

Sermon – 19/07/2009 pm

Haman on Pride's Slide

Study Text: Esther 5, 6

Haman the Agagite was set on destroying the people of God. How was God going to save his people? Mordecai knew that God would save his people. These were the chosen people of God, the people from whom would come the Messiah/Christ, the One to deliver from sin and death.

In these chapters the focus shifts from Mordecai to Esther. We see Esther in battle with Haman, a battle of wit and wisdom. Haman took the lead, with his evil plan to destroy all the Jews now in place. But his superstitious nature locked him into a yearlong delay in executing his plan. Esther called upon the Jews to fast and pray for three days. Through this prayer she was strengthened by the Lord. She was ready to go to the king.

This story is more than just two clever people, two politicians, in a battle of wits. The pendulum swings from one to the other but its every move is controlled by God. The events recorded here are not just about human strategy and coincidence. We must look behind the scenes to the unseen hand of the sovereign God.

The lot was cast *but its every decision is from the Lord* (Proverbs 16:33). The decisions of king Xerxes are vital but *the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord; like rivers of water he turns it wherever he chooses* (Proverbs 21:1). Man proposes but God disposes. There are no 'coincidences' with God because he is the omniscient and omnipotent God. Is this what you believe? Does the way you live show that this is what you believe?

Approach of Esther

Mordecai does not speak in these chapters but his voice continues to ring throughout, especially in the ears of Esther. *Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this* (4:14). Had God made Esther queen that she might act to save God's chosen people at this time?

After three days of fasting and praying Esther was ready to go to the king. She was under no illusions as to the danger she faced, but believed it was God's will for her to go. *If I perish, I perish* she said. What amazing faith we see in this young woman. She believed that her life was in God's hands. Nothing could happen to her outside the will of God. Do you believe this? Do you believe that God can save you from anything, and that you will not die before God's appointed time?

Esther clothed her body with a beautiful royal dress. She clothed her heart with courage and humility as she made her way to the throne room of the king. She went in the strength of the Lord. No doubt Mordecai and all the Jews were praying at this time. Would the king hold out his golden sceptre when he saw her, or not? Would she live or would she die?

To her great relief the king looked on Esther with favour (5:2). He held out the sceptre that was in his hand and Esther approached to touch its tip. The king was most gracious towards her and asked her what she wanted. He appreciated the great courage she had displayed in coming as she did. He knew a matter of grave concern must be on her mind.

King Xerxes promised to give Esther up to half his kingdom (5:3). We are familiar with kings making such outrageous promises. In the New Testament king Herod promised the same to Salome after she danced before him (Mark 6). This was the moment Esther prayed for. She was in the king's presence and he was ready to give her whatever she wanted. All she had to do was ask the king to withdraw his order to kill all the Jews.

Esther asked the king to come to a dinner she had prepared. What sort of answer was that? Esther was neither afraid nor foolish. She was acting with 'wisdom from above'. To confront the king and make him choose between her and Haman would have put the king in a dilemma. Her plan may have backfired. She wanted to be sure, and she also knew God wanted to have Haman punished. 'Bring Haman along to the dinner also' she told the king (5:4).

Having begun in the strength of the Lord Esther continued in the strength of the Lord. Too often we set out on some work or ministry after much prayer but then think we can go it alone. Some new believers start out reading and praying every day but begin to fall away because they rely on their own strength and their own wisdom. When was the last time you earnestly prayed about a decision you had to make?

At the dinner the king again asked Esther what she wanted, again promising up to half his kingdom (5:6). He knew she wanted more than just his presence at a dinner. With Haman present it would not be easy, but this was not the reason why she again put off making her request. That showdown must come, but now was not the time. Why? Esther does not say why but seems to have sensed this. Did she shoot up a prayer to God like Nehemiah before he answered the king (Nehemiah 2:4)?

Esther was overwhelmed by the king's unbelievable promise. She acted as before with God-given wisdom, asking the king and Haman to come to another dinner the following night. She promised to tell the king her request at this dinner. She was keeping the king in suspense and making her request one of great moment before the king.

