

Unseen God



Hidden Hope Found in the Book of Esther

DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE



Contents

Unseen God | 6

Background and Intro | 10

Sermon Series | 19

Discussion/Study Guides | 21

Appendix | 42

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Unseen God | *Hidden Hope Found In The Book of Esther*

When do we need hope? Is it when everything is going well in our lives or in the world, where the present seems pleasant and a clear vision of a flourishing future is in sight? Is it when we are led by strong and tender leaders whose virtue, caring character, and defense of justice is plainly visible to all? Is it when we have a secure sense of self and we know we are valued and respected in our context even when we bring our full selves to the table? **Or...**

Is it when those with favor are more interested in self-preservation and vengeance than liberty, justice, and mercy for all? Is it when evil is not only plotting and desires destruction, but also has the means and influence to cause great harm? What about when the issue isn't external to our environment but is internal to the core of our being? What about when we know in our actions or attitudes, we have fallen short. We've sinned or failed, and we wonder *"Am I still redeemable? Is there any hope for me or my life to turn around? I am I still in God's grace?"* It's in these moments of external or internal darkness when we individually or collectively need hope the most. Hope gives us patience and endurance in the present and gives us a promise of a better future. The more intense the darkness, fear, or hopelessness the greater and more dramatic we want it answered. We want a miraculous sign/vision/prophetic word, we want a dramatic turn of events or circumstance, we want a hero to save or lead us, we want justice for our enemies, and we want mercy and grace for our short comings. Yet most often what we see, or experience is silence from God or spiritual dryness. When we look for leadership, or in the mirror, all we see are ordinary/imperfect (even morally bankrupt) people. We want comfort but we are instead confronted with world events or personal circumstance which are too overwhelming to process and which we are powerless to change.

Why does hope appear absent when it is most needed? How do we find hope and courage in a broken world when God is not, seen, heard, or felt?

The Old Testament Book of Esther is unique in the the Bible in that there is no mention of the God. No one prays to Him, seek His will or intervention. There are no declarations of devotion to Him and there is no supernatural vision from Him. There are no miracles which reveal His actions for His people and there is no prophetic voice to reveal His purposes to His people. Does that mean He is not present with His people and faithful to His promises for His people? No! The God of Esther is an **UNSEEN GOD**, but He is not an absent or inactive God. **Hope** has been **Hidden** in the ordinary, the imperfect, and even in the wicked, but it is still present waiting to be *found in **the Book of Esther***. It is in Esther, where we are reminded that often God works in seemingly ordinary ways through clearly imperfect people. Through coincidences in various circumstances, cunning in the face of challenges, and courage in the face of crisis we see glimpses of the present and active work of the clear hero. This hero is not only the hero of Esther, but of all History and of our individual stories. While there are fools, villains, victims, and complicated characters used to avert genocide and apply justice, there is only one true hero in this account and it's not Esther! In the grand narrative of scripture, Jesus is THE perfect hero who comes to save His people, defeat evil, bring justice, give grace, and bring hope for a prosperous forever future. Esther is a small story that is part of a greater story given to show us God is good to preserve His people, fulfill His promises, and provide us with hope in the midst of overwhelming circumstances.

*For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have **hope**. - Romans 15:4*

We call this hope hidden because unlike the explicit theology of a New Testament epistle, or the extraordinary account of God saving His people in Exodus, God's work in Esther displays itself in the ordinary. Yet great

hope is present, and it is waiting to be found in various themes found in Esther including:

Hope in Ordinary and Extraordinary People – Without the apparent presence of a perfect hero all we are left with are imperfect and even immoral people. Because of sin, all God has to work with are imperfect people. Yet great influence is granted or allowed which ultimately serves God’s purposes. While God uses imperfect people, only He is the perfect hero.

Hope in Circumstances and Coincidences – Proverbs 16:33 says “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.” Where we see and experience coincidences and random chance impacting outcomes and circumstance both large and small there is actually a God who is actively engaged in the affairs of this world. This means we do not have to fear the cold random acts of an unfeeling universe, but we can have comfort in a God who works out all things for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

Hope in a Godless Society – Like Esther, Mordecai, and the Jews in Persia, Christians today are elect exiles in a world opposed to the rule and reign of God. Yet we know we are citizens of an eternal kingdom where Jesus rules and reigns with righteousness and Justice. We have been given the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to reveal and guide us in the will and way of God until we are finally home reunited with God the Father.

