaeffer’s book. Someone wondered how we might summarize in a single statement our purpose for living. One woman candidly admitted, “My only goal in life is to catch up.” Sound familiar? For others it might be, “To have as little trouble in life as I can.” Or you may say with Haman, “You can never have too much.”

But as followers of Jesus Christ, we should be able to say with the apostle Paul, “One thing I do, ... I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14).

Is that the purpose of your life?
Do you pursue a life of wealth and fame?
A mocking epitaph is all you’ll claim;
Let God replace your vain and selfish aim
With lasting goals that glorify His name. —Gustafson

We fulfill our purpose when we serve our Creator.

Esther 9:20-28

Charity - Sell what you have and give alms. --Luke 12:33

Purim is one of the most unusual of the Jewish feast days. It was instituted to celebrate the death of Haman and the escape of the Jews. Today it is marked by reading the book of Esther (interrupted by raucous noisemakers whenever Haman’s name is read) amid a party atmosphere.

Purim is also a time for charity, a concept rooted in the Old Testament (Dt. 15:7, 8; 26:12-13). The joy of Israel’s deliverance from Haman’s diabolical plot is expressed in generous charity to all who request it.

In his book *Jewish Literacy*, Rabbi Joseph Telushkin tells about a rabbi who felt so compelled to keep the day of Purim that he gave alms to two Jewish women who asked, even though he knew they were frauds.

Because we have been liberated from sin through Jesus Christ, we should be generous to the needy. From hearts of compassion, we are to be benevolent and help the poor. We won’t be charitable, however, if our hearts are hardened by a self-protective spirit, or if we think charity is someone else’s responsibility.

Christ commanded His followers to be charitable (Mt. 6:1-4; 12:33), and He demonstrated charity by the ultimate gift of Himself. --D C Egner ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

You have bought us, and no longer
Can we claim to be our own;
Giving freely, naught withholding,
We shall serve You, Lord, alone. --Murray

The highest kind of giving springs from deep within the heart.

Today in the Word

Esther 3:1-6

Refusing Orders

According to a recent study among doctors, their most common aggravation (next to patients who do not pay their bills) is patients who refuse to obey the doctor's orders. It is estimated that as many as 90 percent of all patients leave half-used prescription bottles, cheat on diets, continue to smoke, or never return for checkups. Often this neglect proves detrimental to the patient's health. Sometimes it's fatal. There was an incident in Israel's past which had a similar effect on the nation. In I Samuel 15 we read that God commanded Saul to eradicate the decadent Amalekites, including their livestock and their king, Agag. Saul chose to obey God halfway, defeating the Amalekites, but sparing their leader with some of the populace and the choicest of the livestock. Through His prophet Samuel, God condemned Saul's disregard for His command, and rejected Saul as king. Samuel then executed Agag, though apparently some of the king's subjects and descendants escaped to parts unknown.

And so it is in the Book of Esther, some 400 years after Saul failed to eradicate a people bent against the people of God, that Mordecai is confronted with a descendant of Agag (Haman) who is equally hostile to God's people. - Today in the Word, May, 1989

Esther 7:1-10

The Inmate

Not long after the wealthy contractor had finished building the Tombs prison in New York, he was found guilty of forgery. When convicted, he was sentenced to several years in the prison he had built! As he was escorted into a cell of his own making he said, "I never dreamed when I built this prison that I would be an inmate one day." - Today in the Word, May, 1989

Our Daily Homily

Book of Esther

F B Meyer

Esther 1

That every man should bear rule in his own house. Esther 1:22

ONE of the pre-requisites in choosing a presiding officer in the early Church was that he should rule well his own house; "for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?" (1Ti 3:4,5).

When a man bears rule as husband and father in the love of God, there is no issue of commands which conflict with primary obligations; rather than that, his authority represents the Divine authority. As Christ received his authority from the Father, so does a man derive and receive his from Christ; and in the recognition of his delegated right and ability to lead, the entire household becomes well ordered. The relaxation of the bonds of authority and government in our homes is one of the saddest symptoms of national decay, as it is among the predicted signs of the end (2Ti 3:2-note, 2Ti 3:3-note).

But, on the other hand, you must show yourself worthy to lead and rule your home. Your character must be such as to command respect. Those whom God has put into your charge require that you do not use your authority for selfish or capricious ends. Above all, love is the source of the truest authority. We count nothing hard or irksome that we do for those we love. Show love, and you will win love; and on love will be built respect, reverence, and obedience.

One of the most eloquent of modern Italians has said truly: "You can only obtain the exercise of your rights by deserving them, through your own activity, and your own spirit of love and sacrifice!" Christ's golden rule holds good in every phase of life -- "In all things, whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." (Mt 7:12-note)

Est. 1:2

G Campbell Morgan

Life Applications

Vashti refused to come.—Esther 1.12.

This is the one gleam of light in the picture of the conditions obtaining at the court of Ahasuerus. The feast in the palace of the king was characterized by all the gorgeousness peculiar to the East. It resolved itself into a debauch of drunken revelry. In the midst of this, the king commanded Vashti, his queen, to his presence, and to that of his drunken nobles. She refused to come. She paid the price of her loyalty to her womanhood in being deposed. Incidentally, the story reveals the place which woman occupied outside the Covenant of the chosen people; it was that of being the plaything and the slave of man. It also reminds us that, in the midst of the grossest darkness, the human soul is not without some consciousness of higher things; and that among the least favoured we may at times discover things of real value and beauty. Let the name of Vashti be held in everlasting honour for her refusal. The events record in this Book took place between the completion of the Temple and the mission of Ezra. The book in itself would seem to be a fragment of Persian history, captured and incorporated for sacred purposes. It shows us God overruling the affairs of His own people in a foreign land. The feast of Purim, observed to this day, is the living link with the events recorded, and sets the seal of historic accuracy upon the story. That feast celebrates, not the defeat of Haman, nor the advancement of Mordecai, but the deliverance of the people.

Esther 2

Hadassah, that is, Esther. Esther 2:7

THROUGH this one girl-life God was about to save his people, though He was all the while hidden from view. The peculiarity of this book is that there is no mention of the name of God; but there is no book in the Bible more full of the presence and working of God for his own. His name is clearly in the watermark of the paper, if it do not appear in the print.

We know that the meshes of evil plotting were laid for the hurt of Israel long before the fatal decree was made for the destruction of the entire nation; but here we find that God has begun his preparations for deliverance long before. In the beauty of Esther, in the position her uncle held at court, in the favor she won with the king, in the discovery through Mordecai of the plot against the king's life, there are the materials of a great and Divine deliverance. God was clearly beforehand to the devil. The angels of light were on the ground before those of darkness were marshalled.

It is a sweet thought to carry with us always: God prepares of his goodness for the poor. He prepares the good work in which we are to walk, and the deliverances by which He will succor us in the hour of need. Do not dread the foe, be not fearful nor dismayed, as he draws his net around thee; God has prepared a way of escape, so that thou shalt be able to bear it. In the meanwhile, rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; trust in the Lord; wait for the Lord; be silent to the Lord. He is more far-seeing, his plans more far-reaching, his help more certain, than all the stratagems of evil. God laughs at them. Into the pit they have dug, thine enemies shall fall.

Est. 2:17

G Campbell Morgan

Life Applications

The king loved Esther ... and... he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti.—Esther 2.17.

This chapter reveals customs obtaining in the household of Ahasuerus, which show us how far in advance of the pagan world the Hebrew people were, in spite of all their failures. Moreover, we can only read them in thankfulness that, wherever the purifying forces of revealed religion have operated, such things have become impossible. In the midst of the story, Mordecai appears upon the scene. Living with him was his cousin, whom he had adopted as his daughter. In the carrying out of a decree of the king, she was taken to the royal palace in the company of the maidens. Mordecai's action in this matter is certainly open to question. His love for Esther is evident, and the picture of him walking before the court of the house of the women indicates his continued interest in her. One can only hope that her presence there was not due to his scheming for place and power. It looks suspiciously as though it was so, and in any case his advice that she should not betray her nationality was questionable, as her position at the court of the king was one of grave peril for a daughter of the Covenant. We must remember, however, that this story is not preserved for us in order to glorify Mordecai, but rather to show how God overrules all the cleverness and folly of men, in order to carry out His own purposes. The beauty of Esther captured the heart of the king, and she was made queen in place of Vashti. God over ruled her presence in the palace, in such wise as to make her the instrument for frustrating the foe, and preserving His people from massacre.

Esther 3

But Mordecai bowed not. Esther 3:2

THERE was stern stuff in this old Jew. He was not going to prostrate himself before one so haughty and so depraved as Haman, albeit that he was the king's favorite. To be the only one in a city office that does not laugh at the questionable story; to stand alone on shipboard against the gambling mania; to refuse to countenance cleverness which is divorced from cleanness, and genius which is apart from goodness -- this is to do as Mordecai did in the gate of the king's palace.

Only God can give this power, since of ourselves we are as reeds shaken by the wind. Sooner might a single ear of wheat resist the breeze that bends all its companions in the same direction, than we stand alone, whilst all our associates bow, unless God Himself enable us. But God is prepared to enable us. Listen: "I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." But the mistake we are so apt to make is to brace ourselves up by resolution and firm determination, in anticipation of some impending struggle. To do this is to fail. Live in Christ, look up into his face, derive from Him strength for the moment and at the moment; and often wrap about thee that exceeding great and precious promise, "I will make him to become a pillar in the temple of my God; and he shall go no more out; and I will write on him the name of my God." Oh to stand pillar-like amid men, bearing up the temple arch of truth, and inscribed with God's name, whilst the crowds go and come on the pavement beneath!

**"Greatly begin! though thou have time
But for a line, be that sublime --
Not Failure, but low aim, is Crime!"**

Est. 3:15

G Campbell Morgan

Life Applications

The king and Haman sat down to drink. Esther 3.15.

And so far as Haman was concerned, he did so with complete satisfaction, because he had now perfected his arrangements for the extirpation of the Jews. There was, however, a quantity with which he had not reckoned, and that was that these people were the people of God. It is questionable whether he had any idea of such a fact; or, if he knew that these people claimed some special relationship with a God, he knew nothing of that God; nor thought it worth while to take such a matter into consideration. And thus he omitted the only factor of real importance. He had power and cleverness on his side. He was in complete favour with the king. Himself, he was haughty, imperious, astute. He had used his power, laid his plans; everything was done. Therefore he sat down to drink with the king. And all the while Mordecai, the Jews, and Haman, were in the hands of God. In the doings of evil men, their cleverness is constantly seen breaking down, in that they do strange and inexplicably foolish things from the standpoint of their own purpose. In the case of Haman, we ask: Why did he delay for months the carrying out of his intention? The answer probably is that he thought by such delay to make the extermination of these people more complete. We see now how that delay gave the necessary time for all the events which ended in the deliverance of the people of God. If men fear God and follow Him, they can always reckon on Him. If they ignore Him in their reckoning, they always find Him sooner or later, to their own undoing.

Esther 4

Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? Esther 4:14

WHAT grand faith was here! Mordecai was in God's secrets, and was assured that deliverance and enlargement would come to his people from some quarter -- if not from Esther, then from some other; but he was extremely anxious that she should not miss the honour of being her people's emancipator. Therefore he suggested that she had come to her high position for this very purpose.

We none of us know, at the first, God's reasons for bringing us into positions of honour and trust. Why is that young girl suddenly made mistress over that household? Why is that youth taken from the ranks of the working-people, and placed over that great City church? Why is that man put forward in his business, so that he is the head of the firm in which he served as an office-boy? All these are parts of the Divine plan. God has brought them to the Kingdom that He may work out through them some great purpose of salvation. They have the option, however, to serve it or not. They may use their position for themselves, for their own emolument and enjoyment, that they may surround themselves with strong fortifications against misfortune; but in that case they court destruction. Their position and wealth may vanish as suddenly as it came; or ill-health and disaster may incapacitate them.

If, on the other hand, all is used for God, though at the risk of perishing -- for it seemed to Esther as though the action to which Mordecai urged her meant that -- the issue is blessed. Those that love their lives lose them; those that are prepared to forfeit them keep them. The wheat grain which is buried in the soil bears much fruit.

Est. 4:4

G Campbell Morgan

Life Applications

Who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this ?—Esther 4.4.

The action of Haman produced consternation among the Jews, as indeed it well might. The whole diabolical plan had been cleverly conceived, and the arrangements for carrying out the dire purpose had been skilfully made. On the level of human observation, it seemed that there could be no escape from a terrible massacre. Mordecai was overcome with grief, but in these words we discover the one gleam of hope that shone for him amid the prevailing darkness. It was not an affirmation, it was a question; not the expression of confident faith, but the inquiry of a wistful hope. Yet the true answer to that inquiry was an affirmative one. Esther became a direct link between the king and jeer people. The custom and law of the court forbade her approach to her lord, save at his command. Nevertheless, the urgency of the case inspired her to the heroism of making the great venture. Conscious of her need of moral and spiritual strength, she asked that her people might fast with her. The note of sacrifice on the highest level is discoverable in her word: "If I perish, I perish." This portrait of Esther is a singularly fine one. A beautiful woman, occupying a grave place of peril at the court of this Eastern despot, and that by no choice of her own, she made a great venture on behalf of her people in their hour of peril. She did it in the spirit of conscious dependence upon God, and in that of complete readiness to sacrifice her life. She had certainly come to the kingdom for that time; and she was exactly the woman whom God could use to be the instrument for carrying out His deliverance of His people.

Esther 5

The king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Esther 5:2

WHAT a beautiful type this is for each of us in our approaches to God!

For the repentant sinner. -- You may have said with Esther, "I will go into the king's presence, and if I perish, I perish." But it is impossible for you to perish. None ever perished at the footstool of mercy. God is faithful to his promises, and just to his Son; and He can do no other -- He wants to do no other -- than forgive. As you stand amid the throng that surrounds his throne, He will espy you, and accept you graciously, because of the God-Man who sits at his right hand, and ever lives to intercede. In his name you may come boldly and obtain mercy.