Anger of Haman

Esther was not to know, but God knew, that there would be a great turn of events before her next dinner. Esther simply trusted herself into the hands of her God and let him work things out for good just as he promises (Romans 8:28). Haman was about to put his foot in it, big time.

Haman was on top of the world when he went out from the first dinner with the king and queen. He was the happiest man alive – until he saw Mordecai sitting in the king's gate. Mordecai still refused to bow down to Haman. Haman was filled with rage. His happiness disappeared in a moment. His balloon burst we might say. And all because of one man.

Haman let one man ruin what had been a glorious day. Great men overlook personal slights but lesser men exaggerate them. They cannot let them pass. They must have their revenge. Haman's heart was filled with pride. Pride leads to arrogance and arrogance to anger. Anger opens the door for Satan to enter and weave his wicked web of destruction.

Haman managed to restrain himself and go home quietly, but Satan was in his heart just as surely as he was in the heart of Judas when he betrayed Jesus. Haman boasted to his wife and friends of his riches and his fame. His happiness depended on his ability to boast of having more than everyone else. He was more important than everyone else in the empire because Queen Esther had invited him to join her and the king at dinner. Esther knew what she was doing.

But there was that man Mordecai the Jew. Haman could not let go of his hatred for this Jew. How could he wait twelve months to be rid of him. His wife and friends decided to help poor Haman. They encouraged him to build gallows 23 m high and have Mordecai hanged them. Let everyone take note of what happens to the enemies of Haman. Haman had the gallows built immediately and early the next morning hurried off to the king to get the okay to hang Mordecai.

Like all who let selfish pride take control of their lives Haman was heading for a great fall. He was on the slide that accompanies pride. Those who climb the ladder of riches and fame find a slide waiting at the top. I was recently asked to play a game of snakes and ladders. I don't know who invented this game but it reminds us of the some Bible truths. Just as in the game landing on a snake means a rapid slide down, so in life that old serpent Satan brings many souls crashing down. Haman was at the top next to the longest snake.

Pride is the most sinister of sins. It can be related to money, family, physical strength or beauty and anything else that we have a gift from God. Pride is actually taking God's gifts and calling them our own; in so doing we cut God out of the picture. 'Our pride robs God of his right to be acknowledged as the source of the good we know and enjoy'.

Paul warns Timothy of terrible stress in the last days. Men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful and unholy (II Timothy 3:1-2). Haman was a man before his time! We live in the last days and we see many 'Haman's' around us. Be careful that you do not become one of them.

Arrangements of God

That night, the night after the first of Esther's banquets, King Xerxes could not sleep. Was it something she fed him? Was it just a coincidence? It is disturbing to find evangelical commentaries declaring 'Jewish commentators see God at work in these events but most others see a series of coincidences' and 'this is a series of seemingly trivial coincidences'. God does not depend on 'coincidences' to fulfil his eternal, unchanging plan.

The king could not sleep so called for the book of records to be brought and read to him. This was no coincidence. It was a case of God 'governing all his creatures and all their actions', just like Esther becoming queen was divine providence. In the providence of God the king heard about Mordecai and that he had not been rewarded for saving the kings life all those years before. The king decided to put things right. He turned to the first person to enter his court that morning to suggest a reward for Mordecai. Who should he find in his court but Haman, hurrying to the king to get permission to hang Mordecai onto his gallows. In a case of divine irony Haman ends up dressing Mordecai in royal robes and leading him in procession through the city. Haman returned home totally and utterly humiliated.

Proud people exalt themselves above everyone else. They are blind to their own shortcomings. They exalt themselves against God their maker. But God sits in heaven and laughs at such people. God knows that *pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall* (Proverbs 16:18). Just as God works all things together for good for those who love him, so he works things together for the downfall of those who do not love him. *God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble* (James 4:6). Do not be proud but *humble yourself before the Lord and he will lift you up* (James 4:10). Be like Esther not like Haman.

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