Hope for Sinners – Perhaps the greatest hope hidden in Esther is found in God’s enduring grace to His people who desperately need it. The Jews in exile were aware of their years of faithlessness towards God. Certainly in the time of Esther they wondered if there was still reason to hope. God answered them by both preserving line of the promised savior AND in God reversing the fortune of people who had been living under decree of destruction. The climax of this story a dramatic reversal of destiny that should give great hope to all who hear and receive the good news of the Gospel. ***Specifically, the Gospel is a stunning reversal of fortune for all of***

us. We were destined for wrath, now we are adopted royalty. We were destined for death, now we have hope, life, and resurrection. All this is because of the work of Jesus on our behalf.

Background | *Historical Context & People*

Historical Context

The Jews of Judah and Jerusalem were carried into exile by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar when he sacked the city and burnt the temple in 586 B.C. God had warned his people in Deuteronomy (28:15, 36, 64) to carefully follow His commandments or face being scattered among the nations. However, they instead lived a pattern of disobedience and sinful practices choosing to worship idols rather than the one true God.

During this time of exile God's people came to be called Jews (from the name of their homeland, Judah). The subsequent exile and restoration shaped Judaism in unmistakable ways. Without the Temple, the sacrifices, the priesthood, and the monarchy, God's people could not function as they had before. New practices centered around the study of the Torah emerged and despite a short period where many Jews worshiped at the Temple again during the 2nd Temple period, continue on today in Modern Judaism.

Esther takes place during the reign of the Persian empire. The Persian empire stretched from what is modern Pakistan in the east to modern Turkey and the coastal islands of Greece in the west to Northern Sudan in Africa. The Persians had control of this area from the mid sixth century B.C. to the loss of their empire to Alexander the Great in 330 B.C. Specifically, the events of Esther take place during the reign of Ahasuerus (the biblical name for Xerxes, King of Persia 485-465 BC). The author mentions the feast of Purim, but does not use any Greek-influenced vocabulary so we can safely assume that the book was written before Alexander's conquest of Persia.

People in Esther

The Book of Esther shows an imperfect Hero/Heroine used by a perfect God! The people in the story are morally imperfect at best and wicked at worst. A quick character study of the primary human actors reveals the absence of any true earthly hero, highlights great deficiencies and devious intentions, while crying out for a greater divine Hero who will bring true forever victory.

Key Truths to Remember

In Bruce Waltke's excellent introduction to Esther he notes the following three theological truths we would do well to remember as we study:

1. The dispersed Jews in Esther are only nominal covenant people. Neither Esther nor Mordecai nor the Jews show love for God or for their neighbors, the identifying marks of the true covenant people of God.
2. Providence is at work behind the scenes on behalf of these "secular" self-serving Jews. The covenant-keeping God rules through human folly, such as the foolish pride of Mordecai and the overweening pride of Haman. One seemingly insignificant event leads to another, such as Mordecai's overhearing of a plot to assassinate the king and a sleepless king learning of that plot at the right time. Through a mysterious and inscrutable Providence, against all odds, the fate of God's covenant people is reversed.
3. God not only preserves his nominal people of the Diaspora but furthers salvation history through them. Haman is an Agagite, which Bible students will recognize as a reference to Agag, king of the Amalekites (1 Sam 15:20). The Amalekites were enemies of the Israelites from the Exodus onward and God's triumph over Haman and his plots to destroy the Jews symbolize the termination of all of God's enemies.

Finding Christ in the Old Testament and Esther

The narrative of the Book Esther alone should leave us more than a little unsatisfied desiring a more comprehensive salvation for God's people and greater victory for God's purposes. ***We get what we need from this book, but not all that we want.*** Esther is an essential part of the narrative of the Gospel. It shows how God protects His people and preserves His promises in the face of an evil enemy, while a weary world waits for a perfect Messiah. However, Esther is never intended to convey the entirety of the Gospel, we have been given more than Esther! So we should read, study, preach Esther not as a necessary and intriguing speed bump on the road to Jesus, but illuminated by the truth of the great narrative of a good God who saves His people through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

“We do not start at Genesis 1 and work our way forward until we discover where it is all leading. Rather we first come to Christ, and He directs us to study the Old Testament in light of the gospel. The Gospel will interpret the Old Testament by showing us its goal and meaning”

– Graeme Goldsworthy, According to Plan

Jesus himself says in Luke 24 all of the Old Testament is about Him, so every single text of Scripture in some way points to Christ in either revealing His character, describing the depth of our depravity and need, promising or foreshadowing His arrival, telling the story of His redemption in History, prefiguring His work and person, or mining the complexities of our relationship to and with Him among others. Some OT connections to Christ are clear and overt while others are more nuanced or even subtle. Not every scrap of wood is an allusion to the cross and not every drop of water prefigures baptism, yet shadows and signs of Jesus (even in contrast) can and should be found as we study the richness of the Old Testament.