For the suppliant. -- You have a great boon to ask for yourself, or another. The King's court stands open; enter and lodge your petition. He will be very gracious at the voice of your cry: the golden scepter extended, his word passed, that He will answer with the whole resources of his kingdom. The answer may not come at once, or in the way you expected; but no true suppliant was ever turned away without his complaint or cause being graciously considered, and in the best way met and adjusted.

For the Christian worker. -- Surely Esther represents a Paul prepared to be himself accursed, a Luther, a Brainerd. It is a lovely sight when the child of God is so oppressed with the burden of other souls as to sacrifice all else in order to plead their cause. Surely such find favor with God; they are kindred spirits with his own, and He bids them share his throne. God will do anything for those who are consumed by his own redemptive purpose.

Esther 5:13

Delusiveness of Earthly Glory

"Yet all this availeth me nothing"—Esther 5:13

This is how Wellington wrote about the great victory at Waterloo: "I cannot express the regret and sorrow with which I contemplate the heavy loss I have sustained. Believe me, nothing except a battle lost is so terrible as a battle won. The glory arising from such actions is no consolation to me, and I cannot suggest it has any consolation to you." (Anecdotes Illustrative of Old Testament)

Est. 5:13

G Campbell Morgan

Life Applications

All this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.—Esther 5.13.

What an unveiling of the essentially evil heart we have in these words of Haman! At the back of selfish ambition, some cankered pain for ever torments. In this case, it was that of Mordecai refusing to render homage to him and to his friends. Haman frankly admitted that nothing satisfied him while this condition of things continued. I repeat, what an unveiling this is! Here we see the true

reason of all the appalling suffering that this man was proposing to cause to a whole people. It was that of petty pique and pride. If it were not for the awful things which can result from such an attitude of mind, it would seem to be sufficient to hold it in contempt, to laugh at it. But that is the whole mischief. That apparently trivial thing is fundamentally wrong; and that is really so terrible, that when it completely expresses itself it does so in terms of cruelty, rapine, murder, and every evil thing. And all the while the evil root is a torment to the man in whose bosom it dwells. Haman said: "All this availeth me nothing ... so long ... !" The only cure for this malady would be the death of Mordecai, and that God would prevent. The gallows for Mordecai was intended to be Haman's comfort during the process of the feast. But in the counsels of God that gallows was not for Mordecai. The more carefully one considers the moral world under the government of God, as to its laws, its methods, its torments, and its triumphs, the more one is constrained to worship in the presence of the infinite wisdom and unvarying justice and mercy of our God. In the meanwhile Esther had made her venture, and the outstretched sceptre of the king was the sign of the Divine rule exercised in that court of earthly pride and pomp.

Esther 6

As thou hast said, do even so to Mordecai the Jew. Esther 6:10

HERE indeed was a turning of the tables! Haman doing honour to the humble Jew, who refused to do honour to himself. Surely that day the old refrain must have rung through Mordecai's heart: -- "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's." And there was an anticipation of yet other words: --

"For thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name: behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." (Re 3:8 [note](#))

How evidently God was working for his child. The gallows, indeed, was being prepared, but it would be used for Haman; whilst the triumph that Haman thought to be preparing for himself was to be used for Mordecai.

This is not an isolated case. Any one who has lived a few years in the world and has observed the ways of God could duplicate it with instances that have come under his own notice. Dr. Gordon told us once of a church in Boston that would not admit colored people; and after a few years it broke up, and the edifice is now occupied by a flourishing colored church.

Trust on, beloved friend, amid scorn, hate, and threatening death. So long as thy cause is God's, it must prevail. He will vindicate thee. Them that honour Him He will honour; whilst those that despise Him shall be lightly esteemed.

**"Though the mills of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceeding small;
Though with patience He stands waiting,
With exactness grinds He all."**

Esther 6:1

G Campbell Morgan

Life Applications

On that night could not the king sleep. Esther 6.1

In this chapter we have a night interlude between the making of a gallows and the holding of a feast. In the economy of God, vast issues follow trivial things. A sleepless night is a matter transient and althost trivial. Yet it has often been a time of revelation and surprise, affecting the after-years. In the case of Ahasuerus, it was another of the ways along which God moved forward for the deliverance of His people. To while away its hours, the king commanded his readers to read to him from the Records. Again the unseen God, directing the mind of the king! When they obeyed, they found themselves reading an entry about a service Mordecai had rendered to the king. Again the unseen God, choosing the particular roll for their reading! Then swiftly and suddenly things developed. Haman was waiting without, for the opportunity of asking that Mordecai be hanged. He entered, heard, and went forth to confer the highest dignities of the kingdom upon Mordecai! Thus God works out His own high purposes, slowly as it seems oftentimes, but surely, and with unerring wisdom, until all things being done, the end is sudden, dramatic, complete. In two very different poems Russell Lowell gave expression to two truths which we may bring together and keep together in our thinking. In "The Crisis," he wrote:

"Standeth God within the shadows,
Keeping watch above His own."

And in "The Biglow Papers," he wrote: "

You'll hev to get up airly

Ef you think to take in Gawd."

Esther 7

What is thy petition, and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? Esther 7:2

AMID the sensual conceptions of marriage that obtained in this heathen empire there was doubtless a consciousness in the king's breast of the essential unity between himself and his beautiful queen. She was his better self, and in her pleading he heard the voice of his own higher nature. To nothing less than this could he have made so far-reaching a promise. It was not so much Ahasuerus pledging himself to Esther, as Ahasuerus, the king, awakening to the appeal of a nobler Ahasuerus, for the most part buried. Such is the power of a pure and noble character awakening a nobler life. Will you try by your unselfishness and purity to awaken those around you to see and follow an ideal, which shall presently assume the form of the living Christ?

In these words of the king we are reminded that God is willing to do beyond what we ask or think. Not to the half of his kingdom, but to the whole extent of it, has God pledged Himself, "according to the power that worketh in us." (Ep 3:20-note) But our prayer must be in the name, or nature, of Christ; that is, the nature of Christ must pray in us, and God must recognize Himself come back through the circle of our intercession to Himself. The Spirit must make intercession in us, according to the will of God. When the unselfish, lovely, and holy nature of Jesus pleads in us by the Holy Ghost, there is nothing that God will not do for us, even to the whole of his kingdom.

"If ye abide in Me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." (Jn 15:7)

"Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name He will give it you." (Jn 16:23)

Esther 7:10

G Campbell Morgan

Life Applications

They hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.—Esther 7.10

By the way of the banquet Haman passed to the gallows which he had caused to be erected for Mordecai, and the existence of which he had expected to be his special source of consolation during that time of revelry and feasting. It was a fierce and terrible retribution, but it was characterized by poetic justice. The very core of Haman's hatred for Mordecai was that of his own self-centred and self-consuming pride and ambition. This was of so masterful a nature, that one man refusing to render homage to him inspired him to such hatred that he was deter-mined to encompass, not the death of that man only, but also of all those who bore blood-relation to him. The nets of evil plotting and malicious enterprise, swing far out in the tides of human life, but never far enough to enmesh God. He remains beyond them all, and gathering them in the hands of His power, He makes them include the men who weave them to destroy others. The instrument which Haman's brutality prepared for Mordecai, God employed for the destruction of Haman. Not always with the same spectacular visibility, nor always with the same dramatic suddenness, but always, inevitably, sooner or later, now or in those longer issues, which only the eyes of God can see as yet—"Jehovah bringeth the counsel of the nations to nought.'

Esther 8

Sealed with the king's ring. Esther 8:8

IN Esther 3:10 the king took the ring from his hand, and gave it to Haman. It is evident that he had resumed it from his chief officer's finger before sending him to execution. It was now entrusted to Mordecai, because it gave validity to the documents that proclaimed liberty to the Jews. Notice those words: "The writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's seal, no man may reverse," and apply them to that sealing with the Holy Ghost, of which we read so often in the New Testament.

On the molten wax the ring, with its royal device, or perhaps the cutting of the royal profile, was pressed, giving sanction, validity, and irreversibility; so on the tender heart of the believer in Christ, the Holy Spirit impresses the likeness of Jesus. The seal does not leave an impression of itself, but of the sovereign; and the Holy Spirit reveals not Himself, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and aims only to leave the mark and superscription of Christ on the character. The word character is used in Hebrews 1:3 (see note). How

wonderful, that as the image or character of the Father was impressed on Christ, so the Savior's image and character are impressed on us! "Him hath God the Father sealed," says the evangelist. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, by whom ye were sealed," says the Apostle.

This sealing us with the likeness of Jesus is God's attestation. It is his witness that we are born from above, and are become his sons and daughters. It is God's sign manual of his intention and decree that we should inherit an irreversible portion; and when God has once passed and sealed it, neither man nor devil can reverse it.

Est. 8:16

G Campbell Morgan

Life Applications

The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honour. Esther 8.16.

The deposition of Haman issued naturally in the promotion of Mordecai. The peril threatening the Jewish people, however, was not yet by any means averted. The royal proclamation had gone forth that on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month the Hebrew people should be massacred. By the constitution no such royal proclamation could be directly reversed. Some other way must be discovered if the people were to be saved. Through the intervention of Esther, the king granted permission to Mordecai to send a proclamation under the royal seal allowing them to arm and defend them-selves. Thus, through ordinary channels, God brought about the deliverance of His people through the extraordinary method of sending the king's own messengers with haste through the country, urging the people to be ready against what would have been the fateful day of their own slaughter by previous royal proclamation. We can understand what a day of "light and gladness" it was for these people. A very significant fact is recorded, namely, that many from among the peoples of the land "became Jews." Thus, the deliverance was evidently recognized as wrought for these people by supernatural means: and upon the other people the fear of the Jews fell, for the complete reversal of their position was conspicuous. In a distant land, and on a dark day, God thus gave His people a sign of His watchful care over them, and filled their hearts with joy. The whole value of the story is that it reveals anew the greatness of the love of God.

Esther 9

The Jews had rule over them that hated them. Esther 9:1

YES, my reader, a similar reversal awaits us in the near future! Now, the god of this world and his followers bear rule over us, and work their way with the servants of God. They butcher them like sheep, and scatter the ashes of their homes to the winds; and sometimes it seems as though God had forgotten to avenge the cause of his saints. But the hour is coming when the Almighty will arise on our behalf; and to him who has patiently kept his works unto the end, He will give authority over the nations. Listen to these great words: "Behold, I give of the synagogue of Satan, of them which say they are Jews, and they are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." Words more applicable to the case of the Jews in the days of Mordecai, and to the history of the Church, it would be impossible to find.

But mark a notable distinction. In the case of the enemies of the Jewish people, there was no quarter. Destruction and death were meted to those who had breathed out persecution and slaughter. But in the case of Christ and his Church, power is viewed only as an opportunity of securing salvation and life. The Saviour said, after his resurrection, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth; go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: and lo, I am with you alway." And the Church says, as through suffering she passes to the right hand of power, "Lay not this sin to their charge; but out of our persecutors raise apostles to carry the Gospel to the confines of the earth."

Est. 9:32

G Campbell Morgan

Life Applications

Esther confirmed these matters of Purim. Esther 9.32.

In this chapter we have a full account of the arrival of the fateful thirteenth day of the twelfth month, and of all that happened thereupon. It was the day on which the changed conditions in the cases of Haman and Mordecai were revealed throughout the whole of the provinces. Men who had persecuted the Jews, and were looking for the opportunity of wreaking their vengeance by royal decree, found themselves filling the places which they had intended their foes to occupy. It was in remembrance of this great deliverance that the feast of Purim was established. The thirteenth day was the day when the lot, according to Haman's devices, was to fall out to the destruction of the Jews. God overruled the lot, and they were delivered. Therefore the fourteenth and fifteenth days

were hence-forth to be observed as Purim, or lots, a time of festal celebration. This decision was confirmed by the royal consent through Esther. According to a Jewish tradition, "all the feasts shall cease in the days of Messiah, except the feast of Purim." It is a remarkable fact that while there have been breaks in the observance of the other great feasts, and some of them have been practically discontinued, this has been maintained. Whatever view men may hold of the value of this Book of Esther, it is certain that Jewish leaders have ever treated it as an exposition of the method by which God wrought deliverance for His people in a time of peril, even while they were in exile, and so of His unceasing care for them. It has been the inspiration of hope for them in many dark and desolate days.

Esther 10

Seeking the good of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed. Esther 10:3 (R.V.).

THIS epitaph on the life of a simple-minded, truehearted man, might be yours also. Why should you not from this moment adopt these, twin characteristics? Go about the world seeking the good of people. It does not always mean that you should give them a tract, or a little book. It is much easier to do this than to sacrifice your own good in order to seek theirs. You may be quite sure that some little act of self-sacrifice or thoughtfulness for a weary mother, or crying child, for a sick friend, or for some person who is always maligning and injuring you, would do a great deal in the way of preparing an entrance for the Gospel message. It is thus that the genial spring loosens the earth and prepares the way for the germination of multitudinous life. Count the day lost in which you have not sought to promote the good of some one. Adopt as your own the pious Quaker's motto, "Do all the good you can, to all the people you can, in all the ways you can."

Speak peace to people. -- Soothe agitated and irritated souls. Throw oil on troubled waters. There are worried and anxious hearts all around us; a word of sympathy and earnest prayer with them will often remove the heavy load, and smooth out the wrinkles of care. Let the law of kindness be on your lip. Do not say sharp or unkind things of the absent, or allow your lips to utter words that will lead to bitterness or wrath. Seek peace and pursue it. And in order to this, let the peace of God that passeth all understanding keep your mind and heart.

