

Esther Lesson 5 - Esther's Intervention

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT WEEK: Read Esther 6: 1-14

TEXT

Read Esther 5:1-14

PASSAGE SUMMARY

Esther entered the inner court of the king's palace and the king held out the golden scepter to welcome her into the court. He asked her what she would like (offering her half of his kingdom as a grand gesture) and she responded by inviting the king and Haman to a feast she was preparing for them. Haman is summoned to the feast and the king and Haman enjoy the feast that Esther prepared for them. After the feast the king asked Esther again what she would like and she responded by inviting the king and Haman to a feast she will have for them the next day.

Haman left the feast joyful and glad, but after seeing that Mordecai did not rise or tremble in front of him, he was filled with anger against Mordecai. Haman arrived at home and spoke with his friends and his wife Zeresh. He spoke about all his riches, his sons, his promotions, and how he had advanced above other officials. He spoke about the queen's feast and how he had been invited to another feast tomorrow. However, he said all this was worth nothing as long as Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate and not honoring him. Zeresh and Haman's friends encouraged him to build a gallows and tell the king to have Mordecai hanged on it in the morning. Haman felt this was a good idea so he had the gallows made.

STUDY

1. READ

- a. What risk was Esther taking by entering the inner court of the king uninvited? What is the king's response once he sees her?
- b. After the king offered Esther half his kingdom, how did she respond? What was her request?
- c. How did Haman respond after being invited to a second feast by Queen Esther? How did he respond after seeing Mordecai at the king's gate?

2. MEANING

- a. Why do you think Esther invited Haman to her feasts? What was she planning to do?
- b. Esther's subtlety in Chapter 5 ends up elevating her to be the dominant character throughout the rest of the book. Was she fearful of making her true request known to the king or was she being prudent by being slow and steady in making her request known?
- c. What do you think would have happened if Esther was more impulsive with her request to save the Jews in Chapter 5? How was God using Esther's subtlety and Mordecai's stubborn refusal to bow to bring about his will?

- d. Haman said all the riches, promotions, and splendor he accumulated is worth nothing if he sees Mordecai seated at the king's gate. Why do you think Haman is overreacting in this way?

3. APPLY

- a. In what ways was God using Esther and Mordecai to bring about his will? In what ways has the Lord used you in the development of his kingdom, maybe without you knowing it at the time?
- b. Esther demonstrated incredible faith and courage in this passage. When have you exercised faith and courage? When have you failed to do so? What was the difference?
- c. Haman said that all the things he had acquired were worthless to him if Mordecai did not honor him. In what ways does Haman's anger and overreaction expose his idols? About what things in your life might you similarly say "If I don't have *that* then everything else that I do have is worthless?"
- d. How does this passage lift your eyes to the greatness of Christ? How is Jesus the opposite of Haman and the king in this passage? How is Jesus even greater than Esther?

NOTES

vv 1-2 - After **three days of fasting**, Esther appears in the inner court. She stands in an area where Ahasuerus can see her. She is waiting to either be received by the king or rejected. If she is rejected she could be killed by the king. So this is a very tense moment in the story.

v 3 - King Ahasuerus offered Esther **half his kingdom**. However, Esther correctly recognized it as a traditional, grand gesture rather than an offer that the king would follow through on.

v 4 - Esther carefully and cautiously put together her plan before she was received favorably by the king. She purposely invited Haman to a **feast she prepared** to flatter him and to set him up for a major fall.

v 8 - Esther bided her time by offering a second **feast** to Haman and the king. This puts Haman further off his guard. It also serves the purpose of building suspense with the king and ensuring he is in the best mood possible before revealing her true desires.

vv 9-13 - In these verses we see the wild swings in Haman's emotions, going from **joy** and elation to **wrath** and anger. Despite his initial joy after being invited to the queen's banquet, he will not be able to enjoy the second feast until Mordecai is dealt with. Haman's idol is public recognition and knowing that his presence intimidates those he perceives as being in a lower position. Haman is trapped by these strong emotions and his idol, which ultimately leads to his undoing.

v 14 - The **gallows** described here would be at an enormous height (about 75 feet), which is symbolic of Haman's rage towards Mordecai. Its height was probably also intended to send a message to the people about dishonoring the king or his top officials. Haman is surrounded by "yes" people who assume (perhaps wrongly) that he has accumulated so much influence over the king that he can simply order the king to kill Mordecai. Chapter 5 concludes with a question of who will have more influence over the king: his queen or his top official. Haman is just as much under the influence of his wife and friends as Ahasuerus is under the influence of Haman and Esther. This potentially puts him in an extremely vulnerable position that ultimately brings about his demise.