Intentional effort is required as disciples to search the scriptures, not to find eternal life but to find the one with whom eternal life is found. Professor and Theologian Sidney Greidanus, in his work *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* defines preaching (and finding) Christ as...

“preaching sermons which authentically integrate the message of the text with the climax of God’s revelation in the person and work, and/or teaching of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament.”

He lays out seven “legitimate” ways to move from an Old Testament text to Jesus in the New Testament. These include:

1. **Redemptive-Historical procession-** Seeing the message of the passage in the context of redemptive history from beginning to end, especially following the progression of redemptive history as it moves forward from the text’s historical setting to Jesus’ First and/or Second Coming.
2. **Promise-fulfillment-** showing that the promise of a coming Messiah was fulfilled in Jesus’s First Coming or will be fulfilled in his Second Coming.
3. **Typology-** moving from an Old Testament type prefiguring Jesus to the antitype, Jesus himself.
4. **Analogy-** noting the similarity between the teaching or goal of the text and teaching or goal of Jesus.
5. **Longitudinal themes-** tracing the theme (or subtheme) of the text through the Old Testament to Jesus Christ in the New Testament.
6. **New Testament references-** moving from the preaching text to Jesus by way of New Testament verses which cite or allude the preaching text and link it to Christ.
7. **Contrast-** noting the contrast between the message of the text and that of the New Testament, a contrast which exist because Christ has come.

In Esther, some of the clearest ways to move from the OT to Jesus are found in **Redemptive-Historical Procession** and **Promise-Fulfillment** as we see this book is part of the greater advancing narrative of God saving His people and remaining faithful to His promises to them despite their faithlessness to Him. Additionally, because of the glaring imperfect nature of the people involved and the incomplete justice and celebration, **Contrast** is also evident through-out. There is a king present in the story, but he is does not have the wisdom, strength, and righteousness of our Great King Jesus. There is a great festival and celebration enacted but it pales in comparison to the Great Wedding Feast found at the end of Scripture. There are likely other hidden themes and ways this narrative points to Jesus to be found. Disciples of Jesus fail if we study this story from a strictly an OT perspective. In each section and sermon, the goal is not simply to preach or know the text better, but to know more fully the Gospel of Jesus Christ where our true hope and lasting life are found.

Sermon Series

The broad goals for this series are the same for every series; that we would have the target of our affections, hope, and worship moved from the things of this world to the Creator of this world who reveals Himself through scripture and most clearly in the person and work of His Son Jesus Christ. Additionally, as disciples of Jesus who are called to go into the world to make more disciples, we seek to faithfully engage with a world opposed to the God of the Bible.

Our world tells us there is nothing more to our stories than human actors and random actions of an unfeeling universe. Yet also continues striving to find meaning and purpose in the midst of our changing circumstances. It is a contradiction that cannot be resolved by ourselves alone. We can only truly understand our part in our own stories and in THE BIG STORY through faith when we have been, ***Saved by Jesus' Work, Changed by Jesus' Grace***, and are ***Living on Jesus' Mission***. Specifically, we hope this series helps those who know Jesus grow as disciples in three ways:

1. Shaped by ***Gospel Truth*** – We are people of the Book. We study the Gospel Truth of Jesus in our place. *What does God's word to us in the Bible tell us about God, our world, and ourselves? How does knowing and seeing who God is lead us to deeper desire for Him?*
2. Formed in ***Gospel Community*** – We are all made as individuals, but we are also made to be in communion with God and with His people. This means much of his hidden hope will be found the context of a community created by and held together by the Gospel. *How does the Gospel not only change us as individuals but change us as a people?*
3. Propelled to ***Gospel Living*** – Being a disciple of Jesus is never less than knowing, affirming, and believing Gospel Truth. However, it is always more than simple intellectual assent; it changes our lives. *How does*

knowing what Jesus has done for us lead us to a new life of holiness and mission for Him?