**"Come, my beloved! We will haste and go
To those pale faces of our fellow-men!
Our loving hearts, burning with summer-fire,
Shall cast a glow upon their pallidness."**

Est. 10:3

G Campbell Morgan Life Applications

Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus. Esther 10. 3.

This tiny chapter is interesting as it give us the last picture of this man Mordecai. It is a singularly fine one. Whatever there may have been questionable in some of the methods he adopted with regard to Esther—and here we are not able to be dogmatic—it is evident that he was of fine character. Probably all the experiences of the goodness of God had brought him to finer life. Evidently he retained the favour of Ahasuerus, for his position was next to the king. This did not alienate him from his own people. He continued to seek their good, and to speak peace to them: and therefore was held in highest honour among them, as well as trusted in the realm in which he exercised authority. Perhaps there is no severer test of greatness of soul than that of advancement in the favour of kings. Too often such advancement has meant the undoing of men who, in poverty, or under disfavour in high places, have been true men. The man who can pass to wealth and to position among the great ones of the earth, and still maintain his integrity and his loyalty to his own kith and kin, is ever a great man: and the secrets of such greatness invariably are that his roots are in God.

TODAY IN THE WORD
Devotional on the Book of Esther
Chapter by Chapter

[Moody Bible Institute - Today in the Word](#)

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Esther 1:1-8

To God belong wisdom and power. - Job 12:13

TODAY IN THE WORD - In the 1939 movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, a tornado lifts and carries Dorothy, her dog, Toto, and her house, to a magical land. They must journey to the Emerald City to seek audience with the Wizard of Oz. It is by his power that they hope to return to Kansas. Upon first meeting him, they tremble with fear as his thunderous voice booms through a cloud of smoke. Toto later sniffs out that this fear-inspiring Wizard is nothing more than a man behind a curtain, turning switches and pulling levers.

Until we draw back the curtain in this opening scene of the book of Esther, King Xerxes appears to be the embodiment of power in this story. In verse one, we discover that he ruled over the entire Persian empire, from India to Cush, or modern-day Ethiopia. The Persian empire dominated the world scene at that time, and is in fact one of the greatest empires in all of human history. As king at that time, Xerxes had absolute authority. He never faced an electoral challenge, never had to answer the indictment of a special prosecutor, and never waited on a legislative body to enact his wishes. King Xerxes could do everything as he pleased when he pleased.

He was not only powerful, he was also extraordinarily wealthy. To describe the celebration he threw in today's passage as lavish hardly does it justice—it lasted for a full six months, its food and wine knew no limit, and its posh decor of linen, gold, and marble was breathtaking. The feast served one purpose: to flaunt not only the wealth of the kingdom but the splendor of King Xerxes (Es 1:4). And interestingly, the feast was given early in the reign of King Xerxes, in his third year as king (Es 1:3). Make no mistake, the king was sending one message and one message alone, not only to those in his administration, but to everyone throughout the kingdom: I am king! My riches are vast, and my power unparalleled! Tomorrow we'll quickly discover the limits to this "absolute" earthly power.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY -Have you ever considered how many of our personal sins and failures amount to either too much fear of man or too little fear of the Lord? This month's study intends to "draw back the curtain" on the limited power of a human kingdom to reveal the true power of a divine King. Scripture reminds us of this: "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe" (Pr 29:25). Pray that the Lord will help you to fear Him alone.

Esther 1:9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14,15

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. - 1Ti 3:17

TODAY IN THE WORD - Princess Diana was frequently considered one of the most beautiful, desirable women in the world. Men wanted to be with her; women wanted to be her. She seemed to have it all—a fairy-tale wedding, beauty, and access to one of the greatest fortunes in the world. Yet, as Diana told friends, she was deeply unhappy, partly because her husband was in love with someone else. All of her beauty and charm and wealth could not guarantee her the love of someone else.

King Xerxes discovered this same limit to his power in today's reading. At the end of the lavish feast he'd been throwing, he was completely drunk and "in high spirits" (Es 1:10). He had been a tremendous host to the entire kingdom, winning their affection with food and wine. And by his lavish hospitality, he was ensuring their loyalty as royal subjects. His final boast concerned the beauty of his wife, Queen Vashti. Nothing was missing from this picture of power and prominence: he had the greatest political influence of that time, wealth beyond measure, and now a wife for all to envy.

There was only one problem—she snubbed him! After King Xerxes went to such great lengths to display his power, he felt sure to be mocked for his impotence to rule in his own household. Little wonder he "became furious and burned with anger!" (Es 1:12). This was no simple domestic quarrel—it threatened to damage the image of power he worked so hard to create. And that's why today's reading ends with a council of the experts in law and justice. Queen Vashti had to be punished for her insubordination to the king.

Yesterday we talked about "drawing back the curtain" on human power in the book of Esther. Today's reading shows us that no human being, not even a powerful king like Xerxes, has absolute authority or control. We discover a great theological treasure here in Esther. King Xerxes provides a contrast for the one true King "eternal, immortal, invisible" (1Ti 1:17). It is He alone who has true power over all of creation.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY -Job declares of our God, "He stands alone, and who can oppose him? He does whatever he pleases" (Job. 23:13). Because it's true that God's power and plans cannot be thwarted, it would be foolish to attempt life without Him. A symptom of this tends to be our own prayerlessness. Make a new habit to begin your day by prayerfully naming each item on your to-do list and calendar. Pray for wisdom in what you have planned, grace for the interruptions, and faithfulness to the Spirit's unexpected leadings.

Esther 1:16-22

The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases. - Proverbs 21:1

TODAY IN THE WORD A common phrase is sometimes heard in evangelical circles to describe the relationship between husbands and wives: "He may be the head of the household, but she's the neck that turns the head!" Usually this wife is known for pulling the

strings of the family behind the scenes, while making her husband feel like he's really in charge.

In today's reading, we discover that God has the power to direct the course of human history. His plans don't depend upon volunteers. As our verse for today indicates, God can do His will though we think it's our idea! For example, though King Xerxes had only one plan in mind in the beginning of chapter two, God had another. King Xerxes was looking for a way to punish Queen Vashti who made a mockery of him; God was creating a way to position Queen Esther for His purposes.

In advising the king, the nobles cleverly cast Queen Vashti's actions not as a threat to the monarchy but as a threat to all marriage. "For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women, and so they will despise their husbands" (Es 1:17). They intended to minimize the political damage by framing Queen Vashti's insubordination in terms of a wife challenging her husband, rather than a subject challenging her king. And so the decree is issued: Queen Vashti is banished from the king's presence, deposed as queen, and her place would be given to someone else (Es 1:9). Vengeance proved to be a sure antidote for the king's earlier anger (Es 1:21).

What looked like an arbitrary and excessive act of vengeance by an egotistical king was really the first step in God's plan to later save His people. While King Xerxes was busy protecting his image, God was at work to protect His people from a future threat.

Yesterday we saw the powerlessness of King Xerxes. With the majority of the ancient world under his control, he could do nothing to force his wife's submission. He could not control her choices. By contrast, today we see the power of our King, who can do anything He chooses. Human choices will never stand in the way of His sovereign power. He can even use the king's heart to get the job done.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY - We've seen several principles about God and His working. For one, the human heart is never beyond His reach. He can heal marriages by making us willing to forgive and love! He can bring a belligerent atheist to his knees. He can change the heart of a rebellious child. This is a great hope for our prayers! Over what situation or relationship do you find yourself powerless simply because you cannot change another person? Pray to the God who can!

Esther 2:1-4

The world and its desires pass away. - 1John 2:17-note

TODAY IN THE WORD In a recently published book of essays, one woman writes a tragic account of her pursuit of independence from others: "The reality was ... I did not know how to live in a decent way with another human being... I tormented every man who'd ever loved me: I called them on everything... There was, of course, more than a grain of truth in everything I said, but those grains, no matter how numerous, need not have become the sandpile that crushed the life out of love."

This same wistful regret echoes through the first verses of today's reading. We do not know King Xerxes's emotional state at this time, but we can draw clues from the historical context. King Xerxes divorced Queen Vashti in the third year of his reign. He didn't marry Queen Esther until his seventh year as king. In the interlude, King Xerxes made a disastrous expedition to Greece. In 480 b.c. his navy faced defeat at Salamis, and in 479 b.c. his army was routed at Plataea. His ambitions for expanding his empire must have deflated, along with his power-hungry ego.

So when the text tells us matter-of-factly that King Xerxes "remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her" (Es 2:1), one wonders whether or not he regretted his decision to banish Queen Vashti. His failed political conquest left him lonely and longing for the marital companionship he once shared with Vashti. At least that's how his personal attendants saw it. As a solution to his melancholy, they propose that the king fulfill his royal decree and "let the girl who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti" (Esther 2:4).

This passage illustrates the emptiness of pursuits apart from God's kingdom. King Xerxes ruled the largest empire of his time, but it wasn't enough. He wanted to strive to conquer more territory. King Xerxes had a harem full of beautiful women, but he wanted a queen. Even all that his power and pleasure afforded him left him like a poor man, begging for more. Without God, his life would always be a life of striving, rather than of rest and peace.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Read 1Jn 2:15-note, 1Jn 2:16-note, 1Jn 2:17-note. It contrasts the temporal desires of the world with the eternal pursuits of heaven. One example of the world's desires is pursuit of wealth. Open your checkbook register or this month's Quicken report for a quick inventory: Where have I invested for God and where have I invested for myself? If you haven't "put your money where your mouth is," begin to make changes and commitments in giving of your finances as well as time and skills to your church and ministries of Christ.

Esther 2:5-7; 2Chr 36:15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23

You are a chosen people ... belonging to God. - 1Peter 2:9-note

TODAY IN THE WORD The Christmas story of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer cheers the hearts of children. His bright red nose, which other reindeers mock, ends up saving Christmas by guiding Santa's sleigh on a stormy Christmas Eve. He and his other friends from the Island of Misfit Toys prove that being a misfit serves a purpose that no ordinary toy could!

Today's reading notes that Esther didn't seem like the most promising candidate for Queen of Persia. She was a misfit of sorts. In verses five and six, the family tree of her uncle, Mordecai, reveals that they were about three generations removed from the Jewish exile into Babylon. Our reading from 2 Chronicles describes how over one hundred years earlier, the Jewish people faced the shame of watching their holy temple pillaged and their people captured. Only the poorest of the poor remained in the land. The rest were forcibly settled in Babylon. When the Persians later defeated the Babylonians, Jews were given permission to return to Judah if they wished. Many, including Mordecai and Esther, chose to remain in Persia.

This young girl belonged to two cultures. Her Hebrew name, Hadassah, was a reminder of her family's roots in a distant land (Es 2:7), and this heritage might be viewed unfavorably in Persia (cf. Es 2:10). On the other hand, her Persian name, Esther, indicated the culture in which she had been raised. It would be natural to feel alienated from both worlds.

Not only did Esther not fit easily in the culture, her sense of belonging within a family had also been lost. Verse seven tells us that Esther was an orphan. Her parents died, leaving her in the care of an uncle who apparently had no other family. The text makes no mention of either siblings or cousins.

With a background such as this, we would understand if someone had an identity crisis. Had Esther gotten stuck in the cycle of self-pity, the story might have ended here. But we will soon see that these misfortunes in Esther's life were not obstacles in God's plan. They became the very means for Esther to serve as God's instrument.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Today's key verse gives Christians the truth about our identity: we are a people called by God, made holy and purposed for declaring His glory. No personality flaw, no physical disfigurement, no personal inadequacies make us misfits in God's kingdom. Everyone belongs because we belong to God! Is there anything that makes you think you are a misfit in God's kingdom? Ask God for the faith to see this not as an obstacle to His purposes but as something useful for Him

Esther 2:7-11

The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; ... do not abandon the works of your hands. - Psalm 138:8 [note](#)

TODAY IN THE WORD A simple equation can determine one's financial health: assets minus liabilities. So financial planners give simple advice: increase what you own, and decrease what you owe! But what's true in accounting isn't necessarily true in God's economy. Our "worth" in God's sight cannot be determined by the simple equation of ability minus inability, adequacy minus inadequacy.

We learned yesterday of Esther's liabilities. She was displaced because she didn't belong either to a culture or to a family. Today we learn of Esther's great asset—her personal beauty (Es 2:7). This beauty earned her special regard when she was brought into the king's harem. Hegai noticed her immediately, and her beauty won her preferential treatment in the harem (Es 2:9).

But Esther's asset wasn't exclusively her physical beauty. Proverbs 11:22 declares that physical beauty degrades without character: "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion." We catch a glimpse of Esther's true beauty in Es 2:10, and find that her beautiful form and features were coupled with strong character. Mordecai instructed her not to reveal her Jewish identity, and she deferred to his wishes. By willingly submitting to Mordecai, Esther proved herself to be a woman of humility.

What we find in the person of Esther is a portrait of advantage and disadvantage, asset and liability. On the basis of ethnicity, she might have been easily disqualified from the position of Queen of Persia. But liabilities aren't always liabilities in the hands of God—it's her Jewishness that positioned her perfectly for the rescue mission for which God had ordained her.

And her beauty, as an asset enhanced by her character, was the means that God used to earn the favor of those around her. She soon needed this favor in order to become queen and later, to help save God's people.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY In God's kingdom, the balance sheet of our usefulness to God looks quite different than the sum of our strengths and the difference of our weaknesses. God can certainly use personal assets as He did with Esther's beauty. God also uses personal liabilities as He did with Esther's Jewish identity. Faithfully steward the blessings God has given you for His purposes. And don't let your personal inadequacies be an excuse for not serving God!

Esther 2:12-14

In God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? - Psalm 56:11 [note](#)

TODAY IN THE WORD Several popular television series in recent years exploit the world of dating, allowing millions of Americans to watch hopeful men and women seek “love.” Their every misstep, attempt at romance—and in some cases, competition with other suitors—is served up as entertainment. Whatever their true motives for appearing on such a show, it seems clear that this is hardly the best way to find a life partner!

