

Let's Worship God

13th-18th August 2018

Esther



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Monday - Esther 5:5-8 - Déjà-vu

The Jews were staring down the barrel. They were living in a hostile land: despised by the powers that be, defenceless in the face of a cruel vendetta. The clock was ticking: if deliverance didn't come soon, God's covenant people would be wiped from the face of the earth. As time began to run, a hero stepped up. This hero would need every ounce of available courage. This hero would risk death at the hands of a merciless king by pleading for the future of the Jews. Failure wasn't an option. Failure meant certain destruction. I'm not talking about Esther by the way. History has an uncanny way of repeating itself, doesn't it? Almost 1000 years before Haman's holocaust, Moses was the Jews' only hope. He stood in the royal court and demanded that Pharaoh put a stop to the slaughter of God's people. Yet, that's where the similarities end. Moses was armed with the big guns: hail, frogs, and a river of blood. He could count on miraculous manifestations of divine power to strike fear into Egyptian hearts. Esther was seemingly on her own.

Does that explain her less confrontational, more careful approach? Does that explain why she invited the king to dinner rather than making an urgent plea? Perhaps. No doubt she would have loved to have had a few plagues at her disposal. But she didn't. Just because God worked one way in the past, it doesn't mean he can't work a different way in the present.

What can we do when we don't have miracles to make our case? How do we survive in offices where profit trumps integrity? How do we interact with children who have grown up and left the faith behind? How do we navigate the minefields we face in the classroom or football pitch or at family gatherings? How can our churches make an impact on the unbelieving world around? Esther shows us the way: act wisely and trust God to work in people's hearts. Miracles or not, God is still God.

Questions

1. Why might it have been smart for Esther to invite Ahasuerus to a feast rather than dropping her bombshell? Does this mean she wasn't trusting God?
2. Do you feel more like Moses or more like Esther? Why are the differences between the two so encouraging?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that God would help you as you interact with others. Pray that he would help you to speak wisely and that he would do the work within your hearers' hearts.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us; then over us would have gone the raging waters. Psalm 124:4-5

Praise: Psalm 49 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Esther

Tuesday - Esther 5:9-13 - What's Pulling Haman's Strings?

Poor Haman. Strange thing to say about a homicidal monster, I know. He was a pitiable man, wasn't he? He was prone to flailing around like a fish out of water, flopping from one extreme to another. At the start of v9, he couldn't be happier. By the end, he was burning with anger. Why?

It was all down to ego. Haman enjoyed power, but he enjoyed the trappings of power even more. He liked to be important; he loved to be seen as important. That's why he was so thrilled at the start of v9 - he, and he alone was invited to dinner with the King and Queen! Haman's greatness was put on display for everyone to see.

Until the bubble burst that is. Haman met the one man who didn't give him the deference he craved. Mordecai shattered Haman's carefully cultivated persona. Mordecai took the gloss away.

Haman's self-image was what drove him. When his ego was massaged he felt on top of the world; when it came under threat he burned with rage. This was Haman's idol. He may have been pulling Ahasuerus' strings, but this idol was pulling his. Haman was a slave to his own folly. With his idol under threat, poor, pitiable Haman had little choice but to massage his ego all over again. Little wonder he gathered his cronies to weary them with his boastful tales (v11)!

Let Haman be a warning to us. Idols aren't just statues made of metal or stone; they're far more subtle than that. They're the things we hold most dear: our jobs, our families, our reputations, our talents, our hobbies, our plans for the future. Left unchecked, these idols will control us, destroy us, and leave us with nothing at all.