Also, as with every sermon series we preach, **ESTHER** is also explicitly *evangelistic*. Our hope is those who do not know ***the beauty and glory of God in Jesus*** would hear and understand the Gospel. That they would reflect on their own lives, see their sin and brokenness, their need to be made new, and then respond to the offer of life with God in Christ. We serve a God who is unseen, but we are not un-sent. We pray *we would be Urgent Ambassadors!* God saves people, in part, to proclaim His salvation to others. Everyone needs Hope!

Hope can only be truly found when we ***Trust Jesus!***

Discussion – Study Guides

Part I | Foolish King

⁷Drinks were served in golden vessels, vessels of different kinds, and the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king. ⁸And drinking was according to this edict: "There is no compulsion." For the king had given orders to all the staff of his palace to do as each man desired. -**Esther 1:7-8**

If every fool wore a crown, we should all be kings.

– **Welsh Proverb**

Esther 1

While we are of great value and worth, we are not meant to be kings and queens of our own kingdoms. In foolishness, we believe our greatest flourishing will come in rejection of God's authority rather than in humble response to it.

Boastful Banquet (v1-9) – Ahasuerus ruled a kingdom which spanned from Africa to central Asia. Possessing substantial authority was not enough for him, he needed to flaunt it. A six-month season of national feasting, which would put a Rio carnival to shame, was capped off with a week-long party in the capital. Opulent to the extreme with no expenses spared and no limits observed, it was all to feed the foolish desire for glory of one man.

Royal Refusal and Demeaning Decree (v10-22) – Drunk with power, his own sense of self-importance, and alcohol, Ahasuerus wants to show off his queen (likely only) wearing her crown as an objectified trophy to his court. Queen Vashti publicly refuses to acquiesce to this exhibition and Ahasuerus' fragile ego is enraged. Under foolish counsel, the king strips Vashti of her title and issues an irrevocable national decree given to all women requiring them to unquestioningly respond to their husbands as kings of their domiciles.

JESUS IS THE BETTER KING - In Jesus, we have a king whose arrival into history was exceedingly humble, a baby born to a poor family. He lived in obscurity for years. His ministry was to the marginalized and His Kingdom is built with the foolish of the world to shame the wise. Coming not to be served but to serve, King Jesus does not desire to expose our weakness or shame. Rather, He clothes His bride (The Church) in His righteousness and will present us Holy and without blemish.

Questions:

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Did you learn anything new about God or yourself? What did you learn about God as a King?
2. When has God felt distant, absent, or inactive in your life? How have you responded? When have you needed hope? How is it encouraging to know God is active in the ordinary?
3. Why is it so easy to focus on building your own kingdom and so tempting to be centered on your own glory? How is this a struggle for you now or in the past? When have your own desires driven you to foolishness? How has God been merciful or gracious to you in those moments?
4. Describe how Jesus is a better King than Ahasuerus. What are the marks of Jesus' kingdom and leadership? How does Jesus being the King of Kings give us hope in the midst of a foolish world?

PRAY- Confess to God where you have desired your kingdom over His. Ask the Holy Spirit to grant you repentance from foolishness and to give you new desires for God's will in your life. Pray "Your Kingdom Come on Earth as it is in Heaven" and that His kingdom would reign first in your heart. Praise Jesus for being a King who establishes a better Kingdom now and forever.

Part II | *Imperfect Glory*

The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

– **Esther 2:17**

Our desire is not only to SEE glory, but to participate in the glory we see.

– **CS Lewis**

Esther 2:1-18

We all desire glory because we are all created to reflect glory. Yet when we search for glory in ourselves what we find will always be at best fleeting. Struck with reality, we can easily experience fear with our imperfect selves, when we are called to faith found in a perfect God.

Esther Found (v1-11) – The newly “single” king is without a queen and a significant void to be filled both relationally and positionally. Under the suggestion of his court, a national government run casting call goes out to select several contestants for “Persian Bachelor.” Among those selected is a remarkably attractive local girl named Esther. Orphaned and raised by her older cousin Mordecai, she is from a family of exiled Jews taken into captivity under the Babylonians and is now part of a carefully constructed harem. Her national identity is hidden for now, but her beauty and favor are unmistakable.

