

# God Makes Much of Esther's Efforts

Esther 7

*Sermon preached by Rev. Joshua Flinn, 15 October 2023, AM Service.*

In chapter 5, Esther was granted a wish by the king... up to half his kingdom. She gave him a meal, and asked to give him another meal.

Between these two feasts, Mordecai has been honoured and Haman has had to take the low position. Perhaps this gave Esther some confidence, she could hardly have been ignorant of it... given that Haman had to lead him all the way through the city.

And perhaps it gave her an idea of how she might phrase her request. After all, the reason Achashverosh had made much of Mordecai is because he had worked to protect the royal person.

So perhaps this would be a good way to engage the king with her own request. And that's certainly what we see. Her phrasing builds to the crescendo... it is the king's loss she is concerned about...

Haman is doing to the king what Vashti did... reducing his honour... eliminating the opportunity to boast in his triumphs. Haman is working to make the king lose face.

The attack on the queen he loves... and the Jews who served him... are ultimately an attack on his person, just like what happened in Esther 2.

This is a very clever approach. And yet it isn't without significant risk.

On the one hand, despite what Esther has argued, Haman didn't act independently in his decision regarding the Jews. He had spoken to the king about the plan in chapter 3, and Achashverosh had given him his signet ring.

Why were the Jews to be destroyed? Because they refused, as Mordecai had shown, to obey the Laws of Persia.

The king didn't know Esther was a Jew at the time, but he is kind of responsible for that decision.

So that's one potential problem here...

Another is the nature of the man himself. King Achashverosh is presented in this book as an arrogant, womanizing, alcoholic with a temper problem.

And this is further supported by extrabiblical sources. Herodotus, an ancient historian, describes a series of events which indicate just how temperamental this king was.

In one of those events, there was another man who asked for something seemingly reasonable:

Pythius financed one of the king's military campaigns, and then he asked that his eldest son be allowed to remain at home rather than go to war. Rather than granting his request in appreciation for his help, Xerxes flew into a rage and brutally killed his son.

There are many such examples of what this king is like in the Persian histories.

Esther had every reason to be fearful of making a request... even of her loving husband.

Again, there was no guarantee that she would be better off by asking it.

She is to be commended, for her bravery.

But, again, the author of this book doesn't allow us to escape God's hand.

This is the first instance we see of the King having some time out to control his anger... but he does that. And in doing so, he just happens to leave the accused in the same room as his wife in private.

And he just happens to return at the exact moment when Haman has fallen across the couch of Esther. And he just happens to take the worst possible interpretation of this event.

*"Will he also assault (or conquer) the queen while I am in the house?"*

And just as his anger reaches its heights, Harbonah, again, without prompting from Esther or Mordecai, gives the fateful suggestion: how about those gallows?

Verse 10: *"So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's wrath subsided."*

God is at work.

So what's our takeaway for today? What are we to learn here? There's really one major point from this passage that we need to spend some time on. And I'm going to draw one implication out of it.

### **1. God makes much of our weakness for his glory**

One of the incredibly strong themes in Esther, if not the strongest theme, is God's sovereignty. He is the one who turns not only the hearts of kings, but of nations.

Famously, and perhaps infamously according to some, not a hair falls from our head without the will of our Father in heaven.

This is clearly in our chapter yet again.

But... we also see very clearly that even though Mordecai didn't understand it, God had raised Esther for a time like this.

Did God need Esther? No he did not. Could he have destroyed the descendants of Agag without her? Absolutely. And we'll talk about that a bit more next Sunday.

But God did make use of Esther for his glory.

And that's true on both sides of the issue. When Joseph's brothers meant his enslavement for evil, God meant it for good.

And when Esther and Mordecai, though they seem to be primarily motivated for their own house, end up interceding on behalf of all the Jews, and God means this for good also.

For those of us who believe in this reality... and if you're a Christian, you should, because it's plainly biblical...

But for those of us who believe that God is sovereign, there are those among us who swing so far in that direction that we have the tendency to be somewhat fatalistic about it. We don't really need to do a great deal of anything and God will still work out his plan. And, there's a sense that that's true.

On the other hand, there are those of us who think that although God is sovereign, we have a responsibility, and God helps those who help themselves.