While we think these sorts of television programs are a new development, it's not a far cry from Xerxes's search for a queen. In Esther 2:3 and 8, the language seems to indicate that eligible girls in the kingdom were forcibly brought into the harem. The king appointed men from all 127 provinces to search out the most beautiful girls and corral them to the palace, not waiting for willing volunteers or even for the consent of the girls' parents.

Having arrived at the palace, the girls were pampered with the most extravagant spa treatments they could have desired. For a full year, they did nothing other than enhance their natural beauty with the cosmetics and perfumes of their time (Es 2:2). Though many may have been brought against their will, their treatment hardly sounds torturous. But wait—there's a catch.

Es 2:13, 14 describe what happened after that initial year: each girl was allotted one night with the king. For a year, she had been exfoliating her skin, penciling her eyebrows, coiffing her hair—and for what? A one-night stand. And she had to make it memorable enough that King Xerxes would remember her name in the morning (Es 2:14). But if she wasn't chosen to be the next queen? Tragically, no girl resumed normal life at home as she once knew it with her family. Instead, she became a type of second-class wife to the king, committed to live out a kind of “widowhood” in the harem for the rest of her days.

Scholars estimated that approximately 1,400 girls took their turn before Esther arrives on the scene in tomorrow's reading. Over one thousand girls have their dreams for the future dashed at the whim of one king whose foolhardy anger got them in this predicament in the first place!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Imagine Esther's feelings before her turn to go before King Xerxes. How do you approach difficult situations such as these? Are you filled with fear? Worry? Do you turn to prayer? Philippians 4:6-note teaches us how we in the “kingdom” should approach fearful situations. If we belong to the Lord, we must “not be anxious about anything, but in everything present [our] requests to God.” And then we are promised peace!

Esther 2:15-18

Your beauty ... should be that of your inner self. - 1Pe 3:3, 4-note

TODAY IN THE WORD When the invitation arrived for the royal ball, Cinderella's stepsisters scattered in a flurry of activity. They must have the perfect attire for the occasion! They cast all their hopes for impressing the prince into the hands of a ball gown and shoes!

On the night of her presentation to the king, each eligible maiden in King Xerxes's harem placed much importance on that perfect ensemble. Before being taken to the palace, each had access to anything she wanted (cf. Es 2:13), probably a reference to jewelry and clothes. We can infer that the strong-willed girls in the harem didn't stop to ask for advice on hairstyle or fragrance or lip color.

This wasn't Esther's approach, however. Rather than relying upon her own opinions, she sought the advice of Hegai, the supervisor of the harem (Es 2:15). First, this demonstrated great humility and her extraordinary wisdom. Who would know the king's preferences better than the supervisor of the harem? He saw the girls whom King Xerxes summoned more frequently than others. He noted their similarities and could interpret King Xerxes's preferences based upon his observations.

Esther had the same effect on all who saw her: she won their favor. Note that Esther was not just another pretty woman; a pretty woman who is smug and haughty inspires contempt, not favor. Additionally, Esther was surrounded by the most beautiful women from this vast kingdom. Something else had to set her apart. From our reading on May 8, we saw Esther's beauty as far more than a sketch of attractive physical features. With today's passage we can add more brushstrokes to our portrait of Esther's beauty. She combined physical attractiveness with a gracious, humble demeanor. Her beauty radiated from the inside out.

At least King Xerxes thought so! What the niv translates as King Xerxes being “attracted to” Esther more than the other girls is rendered more fairly in other translations as “loved” (Es 2:17). King Xerxes fell in love with Esther—no doubt he admired her physical beauty, but he probably also hoped her demure behavior would make her a more worthy queen than headstrong Vashti!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Humility is one of the primary tools we need in order to be kingdom people. Unfortunately, sinful human nature operates according to the law of envy (cf. Eccl. 4:4). It's too easy to despise others out of envy for their blessings. For this reason, God's people have to be especially gracious and humble, just as Esther was, when they are blessed by Him. Showing humility, then, earns favor rather than contempt, and this ultimately gives glory to God our Father (cf. Mt. 5:16)

Esther 2:19-23

In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps. - Proverbs 16:9

TODAY IN THE WORD On the morning of September 11, 2001, a small detail averted further destruction in Washington, D.C. and the loss of many more American lives. United Flight 93, taking off from Newark and flying to San Francisco, left 42 minutes after its scheduled departure. This delay allowed some passengers to learn of the other plane hijackings that had taken place earlier that morning. These passengers knew that they, too, would become a bomb in terrorist hands, so they heroically tried to take back the plane from the hijackers.

One simple detail of one ordinary morning—a flight delay—spared many lives. God's rescue mission for His people in the book of Esther is a display of His work through details. In today's reading, we find Him at work, preparing His plans for a crisis that hasn't yet been announced.

First, we find Mordecai, sitting at the king's gate (Es 2:19). Most biblical scholars agree that this detail provides evidence that Mordecai held some sort of official position in the court of King Xerxes. Those seated at the gate were most likely respected men of the land (cf. Pr 31:23). Some speculate that Queen Esther had appointed him to this position since becoming queen.

Second, we learn that Esther had continued to keep her identity secret (Es 2:20). As the story unfolds in further chapters, we learn that Mordecai had not kept secret his own Jewish identity. Therefore, it's clear that what did remain secret at this point in the story is the relationship of Esther and Mordecai.

Next, we learn about the assassination plot against King Xerxes. Mordecai overheard this, revealed it to Queen Esther who then warned the king, giving credit to Mordecai (Es 2:22). No credit or recognition was given to Mordecai at that time.

These details are hardly insignificant in the scope of the story. Nothing is coincidental. God has purposed in this story to place Mordecai at the king's gate precisely when a conspiracy was plotted. Esther's Jewish identity had to remain secret for the time being. And Mordecai's recognition for his heroism was providentially delayed for a later time.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Some biblical skeptics believe that a narrative so perfectly plotted as this one proves that the Bible is fiction, not fact. Not so! To the contrary, this proves that God is the most magnificent craftsman, weaving a masterpiece out of our lives with what seem to be small and insignificant threads. In the kingdom of God, nothing is ordinary. A trip to the grocery store, a regular day at the office, an afternoon at your child's soccer game can be divine appointments. Ask God for wisdom to see where He is at work

Esther 3:1-6

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. - Pr 16:18

TODAY IN THE WORD Authors use literary devices to create effect and emphasize certain aspects of their work. For example, foreshadowing is used to create suspense. Another literary device used often in the book of Esther is the creation of a "foil," someone whose traits contrast with another character, emphasizing therefore the qualities of that character.

The book of Esther has a series of contrasts. As our month's theme suggests, the book of Esther teaches us about the kingdom of God by the contrasts we see revealed in King Xerxes's kingdom. Furthermore, we can learn how to be "kingdom people" not simply by imitating the good of Esther and Mordecai but also by avoiding the evil of their "foils."

In today's reading, Haman, Mordecai's foil, stepped on to the scene. He was greedy for self-promotion. It started favorably for him, since the king gave him second place in the kingdom, "a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles" (Es 3:1). On his daily walk to the palace, Haman basked in his own glory as his colleagues bowed when he passed.

One man at the king's gate refused to follow the royal decree: Mordecai (Es 3:2). Despite the fact that his heroism from yesterday's reading had been overlooked, Mordecai continued to faithfully serve the king in his royal position. He didn't make it his job to make sure that he was rightfully rewarded for every deserving act.

Haman, on the other hand, couldn't stand the thought of a shred of honor withheld from him. When Mordecai refused to bow, Haman was enraged! Just as those who tattled on Mordecai knew, Haman feared that this small breach of respect threatened to undermine his power (Es 3:4). If Haman tolerated Mordecai's insubordination, no one else would feel compelled to bow before him.

Haman proved just how ruthless and power-hungry he really was by determining his course of action. It was not enough to kill Mordecai—he decided to exterminate his entire race (Es 3:6)! Though Haman threatened Mordecai's destruction, Pr 16:18 foretells

Haman's destruction, all because of his great pride.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY What is your pride quotient? Here are a couple of tests. When you didn't receive a well-deserved promotion at work, did you complain bitterly about it? When a family member wronged you, did you refuse to forgive her, insisting that she didn't deserve it and was never sorry in the first place? And when you've offended another person, did you offer a litany of excuses for your behavior instead of a specific and direct apology? "Yes" to any of these questions indicates that you need to face God in prayer to ask for a humble heart!

Esther 3:7-14

Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. - 2Ti 3:12-note

TODAY IN THE WORD Jews in Nazi Germany, Bosnians in Yugoslavia, Kurds under Hussein's Iraqi regime, and Africans in the Darfur region of Sudan—all have been victims of attempted genocide. They have suffered the murderous rage of those wishing to wipe out their entire race. Today's reading introduces a historical plot of genocide.

Haman approached the king with his murderous plan. Aware that King Xerxes also worshiped the gods of power and money, Haman cunningly proposed his agenda. First, he warned the king about a people who threaten his power, a people who "do not obey the king's laws" (Es 3:8). Haman didn't mention that the Jewish people weren't categorically guilty; in truth, the only lawbreaker was Mordecai. And the royal decree Mordecai disobeyed was hardly the most crucial of the Persian laws affecting Xerxes. But rather than admit he was out for personal revenge, Haman was shrewd to suggest that it was "not in the king's best interest to tolerate them" (Es 3:8). He then proposed an easy and affordable solution—genocide, free of charge for the king (Es 3: 9)! King Xerxes didn't have to devise a plan, and neither did he have to fund it! Haman was willing to take care of everything.

Before the curtain closed on today's action, Haman, "the enemy of the Jews," held the symbol of power, the king's signet ring. With that ring, he had the power to command anything he pleased. His venomous hatred of Mordecai and the Jewish race, coupled with the power now his, inspired real fear among the Jews. Es 3:12, 13, 14 describe the first steps towards executing Haman's murderous intentions. Decrees were written in every language and dispatched to every province; the fate of the Jews seemed irrevocable.

What began as one man's quiet resistance seemed to be an entire people's impending doom. Mordecai was no fool. He knew Haman's bloodthirst for power. So he wasn't just hoping that Haman would overlook his disobedience. No doubt Mordecai knew that he would suffer a severe penalty for his actions, and he could have chosen the entirely different route of compliance. Yet fear of Haman did not deter him from a greater loyalty.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Because of our loyalty to Christ and His kingdom, living for Him provides eternal gain but often earthly pain (cf. Mt. 10:22; 2Ti 3:12-note; 1Pe 4:12, 13-note). Our suffering in the West, however, is incomparable to Christians suffering in countries like China, Saudi Arabia, North Korea, and Sudan. Take advantages of resources made available by organizations such as Voice of the Martyrs that can show you how to pray for our brothers and sisters suffering for the name of Christ.

Esther 3:15, 4:1-8

When I am afraid, I will trust in you. - Psalm 56:3-note

TODAY IN THE WORD Until the former U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, called the murder and persecution of Africans in the Darfur region of Sudan "genocide," the world seemed content to turn a blind eye to the tens of thousands dead and over a million refugees. Global sentiment in this modern crisis resembled the reaction in Esther's day to Haman's decree of genocide: "the city of Susa was bewildered" (Es 3:15).

In today's reading, we see visceral expressions of grief and fear in response to the royal edict. Mordecai, along with many other Jews, ripped their clothes and put on sackcloth. They paraded in the city streets, wailing and weeping loudly. The Jews knew their fate if something didn't change. In ten months, they and their families, men, women and children alike, would lose their lives because of Haman's royal decree. To whom should they turn in this time of anguish? Upon whom could they count for mercy?

The Jews couldn't expect King Xerxes or Haman to give any time and energy to reconsidering this selfish decision. Esther 3:15 paints a vulgar picture of their joviality in the face of human suffering. Sitting down for drinks, their mood indicated that they acted like their day amounted to routine kingdom business.

The local Persians didn't look like they would be taking up arms in defense of the Jews. Their reaction to the royal edict was no more than tepid ambivalence. Such an unjust and horrible decree barely stirred the slightest anger.

In today and tomorrow's reading, we'll see the source of hope for the Jews is ultimately the God of the heavens and earth, the true King over all. Mordecai's common-sense approach in turning to Esther in today's reading didn't negate God's help. Rather, he recognized that God can work through ordinary human channels just as well as He can use supernatural and extraordinary means. Mordecai assessed the situation: Queen Esther, a Jew herself, alone had the motivation and influence with the king necessary "to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people" (Es 4:8).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Read Psalm 56-[note](#). It describes the emotions of one who is under attack by his enemies. Rather than fearing his enemies, the psalmist turns to God in confidence. "In God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?" Are you facing persecution in your workplace, school, or neighborhood? Have people accused you unjustly or slandered your name? Turn to God for your source of help, peace, and confidence.

Esther 4:1-17

TODAY IN THE WORD Throughout history in Scripture, God raised up nations and rulers to accomplish His will. He used Egypt to provide for Jacob's family during famine, and used Moses to rescue the Israelites from oppression in Egypt. The prophet Habakkuk puzzled over the power of Babylon to destroy Judah, but the Lord assured him that Babylon was His tool of judgment and they too would receive His judgment at the hands of the Persians. We've seen how the godly king Josiah delayed God's judgment on Judah through his repentance and desire to obey the Law. Today we read about the young Jewish girl Esther, who became Queen of Persia at a time when the Jews faced annihilation.

Our reading opens with Mordecai, Esther's cousin, publicly bewailing the edict to destroy the Jews signed by the king of Persia at the urging of Haman. Esther, who seemed not to know of the edict, tried to cheer up Mordecai, until he informed her of what was about to happen.