Esther “Wins” (v12-18) – Over the course of several months, one-by-one, scores of pagan Persian women would spend a night alone with the king. Far from an innocent series of introductory first dates, these evenings were “auditions” where the king would decide who “delighted” him the best. Those who were “tried” and found lacking would be demoted to a secondary harem to be forgotten, while a singular “winner” would be declared. In is in this highly competitive environment where Esther, a Jewish virgin, “found favor” with the king who crowned her queen.

He was so moved by her, the court celebrated with a great feast and the country experienced a generous reduction in taxes.

JESUS IS MOST GLORIOUS – *We all appreciate beauty and strive for glory.* Jesus came in humility and may have even been homely. According to Isaiah He was without form of majesty that we should regard him. However, He has promised to return with great glory. While other pursuits of glory will leave our expectations unmet, Jesus is exceedingly glorious and able to truly satisfy. When we rest in the glory of Jesus, we do not worry about coming before the king to win His favor. We draw near the throne of grace with confidence God is pleased with us in Christ.

Questions:

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Did you learn anything new about God or yourself?
2. Why do we crave glory and enjoyment? Is it always wrong? What happens when we seek to experience glory in unhealthy ways? Read 1 Cor 10:31, what does it mean to “do it all to the glory of God”?
3. How did God use this to providentially place Esther in a position of influence? When have you been in a difficult situation or scenario that has been challenging to discern what is best?
4. In what ways have you felt the need to earn God’s favor? How does God show His glory in Christ? What does it look like to rest in Christ’s glory instead of our own?

PRAY- Praise God for His great glory shown both in creation and in Christ. Ask the Holy Spirit for discernment and wisdom for difficult and unclear circumstances. Thank God for His grace and favor shown to us in Jesus who grants us unmerited access to the Father.

Part III | *Horror of Pride*

⁵ And when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury. ⁶ But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus. – **Esther 3:5-6**

What separates privilege from entitlement is gratitude – Brene Brown

Esther 2:19 - Chapter 3

We walk in entitlement. We believe we are due decadence, all our good actions should receive a reward, and all our transgressions should be overlooked. While pridefully demanding honor for ourselves, we don't see God as worth of honor. This has consequences for us and those around us.

Mordecai Discovers a Plot (v2:19-23) – Esther's relationship with Mordecai and her new position of influence is paying immediate dividends...for the King. A plot from two eunuchs to kill the king is discovered by Mordecai, passed on to Esther, and give to the King. The two men are swiftly executed. Mordecai's good deed is recorded leading to a significant promotion... of Haman.

Promotion of Haman (v3:1-6) – Often obedience or good works are not immediately rewarded. While Mordecai was watching out for the King, the King promotes Haman who only watches out for himself. Now the number two in the entire kingdom and every official is required to give Haman honor due his position. Mordecai refuse causing an opportunity for honor to turn to a path of horror.

Genocidal Plot (v3:7-15) – For Haman, disrespect turns to disdain not only for Mordecai but for his people as generations of pent up vengeance are now unleashed in a plot to “destroy, kill, and annihilate” every Jew in the

empire. When us this to happen? We know in proverbs every lot cast is from the Lord. It is no accident that the “random” time selected by lot would be 11 months later giving significant time for circumstances to change and intervention to occur. The capitol is in confusion, the Jews in condemnation, but is God who is and remains in control. *Because of our pride and sin, we all sit under a just decree of condemnation. We need a hero worthy of honor to save us and grant us mercy.*

JESUS IS WORTHY OF HONOR Even in His “triumphal entry” to Jerusalem Jesus came not demanding honor or displaying power but in humility riding on a donkey. While people honored Jesus as a king, religious Pharisees came to him asking for Jesus to rebuke the crowd. Jesus responds if these people remained silent of the truth the very rocks would cry out. We easily promote ourselves, but we are called in Philippians Chapter 2 to look at the example of Jesus who humbled himself in obedience to God. It is at the feet and name of Jesus only that every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord.

Questions:

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Did you learn anything new about God or yourself? What did you learn about the nature of pride and honor?
2. What is the significance of when the decree of destruction goes out to the Jews in Persia? How is this similar to what the Jews faced in slavery in Egypt? How is it different?
3. How do you respond when your right actions and attitudes are not met with an immediate positive response or reward? Or what about when the response is greater suffering?
4. In what areas of your life do you find yourself in entitlement? Where is God calling you to greater gratitude or humility? How does the Gospel free us from entitlement? How is God's goodness to us in the past able to give us endurance in the present?

