

Sermon – 05/07/2009 pm

Haman the Horrible

Study Text: Esther 3

Who is the most horrible person in the Bible? There were many wicked kings in Israel, men who killed innocent people and sacrificed children in the fire. We might think of King Herod who ordered the massacre of all boys less than two years of age in and around Bethlehem. There was Pharaoh who ordered all baby boys born to the Jews to be drowned in the river. But Haman tops them all. Because one man offended him he planned revenge against his whole race. He planned genocide, the extermination of all Jews.

Haman is not the only man to attempt genocide. We are all too familiar with Hitler's attempt to do the same thing. Anti-Semitism is not new. The Jews were and are different people. People like Mordecai stand out when they show obedience to a higher authority than a human king. Jews were different because they worshipped the true God without compromise. Daniel like Mordecai did not compromise his faith. Daniel was thrown into the lions' den by Xerxes father Darius, but other Jews were not threatened at that time.

All who choose to follow Jesus Christ, all who fear God more than man will stand out in this evil world. The world hated Jesus and it will hate you if you are his disciple. True Christians will refuse to compromise in the worship of idols. They will be called intolerant. In the first century Christians were killed for refusing to worship idols. Some Roman Emperors attempted to destroy all Christians.

Haman's Pride

After these things King Xerxes promoted Haman ... the Agagite (3:1). This was after four years (3:7). Shortly after Esther was made queen Mordecai heard about a plot to assassinate the king and reported it. The two conspirators were tried and hung. It is ironic that Haman got promoted and not Mordecai. We are not told why Haman was promoted but he was obviously a very ambitious man.

Who was Haman? The title 'Agagite' rings some bells for readers of the Bible – although some think it refers to some unknown place. Agag was king of the Amalekites when the Lord told Saul to go and destroy them. *Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed* (I Samuel 15:18).

What was their sin? The Amalekites attacked Israel soon after the Lord brought them out of bondage in Egypt. At that time Moses said *the Lord has sworn; the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation* (Exodus 17:16). Amalek is in some ways the physical representation of the spiritual enemy of God's people. We can see the hand of Satan behind the evil planned by Haman the Agagite. We see the nature of Satan in the nature of Haman his servant.

Haman was a proud man. He was a rich man. He was corrupt and cunning. Power went to his head. When he was made prime minister he got the king to make all servants bow down before him (3:2). What a contrast to Joseph in Egypt, and to Daniel who was also promoted in the palace of Persia. What a contrast to Mordecai who was later promoted.

Haman was of course a heathen. He lived only for this world and for the praise of men. This is the way of the world. It is the way of thousands today who seek after fame and glory in the eyes of the world. What is your ambition – the fame of Haman or the faith of Mordecai?

Mordecai's Faith

But Mordecai would not bow down or pay homage to Haman (3:2). Why did Mordecai refuse to bow down to Haman? Why did he not do what everyone else was doing? Was it some personal animosity? Was he trying to make trouble? Some scholars say that it was not matter of breaking the second commandment because other Jews freely bowed to the king. But Haman was not the king and the honour demanded by him was more than respect – it was worship. 'A Jewish Targum says that Haman set up a statue of himself to which everyone was obliged to bow in adoration'.

Why did Mordecai not bow down to Haman. He answers the question himself. When others asked him why, he told them he was a Jew (3:4). He understood that in bowing down to Haman he would be breaking the first and second commandments – you shall have no other gods before me, and you shall not bow down to any graven image.

Mordecai was a man who feared God more than man. He knew the severe consequences of disobeying a command of the king of Persia. He could well have chosen the path of compromise. "God will understand" he might have told himself, as many do today. Have you been tempted to compromise with the truth or compromise in worship? What if your friends want you over for a party at the same time as church? You can go to church next week you say – and besides God will understand. He will indeed understand. God will understand that you prefer to be with your friends rather than worshipping him, or that you fear other people and their friendship more than God.

What would you have done in Mordecai's situation? Do you have the faith that he had? Do you fear God and honour him as Mordecai did? Not to please his boss was like asking to die. *God honours those who honour him, but those who despise him he will disdain (I Samuel 2:30).* Let me say that always coming late to worship is not exactly honouring to the Lord your God.

Mordecai's faith was deeper than just words. Mordecai was not a great preacher or evangelist, but was a living witness to the glory of God. He was living in a pagan city, just like you. Even though many around here call themselves Christians they do not honour the name of Christ. Jesus comes way down the list of their priorities. If Jesus was number one they would be in church worshipping him today. The truth is, and it will be shocking truth on judgment day, the truth is that Jesus has first place or no place at all in your life.

Haman's Hatred

Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18) – or in common parlance 'the higher they rise the harder they fall'. Promotion can easily encourage selfish pride and then bring about a person's downfall. In recent days we have been reminded of the truth of this proverb yet again. Indeed fame in this world is a ticket to an early death.

The means of death is not important for the Lord works in his own sovereign ways. The writing is on the wall, just as it was for king Belshazzar whose heart became so proud and arrogant that the Lord said *you have been weighed in the balance and found wanting (Daniel 5:27).*

Haman's pride made his heart like a stone. When he saw that Mordecai did not bow down and worship him he was filled with rage (3:5). In his sinful, sinister heart he conceived an inhuman plot. He satisfied his fury with the thought of not only killing Mordecai but every Jew in the kingdom of Persia. He contemplated and planned genocide – men, women and children would be killed in a Satan inspired pogrom (3:13).

The king had his advisors but Haman consulted no one – except Satan. The only decision he was uncertain about was the day on which to murder all the Jews. Wicked people like Haman and Hitler are usually very superstitious. They appear powerful but are actually cowards filled with fear. They look to star charts and astrologers to find the best time to do their wicked deeds. Haman cast the 'Pur' or lot to determine the date. God overrules in all things and so the date came out at almost a year away (Proverbs 16:33). He would have to burn with anger for almost twelve months. And the Jews would have time to pray and plan their defence.

With plan in hand Haman went to the king to get his signature. Through deception – Haman did not mention the name Jews; through lies – he portrayed these people as law breakers which was not true; and through bribery – he offered to pay a huge sum to the king, Haman persuaded Xerxes to put the royal seal of approval on his evil plan. The king was not aware of the gravity of his action, in much the same way that Pilate foolishly gave in to the demand of the Jews to kill the Christ. In both situations God was overruling for his own glory.

Haman's plot became a royal decree and as such was translated into all the languages of the empire and carried to every province by speed post. It was also proclaimed in the capital city. The closing words of the chapter are most tragic. Having just issued a death warrant for millions of innocent human beings, the king and Haman sat down to drink. The rest of the people were perplexed or confused. Why were they being asked to murder their innocent neighbours?

A closing thought. When the Lord told Saul, a Benjamite, to utterly destroy the Amalekites he failed to do so. He thought he knew better than God. He took many as prisoners including king Agag. God's prophet Samuel rebuked Saul and killed Agag himself. The Amalekites lived on because of Saul disobedience. And now generations later an Agagite again threatens the people of God.

Beware of thinking you know better than God. God is sovereign. He knows all things. He knows the beginning and the end. If you think you know better than God you are a fool. If you think you can disobey the word of God with impunity you are a fool.

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