Mordecai urged Esther "to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people" (Esther 4:8). Esther reminded him that being queen didn't entitle her to an audience with the king. In fact, entering the king's presence unbidden was a suicide mission (Esther 4:11). Mordecai responded that inaction was also tantamount to suicide; her position as queen would not save her from the destruction to be unleashed on the Jews (Esther 4:13).

Next, Mordecai revealed the heart of his faith: he believed that God would bring salvation in some way for the Jews, but he also believed that Esther was in her position for a reason. Esther, in great faith, was willing to accept the challenge and act boldly for her people; she requested that Mordecai and the Jews in the capital city fast, and then she would risk her life and go before the king. As the rest of the book of Esther recounts, the faith of Mordecai and Esther was validated as Esther's actions resulted in protection for the Jews in Persia.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY - Haman's plot to destroy the Jews was rooted in his jealousy of Mordecai (see Esther 3). We've seen other accounts of jealousy leading to great sin and destruction. Today, ask the Holy Spirit to weed out any roots of jealousy in your heart. Surrender your desire to advance yourself—whether it's financial advantage, reputation, or a promotion—and seek to serve others. As Haman learned, attempts to elevate ourselves end up destroying us, but selfless actions like that of Esther will win the reward of God's blessing

TODAY IN THE WORD - When the Western Union company asked the great inventor Thomas Edison to name his price for the ticker he had invented, Edison asked for a few days to think it over. His wife suggested \$20, but Edison thought that was too much. When the time came for the meeting, the Western Union official asked Edison for his price. Edison wanted to say \$20 but couldn't get the words out of his mouth. So the official broke the silence. Well, how about \$100? Esther must have felt during the situation she encountered in Persia. She was afraid even to approach King Xerxes with her appeal for the Jews, let alone to expect him to grant it in abundance. But after God moved in the king's heart and gave Esther the courage to take a very difficult step, she became a true biblical heroine.

Esther 4:9-14

Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. - Hebrews 11:1note

TODAY IN THE WORD In October 1996, Lance Armstrong, a competitive cyclist, was diagnosed with advanced testicular cancer, which had spread to his lungs and his brain. Everyone predicted the end of his career; doctors feared for his very survival. But Lance's perseverance triumphed over doubt. Beginning in 1999, he has won six consecutive victories at the Tour de France, a feat no other cyclist has achieved.

Today's reading reveals two conflicting perspectives in the face of devastating news: Mordecai's faith and Esther's fear. Mordecai saw deliverance, but Esther saw doom. Mordecai didn't believe that evil human intentions will triumph over God's purpose to

preserve His people. "Relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise" (Es 4:14). Esther, however, felt the gripping fear of the seen reality. She knew the law: anyone who approached the king in the inner court without being summoned would be put to death (Es 4:11). The king had not summoned her in thirty days. Could she possibly hope for his mercy?

Mordecai finally tried to persuade her go before the king with compelling arguments. First, she must not believe that she alone would escape the fate of the Jews (Es 4:13). How easily Esther could have believed this. Think back to the beginning of this chapter—while all of the Jews mourned the decree, Esther seemed oblivious to the news. She didn't understand the reasons for Mordecai's grief, and that's why she originally sent Hathach to question Mordecai (Es 4:5). Having been unaware of this decree, Esther might have hoped that she would be immune to its orders. Mordecai stirred her to action by a call to self-preservation.

Second, he asserted the reality of deliverance. The Jews would be rescued, but if she didn't act on their behalf, she and her family would perish. She faced the possibility of having her own life ended, even if her people were saved.

Finally, he left her with a question: "And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" (Es 4:14). Because this question serves as the lynchpin for Esther's theological lessons about purpose, tomorrow we'll discuss its implications.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Mordecai's faith and Esther's fear parallel the story of Peter walking on the water (Mt. 14:22-33). At first, Peter courageously stepped out of the boat toward Jesus. However, taking his eyes off Jesus and fearing the wind and the waves, Peter began to sink. Like Peter stepping out of the boat, Mordecai had great faith. Like Peter sinking in the water, Esther had little faith at first. Mordecai seized hope. Fear seized Esther. Where is your focus in troubling circumstances? How can you turn your gaze back to Christ?

Esther 4:14 Genesis 45:1-8

God sent me ... to save your lives by a great deliverance. - Genesis 45:7

TODAY IN THE WORD The story is told of a man who, when his neighbor told him to leave his flooding community, refused to leave. As the waters flooded the streets, a rescue worker arrived in a boat. "God will save me!" the man declared, refusing to get in. He then crawled to the roof as the flood waters rose. A helicopter flew overhead. "God will save me!" he yelled confidently. The man eventually drowned, met God in heaven, and asked, bewildered, "I thought you promised to save me. Where were you?" God replied, "But I tried three times!"

The Bible is full of stories of God's rescue missions. What we often find in the face of many of these threats is that instead of using supernatural means, God uses ordinary men and women to deliver help in times of crisis.

We can draw many parallels between the stories of Joseph and Esther. In the reading from Genesis, Joseph was reunited with his brothers after they had sold him as a slave many years earlier. They feared his retribution. Joseph recognized, however, God's purposes even in their act of malice. "It was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you" (Ge 45:5NIV). The favor that he first found with Potiphar, then with the prison warden, and finally with Pharaoh, had placed him in a position of power and influence (see Genesis 39:1ff-Ge 41:1ff). Because of his authority now as second in command to Pharaoh, Joseph was able to make provisions for the famine and could now grant aid to his starving family.

In Esther 4:14, Mordecai asked Esther to give account for her royal position. Was it by chance that she, a Jewish orphan, had become queen of the mighty Persian empire—or could it be part of God's greater plan to rescue His people when they needed it? "And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

This question must have recalled memories of her arrival at the palace. Hegai, the supervisor of the harem, had favored her from the start. She was given advantages over other girls (Es 2:9). Fourteen hundred girls were sent ahead of her to the king, all beautiful, all capable of winning his heart. Yet only she had achieved that. What earlier she might have viewed as good fortune was clearly divine providence.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY None of our success is coincidental in the kingdom of God. In fact, God has a great history all throughout the Bible of blessing people so that they can bless others. This was the original call to Abraham (Gen. 12:1, 2, 3, 4). Where have you found favor in your spheres of influence? With your boss? Your child's teacher? Your neighbor? Your employees? Use their favorable opinion of you to speak to them about Christ.

Esther 4:15-17

Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you. - 1 Samuel 12:23

TODAY IN THE WORD George Mueller, a nineteenth-century English pastor and founder of an orphan ministry, once wrote: "Here is

the great secret of success. Work with all your might; but trust not in the least in your work. Pray with all your might for the blessing of God; but work... Remember that God delights to bestow blessing, but, generally, as the result of earnest, believing prayer.”

Today's reading illuminates the power of prayer in Esther's story. Esther had been persuaded by Mordecai to undertake the dangerous endeavor of going before the king without being summoned and pleading for his mercy towards the Jews. And though earlier we saw Esther's trepidation and fear, today we see her great wisdom and bravery. She answered Mordecai's question in Es 4:14. She had come to be queen so that she could exert her influence over the king in order to save the Jews.

She gave explicit instructions to Mordecai: gather all of the Jews together and fast for me. By implication, she called a three-day prayer meeting (cf. 2Chr 20:1, 2, 3, 4). Esther didn't choose to rely exclusively upon her feminine wiles to convince the king. Neither was she fatalistic in her approach, believing that nothing she could or couldn't do would alter the course of events. Though she realized her ultimate destiny was out of her hands (v. 16), she nonetheless used the resources that she had. Before going to the king, she depended on the strength of the prayers from the community of God's people.

This was an appeal for fervent prayer and fasting, night and day (Es 4:16). The Jews were called to put aside eating and sleeping for the purpose of seeking God's help and deliverance. They gathered together, murmuring prayers in a unified voice as the people of God. Not only did this prayer meeting seek to affect God by beckoning His mercy, it no doubt affected the people. Those who previously felt hopeless and despairing in the face of death found strength and courage through the prayers of the community. And Esther drew confidence for her task at hand.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Today's key verse reminds us that failing to pray for others is a sin in the sight of God. In church or Bible study or small group, when we hear requests for prayer, we are under obligation to pray for these people. This means we should probably write the requests down as we hear them! Not only should we pray for others, but we should rely on others praying for us. Make genuine specific requests for yourself next time you're asked to share so that others can pray effectively for you.

Esther 5:1-8

Through patience a ruler can be persuaded. - Proverbs 25:15

TODAY IN THE WORD Imagine the musical score set to the story unfolding in the book of Esther. In the first chapter of Esther, the melodies are upbeat and bright throughout the 180-day banquet given by King Xerxes. Queen Vashti's insubordination is a brief but dark interlude in the music. The tempo picks up in chapter two until chapter three, when Haman's murderous plot hatches. The once-cheerful harmonies give way to a plodding death march. And as chapter five opens, the instruments are completely stilled. Nothing can be heard; the audience waits, breathless. Esther stood before the king in verse one. As the readers, we are practically holding our breath as he extended the royal scepter, and Esther finally advanced towards the throne.

If we imagine ourselves in Esther's position, we might say: “Oh, King Xerxes, I'm so glad you allowed me to speak. You see, Haman wants to kill me—and my people. O, king, you've got to save us! Don't let this happen!” We might blurt out a flurry of accusations and half sentences, trying desperately to persuade the king to see the situation our way.

Esther's approach was much wiser, less rash, more composed. She simply invited him to a banquet. She knew King Xerxes's love for merrymaking—that's how he first got in trouble with Queen Vashti (Es 1:10, 11, 12), how he celebrated Queen Esther's rise to the throne (Es 2:17, 18), and how he ended his day with Haman after issuing the edict for genocide (Es 3:15). Before revealing her true intentions in coming, Esther would give the king a fine meal and her company.

Moreover, she invited Haman to join them. This, too, reveals her great wisdom in avoiding the foolishness of “he said, she said.” Haman would be right there when she accused him of plotting to exterminate her and her people.

Pr 29:20 warns against impulsivity: “Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him.” Esther profited from the prayer and planning of the three previous days. Her calculated patience and caution served her purposes well.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Proverbs 19:2 reminds us that even when we are zealous for godly purposes, we should not be hasty or ignorant in our planning. If God asked you to confront someone, would you spend time praying and carefully planning what you will say in this conversation? If God asked you to develop a new ministry for an area of need in your church, would you spend time thinking how you'll gather the resources to begin this new ministry? Remember that patience can be a tremendous indicator of wisdom.

Esther 5:9, 10; Mt 16:24, 25, 26, 27

Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. - Matthew 16:25

TODAY IN THE WORD Nate Saint, one of the five missionaries martyred in Ecuador in 1956, said this about a Christian's call to sacrifice his life for Christ: "People who do not know the Lord ask why in the world we waste our lives as missionaries. They forget that they too are expending their lives ... and when the bubble has burst, they will have nothing of eternal significance to show for the years they have wasted."

Haman's "bubble" is delicately fragile in today's reading. At the beginning of verse nine, he was flying high, reveling in his own self-importance. As the king's right-hand man, he could do anything he wished. He's powerful and prominent. The queen even invited him to her own personal banquet. No one but the king himself shared such honor! Haman rushed home to brag of all this to his friends and family.

His mood changed as he approached the king's gate. While everyone else had risen to honor him, one man didn't budge or even cower in Haman's presence. Despite the pressure from other royal officials, despite his impending fate doomed by Haman's edict, Mordecai remained unafraid and unwavering. He would not honor Haman.

Haman couldn't stand the thought of this one man's refusal to obey him. Like a bubble, the more an ego swells the more fragile it becomes. By this point, Haman's ego was so inflated—and fragile—that Mordecai's action drowned out the applause of the crowd.

Those who live like Haman, in deliberate pursuit of self-importance, will live perpetually on Haman's emotional roller coaster. Soaring high when honored, bottoming out when not, Haman and all those like him will forever be enslaved to the whims of others. They can never have the security of joy and peace that Jesus promises us in His kingdom.

Today's key verse assures us that the only way to secure one's life is to lose it. In part, this means giving up the desire for personal acclaim, something Haman couldn't bring himself to do. In God's kingdom, only one road leads to personal fulfillment, and that is the road of denying self and following Christ (Mt 16:24).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Beyond the sadness that funerals bring for the loved ones we've lost, they compel us to consider what will be said of us after we've died. Like Haman and Xerxes, will it be said that you lived for the kingdom of self, always striving for more and yet never satisfied? Or will your story, like Esther's, be told and retold as an example for generations to come? One kingdom will never be shaken, even by death itself (cf. He 12:28-note). How are you living for God's eternal kingdom?

Esther 5:11-14; 1Jn 2:15-17

After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin ... gives birth to death. - James 1:15note

TODAY IN THE WORD Some describe Wilt Chamberlain as the best basketball player to have ever played the game. Though he retired from the NBA in 1973, he still held the record for the most average points scored per game at the time of his death in 1999. His personal life wasn't as admirable. In his biography published in 1991, Chamberlain made scandalous boasts that he'd had tens of thousands of sexual partners. Chamberlain exemplifies what we learn from today's reading: boasting proves not so much what we have as what we desperately want.

Haman spent a great deal of time and effort boasting to his friends and family of his wealth, his virility, his power and prominence (Es 5:11). He added an important detail to his boasts, a chord of irony for all of us who know about Esther's plan. "I'm the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave!" (Es 5:12). His boasting proved the pride of his heart. He believed two things of himself: I deserve all that I have, and I deserve even more. How quickly boasting gave way to craving.

Haman admitted that he couldn't enjoy a single one of his boasts because of Mordecai. "All this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate" (Es 5:13). Haman was like the hungry man of 1John 2, boasting of all he had and craving what he had not. Haman, like Xerxes, pursued that which would forever elude him. Tragically, he couldn't see that sin is a tyrant; it always demands more of us, keeping our hearts restless and our souls starving.