PRAY- Praise God every "lot cast" is under His authority and that none of our circumstances are beyond His control. Ask the Holy Spirit to give us greater gratitude. Thank Jesus for His example of humility.

Notes:

Part IV | Mourning Injustice

...And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?... “Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.” - **Esther 4:14b & 16b**

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”
– **Dr Martin Luther King Jr.**

Esther 4

Passivity is not humility. When we are faced with grave injustice, we are not to cooperate with it or capitulate to it. We are to be conformed to God’s will which may include confronting injustice.

Mourning (v1-5) – When we are first made aware of injustice with tender hearts our reaction should be one of mourning. Mordecai and the Jews in Persia lament the plot with sackcloth, torn clothes, and shed tears.

Providence and appeal to Esther (v6-14) – Mourning over injustice should turn us to appeal for justice! We begin to see God’s “why” for Esther’s quick assent into the royal court. It is her people who have been decreed for destruction and she is in a unique position to attempt influence over the king “for such a time as this”.

Courageous plot and concerned fasting (v15-17) – Esther’s initial reluctance to engage in this issue is met with persuasion from Mordecai that it is in her self-interest and self-preservation to work to reverse the direction of Haman’s plot. Her reticence is replaced with resolve that regardless of her personal cost she will step in help save her people from destruction.

JESUS MOURNS WITH US – In Jesus, we have a savior king who not only hates injustice, but also comes to bring justice. He does not engage or even sacrifice reluctantly but rather for “the joy set before him endures the cross” so His people can be spared. Jesus also meets us in our

mourning even when He is bringing new life. Right before He is about to raise His friend Lazarus from the dead, He weeps with the gathered mourners who only know loss. *Jesus is the God who feels with us and acts for us.*

Questions:

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Did you learn anything new about God or yourself? What did you learn about the nature of mourning or injustice?
2. In this text, in the face of injustice there is no prayer or direct appeal to God but there is planning and human action, is this how Christians are to respond to injustice? When confronted with injustice or trials how quick are you to turn to prayer?
3. Why is it difficult for us to mourn properly? Why is it easier for us to hide or conceal our pain and grief than it is share it with others or process it in healthy ways?
4. When has God called you to step out of your comfort zone to confront injustice? When have you been able to use a position of power or influence to engage with a difficult issue on behalf of others?

PRAY- Thank God for the ways He has worked to expose injustice. Ask God to reveal where He has placed you to engage for His glory others joy. Praise God that He deeply feels our pain and grief and that He is mighty to act in our lives and circumstances.

Part V | *The Plan*

*⁶And as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king said to Esther, "What is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled."⁷ Then Esther answered, "My wish and my request is: ⁸If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my wish and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come to the feast that I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said." – **Esther 5:6-7***

*I believe that God has a plan and purpose not only for the human race, but for my individual life. - **Anne Graham Lotz***

*I love it when a plan comes together. - **Hannibal Smith, The A Team***

Esther 5

In this chapter, two plans are laid out. One plan is developed for the Jews' destruction, and looks formidable. Esther's plan- the plan with the look of weakness - is developed for the salvation of God's people. Esther's plan is destined for success not because Esther is beautiful and brilliant, but rather because God's plan is unstoppable.

(v1-8) – Esther's feeble, tentative plan, is to have the King and Haman over for a banquet. She risks her life to appear before the King unsummoned. He acknowledges her and she invites the King and Haman to a banquet. When the banquet comes instead of telling the King she delays again. The second request for a banquet is accepted and the tension in the story builds.

(v9-14) - Haman and friends plan destruction for Mordecai and the Jews. The community we surround ourselves with will have an impact to either encourage grace and humility or selfishness and pride. The satisfaction of human pride in its demand for honor and respect outweigh the value of human life in the pagan world of Persia.

JESUS ACTS, for our good and His glory. Whether we can see it or not, God's sovereignty is always working behind the scenes. While Esther was willing to die for her people, Jesus actually did. What an amazing savior Jesus is!

Questions:

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Did you learn anything new about God or yourself? What do you learn about God's plan?
2. What do you observe about Esther's plan to save her people? (1-8)
3. What do you observe about Haman's plan? (9-14) What role does pride play in the fall of those who plan violence? (check Proverbs 16:18)
4. What is your usual response to suffering? How might we adjust our expectations to suffering as we wait for God's perfect timing to execute His plan? How is I Peter 4:12-19 a comfort to you?
5. What difficult trial are you going through presently? Is there a clear action step or is now the time to prayerfully wait?