Some of us though, if we're honest... break this mould. We leave spiritual stuff, and the spread of the kingdom of heaven through the gospel ministry, entirely up to God. And the things of the world, everything that happens between Monday and Saturday each week... well... that's our domain to busy ourselves in.

But this is not the lesson of Esther. Nor is it the lesson of Joseph or David or the apostle Paul.

The Scriptures clearly testify that God is both sovereign over all, while man also has a responsibility to serve faithfully.

Philippians 2:12: *"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."*

Ephesians 2:10: *"we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."*

Brothers and sisters, God graciously chooses to use instruments for his glory... for the redemption of his people.

He chose Moses to be his voice... and Nathan to rebuke David... and Esther to intercede with the king.

And he has chosen you to be his heralds in this present darkness. To take up your responsibilities and be faithful.

There's an immense comfort, is there not, in the fact that God will not let one of his people be lost. An immense comfort in the fact that our weaknesses will never hinder him in his great plan of redemption. But that shouldn't drive us to inactivity, and that certainly shouldn't drive us to seek to manage things entirely ourselves.

### **A. Don't be surprised when the good work is overwhelming**

Esther had no hope at the end of chapter 4. And that was because she didn't have a big view of her God.

Mary didn't see how it would be possible she would get pregnant without knowing a man... and yet the angel told her that Jesus would be born to her... why? Because with God, nothing is impossible.

The disciples, told to feed the thousands of hungry people... where is the food going to come from? We have just a few measly fish and loafs of bread... With God, nothing is impossible.

Brothers and sisters, it shouldn't surprise you when the task at hand seems too great. The world is an overwhelming place... even Achashverosh can testify to this... even he couldn't control everything... and he *had* everything. Haman can testify to the same... everything was going his way... until it wasn't.

Now there's certainly something to be said about the wisdom of not taking on too much.

But what about just the basic responsibilities God has given you?

You parents... trying to raise your children... struggling with your stretched patience... struggling with your own wandering heart... agonizing over whether or not you'll ruin them.

You single people, worrying about whether you'll ever find a marriage partner... worrying you're not good enough...

Your Marriage—I love my spouse, but I just don't show it as I ought...

Your Work—I try and I try, and I never seem to get ahead. Mortgage... bills...

Your Health—you deal with one thing and another pops up its head.

There's enough to manage right there, without the Great Commission... without love of neighbour... without the worship of God.

Good works which, due to the nature of them, aren't neutral... or private. In fact, the pursuit of them is explicitly what draws negative attention. It is because we open our mouths with the call to repent, that the world's hatred becomes ours to bear.

Life is hard enough without purposely making it worse. Right?

But this is your calling, congregation. To pursue righteousness and love in the service of your God... to think of the needs of others before your own... to offer up your lives as a living sacrifice to your Maker.

Who is up to this task? None of us... Esther wasn't... and yet the testimony of this chapter is not that in her courage she conquered her problems... but that her weak effort was lifted up by her God... who made much of her effort for his glory.

Life is hard... in fact... life is often too much for many of us. But what is the reaction of a child of God in the midst of the pressure? I rest on his unchanging grace. His mercies are new every morning. Why are you so cast down within me oh my soul... hope in the Lord.

The Lord who has rescued my soul from destruction and showed his benefits upon me... The Lord who equips me to do his will... the Lord who uses me, though such a crooked stick, to turn the mess I too often make into wonderful fruit for his glory.

And so I continue to give the gospel... I try to do better, and it so often comes out in a garbled mess... but I trust in a God who will make much of my effort.

For I know that redemption comes at the hand of God, and I am simply his herald.

**In conclusion:**

The God we worship is the God who flung stars out into space and the God who knows them each by name. He is also the God who knows every hair on your head... certainly better than you know them.

And he knows that you are weak.

Why? Because in the person of Jesus Christ, he took on your form... and became like one of us... suffering in every way as you and I do. As a man, he beheld the suffering before him, and he was so anxious he wept blood... crying out to God to take this cup of wrath from him.

And yet despite the weight he was about to bear, he was faithful even until death.

Jesus knows your weakness. And he knows you cannot find true victory in the strength you have. But because of his work, you now have hope... and your labour is not in vain.

So, strengthen those weak knees... make straight paths... pursue righteousness in the fear of the Lord... do the good works he has planned for you... and trust in him for the outcome... for he works all things together for good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose.

Amen.