Es 5:14 proves the destructive nature of sin as we see in today's key verse. Pride became boasting, because Haman couldn't stay silent about how great he was. Boasting produced cravings and desires, because Haman couldn't be satisfied until he had it all. Craving produced hatred, because Mordecai was the one man standing in Haman's way. And hatred produced plans for murder. How quickly "harmless" bragging gave way to great wickedness.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY In Matthew 5, Jesus described anger as murder and lust as adultery. Today we see another sin of the mind and heart, pride, at the root of Haman's sin. These aren't "small" sins simply because they might be less noticeable to others. They can be our greatest spiritual pitfalls, leading us into a progression of other sins. Take inventory of these three sins of the heart: pride, hatred, and lust. Where do you need to make confession to God? Take another step and confess to a brother or sister in Christ and ask for their prayer support in the battle against these sins (cf. James 5:16).

Esther 6:1-6

Before his downfall a man's heart is proud. - Proverbs 18:12

TODAY IN THE WORD If we're not paying careful attention as we're reading along in Esther, we may miss the time frame of this story. The past few significant events have all transpired in one jam-packed day—one of the most pivotal days in all of human history! The future of the Jewish people, from whom our Lord Jesus Christ would be born, hung in the balance.

Our reading today begins with two critical words: “that night” (Es 6:1). Let's review the events of this particular day. It was the day of Esther's extraordinary courage in approaching the king, the day she hosted the banquet for Haman and the king, the day Mordecai refused once again to honor Haman, the day of Haman's great boasts and terrific rage. The day ended with Haman's instructions for the construction of a gallows upon which he intended to hang Mordecai. This gallows was over seven stories tall—its exaggerated size rivaled the immensity of Haman's bruised ego.

As this day closed, the king couldn't sleep. He requested the book of the chronicles that enumerated all the details of his reign (Es 6:1). It's interesting that he thought that this bit of reading would surely put him right to sleep! That night, instead of dozing to the sleepy cadence of his servant's voice repeating his past exploits and kingdom life, the king grew alert. Ah yes—there had been an assassination plot ... and Bigthana and Teresh were duly hanged. But Mordecai? “What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this?” (Es 6:3).

Here the king learned of his oversight. For the man who'd saved his life, he'd done nothing. This evidently disturbed him. King Xerxes not only wanted loyalty—he demanded it! He executed those who betrayed him, inspiring fear in anyone still plotting treason. Just as he punished treason, he rewarded loyalty in order to ensure its multiplication.

“Who is in the court?” the king asked (Es 6:4). And one of the greatest ironies of the book of Esther surfaces in these next verses. “Haman is standing in the court” (Es 6:5). Note why Haman was there—to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai. But the man plotting Mordecai's death would unwittingly design his honor.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Today's key verse foreshadows Haman's fate and reminds us of how we suffer when we're proud. For example, pride destroys relationships. In our pride, we sever relationships by stubbornly refusing either to confess or to forgive. Humility, however, makes way for reconciliation because of its mercy. Humility is the exact opposite of stubbornness and self-justification. Are any of your relationships suffering because of your pride? Make an effort first to make restitution with that person and then with God (cf. Mt 5:23, 24)

Esther 6:6-11

The Lord watches over all who love him, but all the wicked the Lord will destroy. - Psalm 145:20 [note](#)

TODAY IN THE WORD Shopping malls welcome frenzied crowds in the month of December. Some come to shop; parents bring their children for a short visit on Santa's lap. The long lines snake around holiday displays to accommodate all the eager children who can't wait to tell Santa all they've been wishing for!

“What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?” (Es 6:6). Haman treated the question as if the king had just asked him to fill out his Christmas wish list. He hardly knew where to start! Just two days ago, we learned how Haman's vanity left him dissatisfied and craving more. His pride persuaded him to believe that he deserved more power, wealth, and public acclaim.

We might have guessed what his requests would be: “A royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head” (Es 6:8). So far, Haman had carefully chosen distinct symbols of power. Here Haman showed less interest in actually exerting power and greater interest in the trappings of power. The robe and the horse wouldn't really give him more authority in themselves, but they would elevate him to the image of royalty. If Haman couldn't be king, at least he could pretend for a moment.

But pretending to be king is only a thrill when there is an audience. So Haman added the final element to his wish list. “Let [the king's most noble princes] robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, ”“This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor' ” (Es 6:9). Haman was lost in the reverie of imagining himself in the middle of a Persian parade. The king interrupted his day-dream with some shocking news: “Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended” (Es 6:10).

Here we start the cycle of reversals in the book of Esther. What Haman imagined to be his good fortune was now the good fortune of his arch-enemy, Mordecai. His “Christmas list” had been delivered to the person whom he hated most.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY We're just beginning to see how God executes justice in the book of Esther. As we learned from the very beginning of our study (see Ps 145:20-[note](#)), God is just, punishing the wicked and rescuing the righteous. Sometimes we don't see this justice here and now. We can wonder why those choosing to disobey God seem prosperous and carefree. It can even cause us to question whether living for Christ is really worth it. Read Psalm 73:1-28-[note](#) as an encouragement to persevere in your faith and obedience.

Esther 6:12-14; Luke 14:7-11

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled. - Luke 14:11

TODAY IN THE WORD Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf, otherwise known as “Baghdad Bob,” served as Iraq’s Minister of Information as the coalition forces began attacking Iraq in early 2003. He boasted about Iraq’s great military prowess. “[The Americans] can penetrate our borders but they cannot reach Baghdad. They will try to pull our army and troops out but we are well aware of their plans and they will fail.” How quickly his public boasts gave way to humiliation.

Haman, boasting to friends and family just days earlier about his success (Es 5:9) now faced public embarrassment. Mordecai, not Haman, received all the honor Haman had proposed to the king. At first, the text doesn't provide a description of Haman's mortification. But we can imagine Haman's sullen expression when robing Mordecai with the royal robe and the acrimony in his voice when calling out, “This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor” (Es 6:9). Haman dutifully carried out the king's instructions, and it's only afterwards that we glimpse his humiliation.

In Es 6:12, Haman rushed home, “his head covered in grief.” His grief contrasts with Mordecai's earlier grief. In the early verses of chapter four, Mordecai grieved the king's murderous edict. His grief resulted from the evil intentions of another. Haman's grief, on the other hand, has been self-inflicted. His pride, his boasting, and his vanity have all resulted in myopic vision. He never dreamed that the king would want to honor anyone other than him. This led him to concoct a grandiose vision of glory for himself—only to see the honor and accolades go to Mordecai. And indeed, no pity would be shown to Haman.

The prediction made in Es 6:13 regarding Haman's misfortune proves the truth of today's key verse. “You will surely come to ruin!” they announce. Haman's wife and advisers offered no words of solace to Haman, foretelling instead his demise. And this follows exactly the law of the kingdom of God, about which Jesus teaches in our reading from the Gospel of Luke.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Jesus taught His followers not to assume places of honor, lest they be humiliated. Rather He instructed them to “take the lowest place” (Luke 14:10). To exalt ourselves, as Haman did, will bring humiliation. To humble ourselves, as Mordecai did, elevates us.

Esther 7:1-8; He 10:19-36

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith. - Hebrews 10:22^{note}

TODAY IN THE WORD Frequently people are fascinated by the facial expressions of an accused person when the final verdict is read. On fictional television shows or publicized trials, the cameras focus on faces of the defendants, hoping to capture their reaction to hearing the sentence that determines their future.

Today's reading provides one final look at Haman before the verdict of his guilt was read. Esther hosted a second banquet for the king and begged that he spare her life and the lives of the Jewish people (Es 7:3). The king didn't waste words reassuring her of rescue, but it was implicit in his outburst of anger. “Where is the man who has dared to do such a thing?” (Es 7:5).

At last, Haman was exposed for his “vile” intentions and character (Es 7:6). From our first glimpses of him in chapter three, Haman plotted evil with impunity. In these final moments, Haman was in danger of losing everything. All of his boasts of family, wealth, virility, and power promised to evaporate in a single moment should the king choose to end his life. In these last desperate moments, this man starkly depicted the consequences of evil choices.

He was hopelessly guilty. He could make no appeal or justification for his crime. He chose his only recourse: to beg for mercy! This merciless man who had carelessly plotted the annihilation of the Jewish race was reduced to a sniveling heap beside Queen Esther. He could not hope for mercy from King Xerxes. The king's anger, well-renowned after Queen Vashti's banishment, hardly seems subdued in this scene (Es 7:7,8).

In contrast to our passage from Esther that illuminates the plight of the evildoer, our text from Hebrews highlights the blessings of those in Christ. Like Haman we were once guilty. We had no appeal and no justification for our offense against God. But here the stories diverge. Though we were once guilty, through Christ's blood, we were cleansed from a “guilty conscience.” We have the

privilege of drawing near to God, rather than shrinking back in fear. Most importantly, our position in Christ promises the reward of eternal life (He 10:35, 36-note).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Today's readings illustrate the crucial choice each of us must make in our lifetime, a choice not only about life but also about death. If we live like Haman, we will face our death as Haman did, in fear and desperation, knowing that all we've sought to build we will lose. But if we live lives of faith in God, we will fear neither death nor judgment. Can we look forward to something greater in the life to come? Haman put self on the throne. Did you put Christ on the throne of your life?

Esther 7:1-10; 8:1-8; 9:1-10

TODAY IN THE WORD - Lucie Lipas of the Czech Republic is a good example. While in high school, she felt God calling her to become a Christian counselor. She started looking for good Bible colleges, and a missionary recommended Moody. Lucie applied and was accepted, but where would the money come from? Her family prayed for guidance.

Meanwhile, a friend of the Institute had donated funds specifically for students such as Lucie. That special gift answered her family's prayers! Working behind the scenes, God had orchestrated circumstances perfectly.

Even when we can't see the big picture, we know that God in His sovereignty is always working behind the scenes. Esther's story is another example of this truth. This dramatic book of the Bible, famous for its omission of the name of God, unfolds the story of a woman who not only finished well herself, but also helped to save her people in the process.

Esther and Mordecai were Jewish exiles in Persia under King Xerxes. Esther's beauty won her a place in the royal harem, where her nationality was apparently not known. She quickly came into favor with the king, putting her into position to counter the plot of the Jews' evil enemy, Haman, to destroy God's people.

We don't have space here to recount the entire intrigue. Since our focus is on ending well, we bring your attention especially to the demise of Haman, Esther's plea for a new decree allowing the Jews to defend themselves, and the success of that plan.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY - Perhaps nothing we will be called upon to do will be as dramatic as Esther's nation-saving act of courage. But that's alright because the size of our responsibility is God's concern, not ours. Where has God placed you at home, at work, at church, and in your neighborhood? Is He preparing you for a new or an expanded sphere of influence for Him in 1997? Or perhaps He wants the kind of day-to-day faithfulness that may be less spectacular but that requires the same spiritual fortitude.

Esther 7:8-10, 8:1, 2

The Lord tears down the proud man's house. - Proverbs 15:25

TODAY IN THE WORD Bastille Day commemorates July 14, 1789, the beginning of the French Revolution. Until the storming of the Bastille, Louis XVI and the nobility enjoyed luxurious living at the price of the peasants' hard labor in the fields. The French Revolution was a bloody era that reversed the fortunes of nobles and peasants.

Today's reading records one of the greatest reversals of fortune in all the Bible. Haman lost everything. However, it's not only that he lost all that he's worked to gain, but he lost it to his arch-enemy, Mordecai. At every turn, Haman endeavored to destroy Mordecai and even his entire race. He even went to the extravagant lengths of having a gallows built for Mordecai's execution.

That death sentence was served to Haman in today's passage (Es 7:9, 10). Haman would be hung on the very gallows built and designed by his own hands! Not only would Mordecai be spared his life, he would assume Haman's governmental position. The signet ring, a sign of absolute power, once fatefully in the hands of Haman (Es 3:10), would now be worn by Mordecai. And for final effect, Mordecai was rewarded with Haman's wealth and estate (Es 8:2). No doubt the Lord had torn down the house of this proud man.

What played out here on this historical Persian stage prefigures the heavenly drama soon to be completely fulfilled at Christ's return. Everything that has happened so far in Esther reminds us of the realities of God's kingdom. Things aren't always what they seem. At the beginning of Esther, evil seemed to be prevailing. Mordecai and his people faced unjust suffering at the hands of evildoers. Haman prospered, while Mordecai and the Jews grieved the prospect of death. The "seen" realities of that situation would have convinced anyone that the Jews were sitting ducks for a tragic fate.

While this was the "seen" reality, an unseen reality prevailed. It's the reality of God at work in any and every situation, no matter how bleak. It's the reality of God keeping His promises to His people. It's the reality of vindication for the righteous and punishment for the wicked. It's the reality of faith.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY - Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

Mordecai provides a great example of faith. He didn't focus on the problem but believed in God's goodness. Here is one sure-fire way to increase your faith: spend time studying Scripture. For example, find passages describing what heavenly rewards are promised for those in Christ. This will not only increase your faith but your devotion to living for God's kingdom.

Esther 8:3-14

The Lord is a God of justice. - Isaiah 30:18

TODAY IN THE WORD "Justice is a certain rectitude of mind, whereby a man does what he ought to do in the circumstances confronting him," said Thomas Aquinas. The story of Esther teaches us much about God's justice. We worship a God who is just, who always chooses the right and reasonable action in every circumstance. Today's reading illuminates this for us.

The first example comes through contrast. In Es 8:5 through Es 8:8, King Xerxes corrected the unjust edict written earlier for the destruction of the Jews. This action was unreasonable and unfair; it was unjust. Accordingly, he overrode it with a new edict. What a sobering look at human justice! Unlike God's perfect justice, human justice is subject to error. It usually needs corrective measures for its oversights and excesses. God, however, will never have to override Himself or retract a decision. "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind" (Nu. 23:19). While humans might have 20/20 vision in hindsight, even foresight is always 20/20 with God.