PRAY- Praise God for His control and His plan even though the details may not be evident at the moment. Ask God for clear guidance so that you can take the steps that He is asking you to take. Thank Jesus for being willing to go along with God's plan even though it meant suffering unto death for Him.

Part VI | Vindication Given

*Then the king said to Haman, "Hurry; take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Leave out nothing that you have mentioned." - **Esther 6:10***

*From even the greatest of horrors, irony is seldom absent.
- H.P. Lovecraft*

Esther 6

This is arguably the most ironically comic scene in the entire Bible. As Haman plans his glory and Mordecai's gruesome death, the King has something completely different in mind.

Valor Recalled (v1-3) – God's vindication can start with the smallest detail. Even insomnia can be part of His plan. A sleepless night reminds the king of Mordecai's goodness to him. We can serve now knowing glory is coming later.

Honor Desired (v4-9) – God's vindication cannot be stopped by evil men. Haman means to ask for honor and Mordecai's doom. God turns the tables with ease.

Reward Received (v10-14)- Delayed honor is still honor. We may go through seasons of trial, but all our suffering now is never in vain (1 Cor 15). Mordecai has a grand parade thrown for him while Haman is humbled by leading the procession. In a scene that reminds us of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, God has plans to vindicate us through His grace.

JESUS IS VICTORIOUS and His victory vindicates us through His Grace. Our salvation and inheritance promised to us (Ephesians 1) is greater than we can imagine.

Questions:

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Did you learn anything new about God or yourself?
2. What do you observe about the King's insomnia? What do these little details tell you about God's plan?
3. Have you ever had an experience of either extreme reversal or surprising vindication?
4. What do you think it might be like to receive the type of vindication that Mordecai received? How do you compare that to the Gospel vindication found in Ephesians 1:3-14.

PRAY- Praise God for his victory that Jesus said is finished. Ask God for the faith to believe that all of the details are securely in His hands. Thank Jesus for his victory that completely vindicates us all with his gift of righteousness and an inheritance that will never fade.

Notes:

Part VII | *Justice Revealed*

³ Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request. ⁴For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have been silent, for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king." ⁵ Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who has dare to do this?" ⁶ And Esther said, "A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!" Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

– **Esther 7:3-5**

Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable...Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.

– **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Esther 7

Amid plots, injustice, and systemic wrong we are called to speak words to save. However, only God can truly undo all the injustice in our world.

Justice at the door (v1-2) – Haman sits and drinks wine with the King and Queen. Little does he know he is taking his final breaths.

Justice for the people of the God (v3-6) - Esther identifies herself with the Jews. Haman is revealed to be a plotter of evil.

Justice is served quickly and cannot be resisted (v7-10) – Here we see Haman's last grasp to attempt to save himself but to no avail. When God has decreed justice, it will be served. Like Haman, Satan is a defeated enemy as Jesus declared on the Cross "It is Finished", yet we will still experience his last grasps at power and destruction.

JESUS IS JUST. We are not forgotten! Someday God will answer our question, "How long, o Lord," with "The time of injustice is at an end."

Questions:

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Did you learn anything new about God or yourself? What does this passage tell you about the justice of God?
2. What do you observe about Esther's small speech? How has God given you courage to speak in the past?
3. Esther made her plea personal to the King (7:3-6). How might we think about the injustices around us in more personal ways?
4. In Proverbs 31:8-9 the King's mother told him to defend the rights of the poor and needy. What needs around you need spoken of and met? How do you suppose that you could use your voice, gifts, and resources to help meet needs around you?

PRAY- Praise God for his justice in your life and in the world. Ask God to show you needs that are around you that you can help with using your gifts? Thank Jesus for how His reign will put an end to injustice forever.

Notes:

Part VIII | *The Last Word*

*And in every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and his edict reached, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews, for fear of the Jews had fallen on them. - **Esther 8:17***

*“In Jewish history, there are no coincidences.” - **Elie Wiesel***

Esther 8

We don't have the ability to undo the wrongs done to us, that is a God-sized task. Our attempts at justice either go too far, or not far enough. Our desire for justice is from God, we should also expect that God will be the one who perfectly provides it.

Justice advocated (v1-6) - Esther and Mordecai come into the presence of the king and advocate that an order be written to overrule the dispatches written by Haman that still are in effect and will result in the destruction of the Jews.