It doesn't have to be like that. If we walk in God's ways, he will fix our eyes and our affections on something much more satisfying - himself. "Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart." (Psalm 37:4)

Questions

1. What are the most important things in your life? Are any of them in danger of becoming idols?
2. What happens to a person when his or her idol is suddenly snatched away?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that God would help you to see the idols of your heart. Pray that he would fix your eyes on himself instead so that you find your delight in him.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us; then over us would have gone the raging waters. Psalm 124:4-5

Praise: Psalm 50 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Esther

Wednesday - Esther 5:14 - 6:3 - An October Surprise

Followers of American elections will be used to the concept of an October surprise. It's a game changing moment that causes one campaign to spiral out of control while the opponent surges to victory. It's the moment every campaign manager dreads. Often an October surprise takes the form of something coming to light that had been buried in the past. A candidate's arrest from decades before, a covered up affair, offensive comments in a long forgotten speech - if the revelation is juicy enough the aftershocks can be devastating. The key thing about an October surprise (unsurprisingly) is that it happens in October. Any later and it won't impact an election in early November. Any earlier and the spin-doctors have time to repair the damage. The bombshell has to drop at exactly the right moment. Sometimes an October surprise is so perfectly timed that there's only one explanation: the rival campaign has leaked the story. They may have discovered the secret long ago, but they've bided their time, waiting for the perfect moment to unleash maximum havoc. Coincidence? I think not.

What about today's passage for an October surprise? The revelation is stunning: Years before (2:19-23), Mordecai saved the king's life. The man Haman plans to murder is a national treasure. What a bombshell! The timing is perfect. If Mordecai's heroism came to light any later, he would already be dead. If it had been revealed sooner, his faithful service might have been forgotten by the time Haman put his plan in motion. It's remarkable that Mordecai wasn't rewarded at the time. If Ahasuerus wanted to survive the next assassination attempt, it would have been prudent to honour the man who saved his life. It's baffling that he didn't. Perhaps Mordecai had felt frustrated that his service was not recognised in the way it should have been. Yet, if he had received his reward in chapter 2, the wicked Haman would not have been so spectacularly thwarted. Coincidence? I think not. Who could have masterminded this October surprise?

Questions

1. This is one example of God working at the perfect time. What is the greatest example? (Galatians 4:4-5)
2. How does this story help us to understand why Christ has still not returned?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks for how God always works with perfect timing. Pray that he would help you to remember this when you are frustrated with his speed.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us; then over us would have gone the raging waters. Psalm 124:4-5

Praise: Psalm 51 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Esther

Thursday - Esther 6:4-12 - Pride Goes Before Destruction

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

Could there be a better illustration of this proverb than the Persian Empire's most prominent Agagite? Hubristic Haman had spent years nurturing his idol of self-importance; that very idol was about to chew him up and spit him out.

Try as hard as you can to visualise this scene while standing in Haman's shoes. You walk to the palace with a smile on your face. You've got everything you've ever dreamed of: power, influence, and an outstanding reputation. Well, almost everything. There is one bothersome fly in the ointment, but he's about to be swatted once and for all. Life is good! But, there's no time to bask in your achievements. First of all, there's important business to attend to-it's time for revenge. All you need is for Ahasuerus to rubber stamp the death warrant.

The king's awake and he wants to talk. You rub your hands with glee! Mordecai is toast. But first, the King has something on his mind. He wants to honour a very special man. You get butterflies in your stomach and your heart skips a beat. You've spent so many years polishing your ego... he's obviously talking about you. So, your imagination runs wild. The parade! The robes! The horse! The crowds! You've really made it now!

But stop! Stop imagining this scene from Haman's eyes; let the camera of your imagination fix on this villain's face. He's so sickeningly smug, like the cat that got the cream. But wait for it: that smile is about to be wiped off his face. "The parade... is for... Mordecai?! And... I'm to... announce HIS greatness?"

Haman was looking forward to a feast; instead he was served humble pie. Pride goes before destruction. So it is with every rebel who takes a stand against the true King of Kings. It may not be now, it may not be soon. But the Lord Jesus will bring them low (Psalm 2:9).

Questions

1. How is the story of Esther similar to Psalm 2?
2. Are there ways in which you proudly refuse to submit to Christ? What warning does this passage give you?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks for how all of Christ's enemies will be brought low. Pray that God would give you the grace to humbly submit to his rule.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us; then over us would have gone the raging waters. Psalm 124:4-5

Praise: Psalm 52 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Esther

Friday - Esther 6:1-3 - For The Want Of A Nail

"For want of a nail, the shoe was lost. For want of a shoe, the horse was lost..." Perhaps you've heard that old adage. Its point is that one seemingly insignificant detail can have truly epic consequences.