Another example begins with Es 8:11. Here we discover that God is just because He never executes a punishment that is too harsh or unfair. Some find these next two chapters of Esther difficult to understand. How is it that God could permit His people to kill their enemies? It's clear, however, that God didn't intend for the Jews to take excessive vengeance upon their enemies. Their motive was not to be one of ruthless vengeance but of self-defense (Es 8:11). They were strictly confined to "protecting" themselves.

A final example demonstrates God's justice accompanied by God's mercy through the timing of God's rescue. Es 8:9 tells us that the second edict was written on the twenty-third day of the third month. Remembering back to the first edict, which was written on the thirteenth day of the first month (cf. Es 3:12), we see that only two months have elapsed between Haman's murderous plot and God's rescue. This was a full nine months before the date of destruction set by Haman was scheduled to take place (cf. Es 3:13). God demonstrated not only His justice but also His great mercy.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Have you at times questioned God's justice? Do you feel that your circumstances are too hard? Do you question whether God is demanding unreasonable things from you? Even when experience seems to contradict your belief, God is just ... and merciful! Hebrews 12:6 provides hope for times of suffering and discouragement: "The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Read Hebrews 12:1-11 to learn more about God's just and merciful treatment of His children.

Esther 8:15-17

The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor. - Proverbs 15:33

TODAY IN THE WORD J. R. R. Tolkien, a Christian and author of the Lord of the Rings trilogy, never defended his stories as biblical allegory. Instead, they were what he called "true myth." By this, he was emphasizing the mythological nature of the plot and characters and the "truth" of the themes. One such theme in the Lord of the Rings is the triumph of good over evil, a clearly Christian idea.

This theme resounds in the final chapters of Esther, helping us to see the place of this book in the canon of Scripture. Early on, we noted that many people question the relevance of Esther. Why would a book that never explicitly mentions God be included in the Bible? Now we begin to see that its themes of the triumph of good and the blessings of obedience are essential for strengthening our Christian devotion.

Today's key verse reiterates this theme and provides a framework for today's reading. This proverb compares two synonymous phrases to say that the fear of the Lord is, in essence, humility. Just as the fear of the Lord teaches wisdom, it also assures honor.

It's helpful to think back to the stark contrast between the two characters, Haman and Mordecai. Haman followed the road of foolishness, not the path of wisdom. He lived for himself, pursuing his pleasures and ambitions. He was greedy for his own honor. In the end, all that he had desperately wanted and aspired to was taken from him. Mordecai, on the other hand, went the way of wisdom. He feared the Lord with humility and faith. He did not seek his own honor. He was never climbing any ladders of personal fame or prominence. And look at his reward in today's reading!

Mordecai was dressed like the king. He was wearing "royal garments," a "crown of gold," and a "purple robe" (Es 8:15). This regal picture of Mordecai echoed Haman's earlier ambitions for his own personal glory (cf. Es 6:7-9). And now Mordecai enjoyed not only

the king's favor but also the favor of the entire kingdom. Ultimately, however, the favor Mordecai received served to glorify God, causing many to become "Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them" (Es 8:17).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Read Acts 5:12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and note the similarities between the Jews in Esther's day and the early Christian church in Acts. Both groups inspired others to put their faith in God. We've already learned that we will suffer for Christ and His kingdom. Here we learn that at times we will be honored for our Christian devotion and lead others to God! How many people have seen God's work in your life and placed their trust in Christ? Pray for God's glory to be seen in you, as well as the boldness to declare His glory.

Esther 9:1-16; Ro 12:17-21

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath. - Ro 12:19-note

TODAY IN THE WORD "The Bible is such a book of lies and contradictions there is no knowing which part to believe or whether any," accused Thomas Paine, political pamphleteer during the American Revolution. He wasn't the first to criticize the reliability of the Bible, nor will he be the last. Today's two readings are certainly two difficult passages to reconcile. But this doesn't mean that the Bible contradicts itself.

In the reading from Esther, we see the Jews taking vengeance on their enemies and killing them. In Susa, the killings numbered to little more than five hundred men (Es 9:6). On the following day, another three hundred men were killed (Es 9:15). Yet in the rest of the provinces, the numbers are more staggering: 75,00 men die at the hands of God's people.

This seems to contradict all we as New Testament believers understand about retribution. Ro 12:17-note couldn't be clearer: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil." Ro 12:19-note continues, "Do not take revenge." Were the Jews disobedient to God's law? Had Mordecai and Esther been extreme in proposing this bloody plan (cf. Es 8:8)?

What is clear from both passages and from the entire biblical testimony is the reality of God's wrath and judgment. In the Old Testament, the Jews were instructed to kill their enemies as a way of executing God's wrath (cf. 1Sa 15:8, 9, 10, 11). Today's reading from Esther complies with Old Testament law (cf. Ex 21:23, 24, 25). The language of this passage clearly states that the killings that took place were not random. They targeted the enemies of the Jews (Es 9:2, 5, 14). The Jews took up arms, not to satisfy their own bloodthirst, but to defend themselves. They were not motivated by greed because they specifically did not lay hands on the plunder of their enemies (Es 9:10, 15, 16). These killings were a righteous expression of the wrath of God against His enemies.

Jesus redefined our position towards our enemies: love them and don't seek revenge (cf. Mt 5:38, 39-note, Mt 5:40, 41, 42-note). This doesn't mean that God no longer executes His wrath against the evildoer. Ro 12:19 promises that God Himself will repay the wicked their due. What initially might have appeared to be a contradiction is now the fullest picture of how God treats sin and the unrepentant sinner. Evil will not be ignored! Injustice will never escape God's judgment.

This can certainly inspire our prayers today for the cruelties and oppression we see around us. To be like God means to despise such injustice and to hope prayerfully and expectantly for its end. Pray today for God to correct an injustice you see continuing in the world, such as racism and materialism.

Esther 9:17-23; Ps 78:1-39-note

They would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands. - Psalm 78:7

TODAY IN THE WORD Memorial Day was first observed on May 30, 1868, as a day to commemorate the sacrifices of American soldiers. General John Logan, national commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, declared at that time the importance of such days of national remembrance: "Let ... no ravages of time testify to the present or to the coming generations that we have forgotten as a people the cost of a free and undivided republic."

Mordecai's commemoration of the festival of Purim provided a means for the Jewish people to remember their deliverance. He deliberately prescribed that this festival would be celebrated annually (Es 9:21). Year after year, generation after generation, the story would be retold of God's miraculous rescue of His people.

The festival would include terrific celebration. The Jews would feast and give gifts to one another and the poor as expressions of joy (Es 9:22). This wasn't to become a solemn celebration confined to the quiet halls of the temple. Purim was sure to become one of the favorite festivals of the Jewish children for its gaiety and gifts! The Jews would dance and sing and eat as they remembered God's amazing love and power.

This holiday provided a safeguard for God's people against the perils of spiritual forgetfulness. Psalm 78 provides a haunting look at the dangers of forgetting God's power and provision. Today's verse teaches that remembering what God has done in the past helps us to trust and obey for the future. Sadly, the Israelites after the Exodus fell into sinful spiritual amnesia. They forgot God's power displayed in the ten Egyptian plagues (Ps 78:11). They forgot God's miraculous parting of the Red Sea (Ps 78:13). They didn't remember His guidance by the pillars of cloud and fire (Ps 78:14). Nor did they recall His provision of water from rocks and bread from heaven (Ps 78:15, 24).

This forgetfulness led them into rebellion and disobedience (Ps 78:9, 10, 11). They cowered at the borders of Canaan, fearing that they could not take the Promised Land (cf. Nu 14). If only they had remembered God's power from the past, they may have had the courage they needed!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Decide today how you can protect yourself from spiritual amnesia. Maybe you'll begin a journal in which you'll record times when you've personally seen God's miraculous power and love. Maybe you'll commemorate days throughout the year to remember specific times of God's deliverance and help. Let these be holidays of great celebration and most importantly, of a time to retell the story of God's working. As Psalm 78:4 declares, "We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord."

Esther 9:24-32

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord. - Proverbs 16:33

TODAY IN THE WORD The author of the book of Esther cleverly uses many literary devices to emphasize certain themes and ideas in the book. Today we see the use of irony, a word used to convey a meaning opposite to its literal sense. Its impact can be either humor or sarcasm.

Our reading from chapter nine teaches us the origin of the word Purim, the name given to the festival instituted by Mordecai and Esther. Es 9:24 tells us pur means "lot." This takes us back to the ominous scene of Esther 3:7: "In the twelfth year of King Xerxes ... they cast the pur in the presence of Haman to select a day and month [for the destruction of the Jews]." Casting lots was a practice used for decision-making. It was meant to be as random and impartial as rolling dice. In the scene from chapter three, the lot was cast for the fate of the Jews. The date of their destruction was fixed, by chance so it seemed.

But was this really the story of random happenings or chance coincidences as the word, lot, might suggest? Or was this in fact a story of God's providence and sovereignty? The evidence stacks up in favor of the latter, and the name, Purim, therefore, serves a note of irony.

The summary provided in Es 9:24, 25 of today's reading hardly does justice to the details of the story. No mention is made of Mordecai or Esther's heroism and courage. Instead, we have only the mention of Haman and King Xerxes. First, Haman, "the enemy of all the Jews," who, with all his wits and wealth, plotted the death of the Jews (Es 9:24). Despite his willful and purposeful scheming, he did not succeed. Next mentioned is King Xerxes, who issued written orders against Haman, (Es 9:25). But he hardly deserved the real credit for the rescue of the Jews.

Because the author chooses to emphasize the two minor characters and de-emphasize the two major characters, our focus now rests securely on God. His invisible hand was unmistakable throughout the story. Just as our key verse suggests, lots may be cast, the rudder of human will may be determined, but nothing can keep God from doing as He chooses.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY The Bible is obviously filled with stories of God's heroes, people like Moses and Daniel and Esther and Paul. But the emphasis in the Bible remains upon God. So should it be in our lives today. God works through His people, yes—but we do well to remember they are simply human. The glory rests with God. Pray for the people through whom you see God working, thanking God for their devotion and influence. But don't neglect to glorify God for what is ultimately His work!

Esther 10:1-3 Ps 39:4-7

Show me, O Lord, my life's end. - Psalm 39:4 [note](#)

TODAY IN THE WORD A look at Time's most important people of the twentieth century produces a few not-so-common names: Emmeline Pankhurst, Leo Baekeland, and Louis B. Mayer. Only the Trivial Pursuit buffs are likely to know that Pankhurst was responsible for women's suffrage in England, Baekeland for designing the first plastic, and Mayer for founding MGM. Their accomplishments, while noteworthy, don't guarantee that their names have an indelible place in our memories.

And so it is with human greatness—quite often limited to an era and then left at the mercy of the historians. King Xerxes and Mordecai are no exceptions to this rule. King Xerxes was the greatest man of his time, ruler of the world's largest empire. He raised

extravagant wealth for himself and the kingdom (Es 10:1) and his “power and might” were undisputed in his time. Mordecai enjoyed the power and prominence of being his right-hand man. He was esteemed by his people and held in high regard (Es 10: 3). The book of Esther doesn’t even claim to have recorded all their acts of greatness, so notably vast they seemed. But other world leaders and advisers have come along with greater, more impressive kingdoms and exploits.

Their moment of glory lasted but for a fleeting moment, fulfilling what the psalmist noticed: “Each man’s life is but a breath” (Ps 39:5NIV-note). It can be dismal to look at life in this way. In fact, each of us fears the brevity of our lives, wondering if we’re the fool who “bustles about, but only in vain; [who] heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it” (Ps 39:6NIV-note). To acknowledge our lives as but a blip on the screen of human history sobers us to ask one question: will I have lived a life of purpose?

The only purposes that stand eternal are God’s purposes. The only kingdom to last forever is God’s kingdom. The only rewards to outlast our life here on earth are heavenly ones. All of this the psalmist knew, so he makes his declaration clear: “But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you” (Ps 39:7NIV-note).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY One man conquered death along with its curse of personal irrelevance—Jesus Christ. The apostle John put it this way: “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written” (Jn 21:25). Have you trusted Him to save you from your sins and eternal death? Have you surrendered your life to living for His kingdom? It’s the most important decision that you could ever make.

DEVOTIONAL C H Spurgeon Morning and Evening

Esther 10:3 (Morning and evening)

“Seeking the wealth of his people.” — Esther 10:3

Mordecai was a true patriot, and therefore, being exalted to the highest position under Ahasuerus, he used his eminence to promote the prosperity of Israel. In this he was a type of Jesus, who, upon his throne of glory, seeks not his own, but spends his power for his people. It were well if every Christian would be a Mordecai to the church, striving according to his ability for its prosperity. Some are placed in stations of affluence and influence, let them honour their Lord in the high places of the earth, and testify for Jesus before great men. Others have what is far better, namely, close fellowship with the King of kings, let them be sure to plead daily for the weak of the Lord’s people, the doubting, the tempted, and the comfortless. It will redound to their honour if they make much intercession for those who are in darkness and dare not draw nigh unto the mercy seat. Instructed believers may serve their Master greatly if they lay out their talents for the general good, and impart their wealth of heavenly learning to others, by teaching them the things of God. The very least in our Israel may at least seek the welfare of his people; and his desire, if he can give no more, shall be acceptable. It is at once the most Christlike and the most happy course for a believer to cease from living to himself. He who blesses others cannot fail to be blessed himself. On the other hand, to seek our own personal greatness is a wicked and unhappy plan of life, its way will be grievous and its end will be fatal.

Here is the place to ask thee, my friend, whether thou art to the best of thy power seeking the wealth of the church in thy neighbourhood? I trust thou art not doing it mischief by bitterness and scandal, nor weakening it by thy neglect. Friend, unite with the Lord’s poor, bear their cross, do them all the good thou canst, and thou shalt not miss thy reward.

