

Esther: For Such a Time as This

Esther's Intervention

Esther 5:1-14

Esther trusts the Lord and has counted the cost of going to the king, knowing it will likely result in her death (4:16). Now she makes her move, but it's not as swift as we might expect. Haman the murderous Agagite also takes action, scrambling to build the gallows for Mordecai. This story is a contrast of patient, humble confidence, and hasty pride, the way of life and the way of death.

Patient Humility

Esther fasts for three days before coming to the king (v1). She prepares spiritually and then physically, putting on her royal robe before approaching the king on his throne. The first hurdle is cleared as he holds out his golden scepter, which she is allowed to touch instead of losing her life (v2). The king offers her up to half of his kingdom, a hyperbolic gesture of generosity (v3). But instead of making a request of him, she invites him and Haman to a banquet, where again Xerxes renews the offer, emphasizing his will to deliver (vv4-6). She graciously asks to host one more time tomorrow, when she will indeed ask the king (vv7-8). Is Esther losing her nerve? No, her subtlety is as striking as her boldness. Although she is willing to die, she doesn't intend to. The law of the Persians was irreversible, so she needs the allegiance of the king to undo the decree. He will lose 10,000 talents of silver by not executing the Jews, and this is the first time she has seen in him over 30 days. This is an enormous check to write, so she wants to be sure there is money in the bank. It would have been much easier just to touch the scepter and blurt out her desires, but likely ineffective. "By long forbearance a ruler is persuaded, And a gentle tongue breaks a bone" (Prov. 25:15). She doesn't try to control him, but respectfully appeals: "If it pleases the king... If I have found favor...if it pleases the king to grant..." (vv4, 7; cf. 1 Pet. 3:1-5). Esther has every right and obligation to petition the king, but if she doesn't succeed, it makes no difference. She needs him not only to agree, but to act. We also have to wisely love and bless others in order to win them to the truth. God's deliverance often begins on the third day (Gen. 22:4, 31:22; Jonah 1:17; Hos. 6:2).

Hasty Pride

Haman leaves the banquet with a glad heart, full of himself, but he is broken by one straw (v9). He gathers his friends and wife Zeresh to tell them about his money, multitude of children, his promotion and position above all the other government appointees and bureaucrats (vv10-11). He has no idea that Esther is a Jew, so he's excited to be invited by her (v12). Haman's identity is so fragile that none of this means anything so long as Mordecai won't honor him (v13). Zeresh and his friends propose a 75-foot gallows be made for Mordecai to hang on, so Haman has it done (v14). Pride is a blinding sin that keeps us from understanding what is going on. A man can be sitting in a room full of treasure and be unable to see any of it because one thing is held close to his eyes. Haman has everything, but can't see anything. Life becomes not about all you have been given, but what you "deserve." It's ironic that pride focuses on

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strengthening and glorifying the self, and yet it leaves one utterly vulnerable. Haman defines himself by what he has accomplished, which is considerable, and yet it's meaningless because one Jew sits in the gate (v13). Whenever we define ourselves by what we have or what we've done, we're in a similar position of blindness, dissatisfaction, and fragility. His insecurity requires him to attack Mordecai, and the people around him are there to help (Prov. 13:20). Whereas Esther received challenging counsel from Mordecai to save others, Haman is flattered and spurred on to murder (cf. 1 Kgs. 21:1-16).

A Sure Foundation

Martin Luther describes sin as causing a person to curve inward on himself (*incurvatus in se*). Instead of receiving and enjoying gifts from God, we value them for their own sake and use them for our own selfish ends. Haman thinks he is pursuing fulfillment and happiness, but he is enslaved to his sinful desires and courting death. But Esther trusts God, and consequently does wonderful, creative and surprising things. She conforms herself the image of Christ, and is never more herself, wonderfully human. C.S. Lewis describes it this way: "The more we let God take us over, the more truly ourselves we become - because He made us. He invented us. He invented all the different people that you and I were intended to be. . . It is when I turn to Christ, when I give up myself to His personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own." All of our fears about losing who we are if we were to follow God turn out to be not only false, but the opposite of the truth.