COMMENTS

Esther starts this chapter by taking a very big risk. After three days of fasting she dressed in her royal robes and entered the inner chamber where the king could see her. Because he did not summon her, she knew that he could order her to be killed for seeking him out without being invited. But by this point, she had accepted her fate. Her fate was tied to those of her people and she figured it was worth the risk to see the king and make her request to save the Jewish people. At this point in the story it is worthwhile to contrast the dangers of approaching King Ahasuerus versus approaching Jesus. Esther exhibits great faith and courage in this passage, but we should recognize that Jesus was certain he would die when he approached the cross and carried out God's will. Esther's fate was not clear until the king extended his scepter. God extended the cross of Jesus Christ to the world so that all repentant sinners could live rather than die. Our God invites us to come into his presence often and openly welcomes our requests, without needing to be fearful or requiring subtlety. In contrast, Ahasuerus makes a choice whether he extends his golden scepter or not depending on his mood at any given time. Our king is always available with open arms to welcome us into his court as long as we believe in him. This is a king worthy of our honor, respect, and worship. There is no earthly king that comes close. Luckily for Esther, she found the king in an agreeable mood and he extended his scepter to her, thereby allowing her to live for now.

Throughout Chapter 5 we see Esther rise to become the dominant character in the book. She does this through simultaneous displays of courage and tact. It should be noted that there were great challenges with Esther's desire to reverse the edict against the Jewish people in the kingdom, so it might not be surprising that Esther did not immediately present her request to the king. She was requesting that the king reverse an irreversible law. If her request was granted, the king would lose a significant sum of money. By revealing her request, Esther would have to reveal her hidden Jewish identity, which could be perceived as a deception worthy of punishment. Most importantly though, it is unlikely that the king could grant her request without losing face since the original edict came from his office. Esther likely understood these risks as she put together a plan to discuss the edict with the king. The book does not reveal whether Esther was reluctant to reveal her request because she was fearful or if she was being tactful. However, since Esther was inviting Haman to her banquet to stroke his ego, it is likely that delaying her request was a key part of her plan. Esther was likely aware of Vashti's fate and likely knew that Vashti's impulsiveness to deny the king's request likely only enraged him. By delaying her request through offering two feasts to the king and Haman, she demonstrated meekness, which was an attribute the king valued in women. She showed him reverence and respect by saying "if I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king" (5:8) and by preparing feasts for him while delaying her request. All of this combined to raise her profile in the eyes of the king and also to disarm Haman, who was clearly flattered by her generosity. She set herself up to have her request be received by the king, while simultaneously setting Haman up for a fall. God worked behind the scenes throughout these conversations. God used Esther's position and requests to put the king, Haman, and Esther right where He wanted them to be.

It is useful to contrast Esther's meekness and subtlety with Haman's impulsiveness. Haman's idol was his fragile ego and his deep desire for public reverence. Esther stroked that idol by inviting Haman to her banquets, which put him in a joyful state. Mordecai's refusal to bow jabbed Haman's ego, even though there was no real change in Haman's status or power, yet Haman fell into a deep seething rage against Mordecai. Haman then puts words to his idolatry when he describes his feelings to his friends and his wife. Idolatry at its most extreme would cause us to establish absolutes such as all material possessions, family, or possessions are worthless if our ego is not stroked. Impulsiveness and idolatry are motifs pagan leaders often exhibit in the book of Esther (e.g., the king's response to Queen Vashti, Haman's edict against all Jewish people after being disrespected by Mordecai, and Haman's violent response to Mordecai after seeing him at the king's gate). In each case, God uses these overreactions by these pagan leaders, as well as Mordecai's stubbornness and Esther's subtlety, to bring about his will. The irony of the solution offered by Haman's wife and friends is that hanging Mordecai on the gallows would only feed his idolatry rather than directly addressing the underlying problem, his obsession with public recognition. When our own anger and emotions are out of proportion to the underlying offense, we should immediately ask ourselves whether there is an idol that is being tested by the offense. When we are depressed by minor superficial setbacks, that should be a signal that we have lost sight of God and his glorious promise of everlasting life.

References

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