J R Miller Devotionals

Haman’s Plot Against the Jews

Esther 3 and 4

The Book of Esther opens a window into Oriental life. It shows us also something of the sadness and debasement of woman’s condition in those days. At first thought, Esther seems to have had an enviable experience in being chosen because of her beauty, to be the queen of Xerxes. But when we understand better what her position really was, we see that she was not to be envied—but pitied rather. Esther’s story in the light of Christianity, is a sad one. Nor can we hold her up as an ideal woman. Yet there is value in

the study of her story, as it shows by contrast—what Christianity has done for woman.

The book in its introduction tells the story of the deposing of Vashti, the former queen. Our sympathies are with the wronged queen. We can have only condemnation and contempt for the heathen king. We learn also how it was undertaken to find another beautiful woman to take Vashti's place. In all the provinces of the kingdom the fairest virgin was sought for the king. Esther appeared to win a great prize—but no lowly Christian girl today, would want to exchange places with her.

Mordecai is the real hero of the Book of Esther and the deliverer of the Jews. Not much is told of him. He was of the tribe of Benjamin. He was a captive and lived in Shushan, or Susa, the Persian capital. Esther had been brought up by Mordecai as his own child. Yet Esther was forbidden to reveal in the palace either her relation to Mordecai or her nationality. Mordecai was in close communication with the palace. He discovered a plot against the king and defeated it, his name being recorded in the chronicles.

We do not know what Haman had done to win the king's favor. He was rich, and possibly had been liberal with his gifts to the king. For some reason, at least, the king wished Haman honored, and wherever he went every one bowed down to him—everybody but one man. Mordecai did no reverence to the proud official. Mordecai was a Jew—and Haman was an Amakelite; hence probably the bitter enmity between these two men. All the attendants and courtiers did honor to the grand official as he passed backward and forward—all except this Jew, who refused to bend the knee to him. Haman, writhing under the insult continually repeated, determined upon revenge and conspired to kill not Mordecai only—but all the Jews in the realm. He obtained the king's signature to the decree, and it was promulgated and the time fixed for the extermination of the hated race. Mordecai sent to Esther a copy of the edict, informing her of the plot, and charged her to go in unto the king and plead for her people.

Esther reminded Mordecai at once of the difficulties in the way. She referred to the custom observed in such matters. "All the king's servants ... do know, that whoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law for him, that he be put to death." The only people admitted to the king were those for whom he himself sent, and Esther had not been invited. "I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days." The fact that she had not been invited to come for so long a time, was disheartening. "There must be some reason for it," she thought. Esther would better not have stopped at all to think about these difficulties in the way. Considering the perils in our way—is apt to make us grow faint-hearted. Ofttimes, as it proved in Esther's case, the perils will vanish if we go forward.

Mordecai was not disposed to release Esther from her obligation. So he sent a messenger reminding her that her own life was in bond in this matter. "Think not with yourself that you shall escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews." She might meet death if she ventured into the king's presence; certainly she would meet death if she sat still where she was and did nothing. She was one of those upon whom the sentence had been pronounced in the king's decree, and even the palace and the royal robes she wore, would not protect her. Many people hesitate to come to Christ. They fear He will not receive them. They think it will be hard to live a Christian life. They count the crosses, the self-denials, the duties, and the long way of struggle and battle. But suppose they do not come to Christ at all—what then? Is there no danger in staying away? If you sit still where you are, will you be saved?

Sometimes silence is very costly. Often, no doubt, silence is better than speech. The old proverb says that while speech is silver, silence is golden. Many times we will sin—if we speak. But here is one time when it was a sin not to speak. So in every life there are times when to be silent—is to fail in duty. We are to speak out on all occasions when the glory of Christ requires it. We should never be afraid to speak a word of warning to one who is in danger. We should never hesitate to speak boldly in confession of Christ, when all about us are Christ's enemies. We have many cautions about watching our speech and withholding words that are not good—but we must beware of silence about the eternal things. We scarcely ever lack words when the themes are light and trivial; let us not fail amid the light and trivial talk to speak earnest words which shall not be forgotten.

Mordecai reminded Esther further that she was not God's last resort. "If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" If one messenger proves unworthy of the trust reposed in him, another is found, and the purpose moves on to its fulfillment—but he who has faltered is trodden down by the marching hosts behind him. The only safe way in life's thronging field—is straight on in the path of duty. No danger of the battle is so great as the danger of halting and turning back. No duty, however hard, should be feared half so much—as failure in the duty. We should never shrink half so much from responsibility which seems too great for us as from the shirking of the responsibility. In the end it is always easier and infinitely safer to do our duty, whatever the cost—than not to do it. God can get along without us—but we cannot get along without Him, and to fall out of the line in life's crowded pathway, is to lose everything. To neglect opportunities, is to throw away honors and crowns.

Mordecai went a step farther and reminded Esther that probably she had been born and raised up for this very task. "Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" Every one is born for something, some particular duty or task. Someone speaks of Stephen as having been born and trained that he might make one speech of thirty minutes in length. God has His people ready in their place when He wants to use them. If we are true to God, doing His will day by day—we are always in the place where He wants us, and wherever we are—He has some work for us to do. When we find ourselves in the presence of any

human need or sorrow, we may say, "God sent me here just now to bring relief or to give help or comfort to this person."

We sometimes wonder at the strange ways of Providence, by which we are carried into this place or that. Is there not a key here to this mystery? It certainly was a strange Providence that led Esther, the lowly, simple-hearted maiden, into the palace of the great Xerxes to be his queen—but there was a divine purpose in it. She was placed there—because she would be needed there by and by. When God by some strange providence brings us into peculiar circumstances or associations, it is because there will be some time a need for us just there.

At last Esther rose to the call of duty. She determined to go into the king's presence. "So will I go in unto the king—and if I perish, I perish!" She took the risk. There are times when the best thing we can do with our life—is to give it up. There are times when to save one's life—is to lose it, when the only way to save it—is to sacrifice it. Life that is saved by shrinking from duty—is not worth saving!

Esther 4:8-10

We are apt to overlook the minor actors in Scripture stories—in our absorbed interest in the prominent ones. Yet oftentimes these lesser people are just as important in their own place, and their service is just as essential to the final success of the whole—as the greater ones.

The little girl in the story of Naaman the leper, is scarcely seen in the splendors of the Syrian court; but without her part, we would never have had the story at all.

The young lad with the basket, is hardly thought of when we read the account of the miracle; but they were his loaves with which the Master fed all those hungry thousands that day on the green grass.

The smallest links in a chain—are oftentimes quite as important as the greatest links.

Hathach was one of these obscure characters. But his part was by no means unimportant. Without his being a trustworthy messenger, Mordecai's communication with Esther would have been impossible.

If we cannot do brave things like Esther, nor give wise counsels like Mordecai, we may at least be useful, as Hathach was, in faithful service. And perhaps our lowly part may some day prove to have been as essential—as the great deeds which all men praise. We may at least help some others in doing the great things that they are set to do in this world.

Esther 4:14

"If you keep quiet at a time like this ... you and your relatives will die. What's more, who can say but that you have been elevated to the palace for just such a time as this?" Esther 4:14

The only safe way in life's thronging field—is straight on in the path of duty. He who falters and hesitates even for one instant, is trodden down by the marching hosts behind him. No danger of the battle is so great—as that of halting and trying to turn backward.

The same is true in all the paths of life. No duty, however hard and perilous, should be feared one-half so much as failure in the duty. People sometimes shrink from responsibility, saying they dare not accept it because it is so great. But in shrinking from duty—they are really encountering a far more serious condition than that which they evade. It is a great deal easier to do that which God gives us to do, no matter how hard it is—than to face the responsibility of not doing it. We have abundant assurance that we shall receive all the strength we need to perform any duty God allots to us; but if we fall out of the line of obedience, and refuse to do anything which we ought to do, we find ourselves at once out of harmony with God's law and God's providence, and cannot escape the consequences of our failure.

So it is always in the end easier and infinitely safer to do our duty, whatever it may involve of cost or peril, than not to do it. To drop out of the ranks in life's crowded pathway—is to lose all. To neglect opportunities, is to throw away honors and crowns.

Esther 4:14.

"If you keep quiet at a time like this ... you and your relatives will die! What's more, who can say but that you have been elevated to the palace for just such a time as this?" Esther 4:14

Often we sin by speaking, and do incalculable harm with our words. But there are times when it is a sinnot to speak—when to be silent is to fail in duty. We are not to speak out the wrong thoughts that may be in our heart—but the good thoughts and feelings which burn within us it is usually our duty to utter. We should never hesitate to speak out boldly in confession of Christ, when his honor is assailed by his enemies. To walk with an impenitent friend day after day and year after year, in close association with him, and never to speak a word to him about his spiritual life—is to commit a grievous sin against him.

We have many cautions about watching our speech, and withholding words that are not good; but we need to beware also lest we fail to speak the words we ought to speak. Especially should we beware of silence about spiritual and eternal things. God gives to each of us a message—a gospel message to others—and we dare not fail to deliver it. We scarcely ever lack words when the themes are trivial; but amid the trivial talk, let us not fail to speak some word which shall not be forgotten.

Esther 4:14

"Perhaps you have come to royal position—for such a time as this!" Esther 4:14

One reason Esther was in the palace at this time as queen, was for this very mission—to save her people by interceding for them. She was not there by accident. We know the singular providences by which she came to her circumstances.

We live under the same providence, and nothing is 'accidental' in any of the circumstances of our lives. If we are true to God, doing His will day by day, we are always in the place where He wants us to be; and wherever we are—He has something for us to do there. Each day God sets our work for us. When we find ourselves in the presence of any human need or sorrow, we should say, "Perhaps God sent me here just now—to bring relief or to give help or comfort." Sometimes we wonder at the strange ways of God's providence, by which we are carried into this place or that circumstance; is there not a 'key' to this mystery?

It certainly was a strange providence that led Esther—the lowly, simple-hearted Jewish maiden, into the palace of the great Xerxes to be his queen; but there was a divine purpose in it. She was sent there—because she would be needed there by and by.

Likewise, when God, by some strange providence, brings us into peculiar circumstances or associations, it is because at some time there will be need for us there. We must be careful that we do always the thing, we find there to do.

Esther Pleading for Her People

Esther 8

There was great sorrow everywhere among the Jews. Mordecai rent his clothes and sat in the king's gate, clothed with sackcloth. He sent word to Esther, imploring her to go to the king and plead for her people. The story of her venturing is familiar to all. Her plea with the king was successful. Haman was made very happy by being present by invitation at Esther's first banquet, and went home exultant. That night the carpenters were busy erecting a gallows for Mordecai.

But the same night something else happened. The king could not sleep, and the chronicles of his reign were read to him. There the fact that the king owed his life to Mordecai was recorded, and the further fact that Mordecai's deed had not been publicly recognized. The picture of Haman conducting his enemy through the streets next day as the man the king would honor, is most striking. The tide had turned.

Haman was dead on the gallows he had set up for Mordecai—but the decree for the destruction of all the Jews still stood, and the terrible day was drawing near, when all the Jews should be slain. Unless the decree could be reversed or recalled—they could not be saved. It was at the cost of life, that Esther brought before the king the request that the decree should be revoked.

We get here, a lesson on courage in duty. We learn also that we have a responsibility for others as well as for ourselves. Sometimes the best use one can make of his life—is to sacrifice it, to give it up, that others may be delivered or helped. This is so when the engineer by losing his own life can stop his train and save the lives of the passengers. We learn also that God puts us into places and relationships for the very purpose of meeting some need, performing some service. Esther had been brought into her place at this particular time—that she might do just this particular service for her people. Think what might have happened, if she had failed. Think what may happen—if we fail in any time of duty.

Esther, unaware of the provision of the Persian law that no decree can be recalled, implored the king to reverse the letters devised by Haman, and learned that the reversal was impossible. Far more broadly than we may think this is true in life. We cannot recall any word we have spoken. It may be a false word or an unkind word—a word which will blast and burn! Instantly after it has been spoken—we may wish it back and may rush after it and try to stop it—but there is no power in the world that can unsay the hurtful word—or blot it out of the world's life! It is so with our acts. A moment after we have done a wicked thing, we may bitterly repent it. We may be willing to give all we have in the world—to undo it, to make it as though it never had been. But in vain. A deed done takes its place in the universe as a fact—and never can be recalled.

"Don't write there, sir!" said a boy to a young man in the waiting-room of a railway station, as he saw him take off his ring and begin with the diamond in it to scratch some words on the mirror. "Don't write there, sir!" "Why not?" asked the young man. "Because you can't rub it out." The same is true of other things besides those words written upon glass with a diamond point. We should be sure before we speak a word or do an act, that it is right, that we shall never desire to have it recalled, for when once we have opened our lips or lifted our hand—there will be no unsaying or undoing possible.

Haman had built the gallows for Mordecai—but in the strange and swift movements of justice—Haman was hanged upon it himself! Injustice and wrong recoil upon the head of him whose heart plotted the evil. "Curses, like young chickens, come home to roost." "Ashes fly back in the face of him who throws them." "If one will sow thorns—he would better not walk barefoot." "Whoever digs a pit shall fall therein; and he that rolls a stone, it shall return upon him."

The decree of the king could not be recalled or reversed. But another decree was sent out which in a measure counteracted the former. We have seen that life's words and deeds are irrevocable. We cannot recall anything we have done, neither can we change it. But by other words and deeds, we may in some measure modify the effect of that which we cannot blot out. Paul could not undo his persecutions of Christians—but by a life of devotion to Christ's cause he could in a sense make reparation for the terrible harm he had done. We cannot undo the wrong things we have done—but we should strive to set in motion other influences which may at least compensate in some sense for the harm they have wrought. We cannot unsay the sharp word which wounds our friend's heart—but we can by kindness and loyal devotion—yet bring good and blessing to his life!