"... For want of a horse, the rider was lost. For want of a rider, the message was lost..." Esther is a book of epic consequences. The very existence of the Jewish race was at stake. More than that, the covenant that God had made with his people was in the balance: if Haman's holocaust was successful, the covenant promises would be blown to smithereens.

"... For want of a message, the battle was lost..." And the consequences don't stop there. God's greatest promise was that a descendant of the Jewish race would come in order to deliver his chosen people throughout the world. Salvation itself was dangling by a thread. No Jewish people, no Messiah. It couldn't be more simple.

"... For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost. And all for the want of a horseshoe nail!" Not only is Esther a book of epic consequences, it's also a book of horseshoe nails. Its pages are full of tiny, seemingly insignificant details that transform the course of history. Take this passage for example. What if the King's pillow had been a little softer? What if the Susa air had been a little less balmy that night?

What if Ahasuerus had chosen one of the other distractions at a royal insomniac's disposal? He could have had food, he could have had music, he could have had girls. The chronicles might never have been opened.

And as for his bedtime story, what if his scribe had turned to a different page? A horseshoe nail can make all the difference! Yet, this story trains us to read between the lines. There is a God who is sovereign over all of history: over kingdoms and battles, horseshoes and nails. This is the God who delivers his people. He's still in control and he's still building his kingdom.

Questions

1. Of all the minor details in this book so far, which one has seemed least significant?
2. How might history have been transformed if that one detail was changed?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks for how Christ is the sovereign ruler of all history. Give thanks for how his plans are never truly in the balance.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us; then over us would have gone the raging waters. Psalm 124:4-5

Praise: Psalm 53 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Esther

Saturday - Esther 6:13 - Zeresh: The Broken Clock

One of my favourite sayings is "a broken clock is right twice a day". It's a recognition that even those who are most foolish sometimes get it right. Allow me to introduce Zeresh, the broken clock. Zeresh was a fool. The enormous gallows was her idea (5:14). She got swept up in Haman's temper tantrum and gave some truly brainless advice. Haman would pay dearly for listening to this folly.

Yet, her second line couldn't be more different from the first. Her words weren't foolish, but perceptive. She offered wisdom to be heeded, not idiocy to be ignored. Zeresh could see which way the wind was blowing. Mordecai should have been no match for the money, fame, and influence of the master manipulator. The vultures should have been circling over Mordecai's lifeless corpse.

Yet inexplicably, they weren't. In the blink of an eye, Mordecai became "the man whom the king delights to honour" as Haman found himself on the outside looking in.

Zeresh could read between the lines. The Book of Esther trains us to do the same. This sudden reversal couldn't be explained by fortune or blind luck. It couldn't be explained by genius on Mordecai's part or even sloppiness on Haman's. There could only be one explanation... Mordecai was a Jew!

Mordecai's Jewishness made all the difference. Did Zeresh have a solid grasp of Jewish theology? Probably not. Yet she could see what others could not: you pick a fight with the covenant people, you pick a fight with the God of the covenant. There was no way Haman could win!

Yet, all was not lost. Scripture shows us again and again that there is hope for those who rebel against God. The one who delivers his people also extends the offer of mercy to his enemies. Had Haman shown more wisdom, he would have given up his plot and cried out for forgiveness.

It was probably too late for Haman. It's not too late for you. Do you need to plead for the mercy of Christ?

Questions

1. Have you ever asked God to forgive your rebellion against him?
2. What will happen to those who continue to rebel against Christ?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks for how Christ's victory is guaranteed. Pray that many would come to him for mercy before his final judgement.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us; then over us would have gone the raging waters. Psalm 124:4-5

Praise: Psalm 54 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

The goal of Let's Worship God is to encourage and help you in your worship of God each day.

**God tells us that
Ezra read from
the book of the Law
day after day
and that
the people of God
were filled with joy!**

Let's Worship God is produced for the RP Global Alliance
by Airdrie Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

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