Justice delegated by the King of complacency (v7-8) – We all want leaders who will courageously confront injustice, but we fear they will not address issues or challenge evil. Rather than lead, Xerxes is content to let Esther and Mordecai write the next decree.

Evil is defeated by the God of Justice bringing praise to God (v9-19) - As the word of the new decree goes forward there are celebrations and feasts by the Jews. Many people became Jews after seeing the work of God's hands. We have great confidence that while evil has spoken, it is God who gets the last word.

JESUS IS OUR ADVOCATE, before a Just God. Jesus is the just and the justifier (Romans 3:21-26). He is the one who goes before God to argue on our behalf - like a perfect lawyer. Not only that, He also gives us His righteousness making all things right again.

Questions:

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Did you learn anything new about God or yourself? What did you learn about the role of the advocate?
2. What did you observe about Esther's work as an advocate? How does that make you feel knowing that Jesus is perfectly doing the same for you before a perfect Judge?
3. What do you think of Xerxes response to finding out that his decree will lead to the death of thousands? How do we contrast his complacency with the instructions that God gives Kings in Proverbs 31:8-9?
4. The celebrations and feasts that followed the decrees in 8:9-17 were significant. How could we celebrate better when God does something significant in our lives?

PRAY- God forgive us when we despair. Help us to always trust in your righteous rule. Grant us the strength to advocate for others when they are in peril. Thank you for Jesus who advocates for us before your throne.

Notes:

Part IX | Restoration Seen

For Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brothers, for he sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his people.

- Esther 10:3

“Long live Mordecai, cursed be Haman, blessed be Esther”

- Happy Purim Wishes

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” - Revelation 21:4

Esther 9-10

Evil is defeated! (Ch 9 v1-19) – The tables have been turned and justice, rather than vengeance, is being served. Several times in chapter 9 we see that "the Jews did not lay hands on the plunder." This means the Jews understand this battle as a holy war and no one should profit. The ten sons of Haman were also killed, leaving no one to carry on their father's legacy of hateful pride. Death's legacy has been extinguished.

Celebration is called for! (Ch 9 v20-32) - The author of Esther takes time to show the reader why Purim is celebrated. When there is victory over the evil the response should be to rejoice! In the new heavens and new earth we will have a greater feast and festival to look forward to!

National Hero is declared!! (Ch 10 v1-10) - If we look behind the scenes, we again see that the true hero of the story is God who grants rest, reigns over all human events, and restores joy. Mordechai is worthy of celebrating and Esther is due honor, but ultimately Jesus is the one truly worthy of all honor and praise now and forever!

JESUS GRANTS REST, REIGNS, & RESTORES JOY – JESUS IS THE HERO!!

Questions:

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Did you learn anything new about God or yourself? What about the final chapters of Esther remind you of how God always keeps his promises?
2. Many are troubled by Esther's request to allow a second day of killing (9:12-15) even after all of Haman's sons had been killed. What other circumstances in scripture can you remember when God's people were unjust with their response to danger? What does that tell us about our human condition?
3. What can you observe about the festival of Purim (9:20-28)? What part of the celebration do you see as the most fitting considering that it was God who is in control over the end result?
4. In the end of chapter 9 and beginning of chapter 10 we see Queen Esther and Mordecai declared as heroes. After studying the book do you see them as heroes? Why or why not? What about their character points to the true hero of scripture - Jesus?

PRAY- God forgive us when we go too far, or not far enough as we seek justice in our world. Teach us to be just to our family, friends, church members, co-workers and others that cross our path. Thank you for Jesus who is the true hero in our lives.

Appendix | Recommended Resources

COMMENTARIES & NOTES

- *Esther* | *The NIV Application Commentary* | **Karen Jobes**
- *Esther* | *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* | **Debra Reid**
- *Esther & Ruth: Reformed Expository Commentary* | **Iain Duguid**
- *Exalting Jesus in Esther* | *Christ-Centered Exposition* | **Landon Dowden**

BLOGS AND OTHER BOOKS

- *5 Common Arguments Against the Bible and how to Respond to them* | <https://biologos.org/articles/5-common-arguments-against-the-bible-and-how-to-respond-to-them>
- *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* | **Bruce Waltke**
- *Confronting Old Testament Controversies* | **Tremper Longman III**

VIDEO

- **Read Scripture: Esther** | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JydNSlufRIs>



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