

Slide # 1

Theme: God’s providential Care For His People

Outline:

Chapter 1 – Queen Vashti Deposed

Chapter 2 – Esther Becomes Queen

Chapter 3 – Haman’s Plot Against the Jews

Chapters 4-7 Esther’s Courage – Haman’s Plot Backfires

Chapter 8 The Jews Avenged

Chapter 9 The Feast of Purim Instituted

Chapter 10 Epilogue – Mordecai Exalted

Esther is a story about God’s providence and His faithfulness. It is a story about good versus evil – about God versus Satan – about God’s people versus Satan’s people. And in the end the people of God triumph purely because of God’s power and grace.

As the book of Esther develops we see this is a story about hostility between a man named Haman and a man named Mordecai.

However, it is much deeper than this. Haman represents the ancient people called the Amalekites who were the proverbial enemies of God’s people the Jews. Mordecai represents the Jews. And behind all this is God representing the Jews and Satan representing the Amalekites.

In the story Haman had been promoted to the second highest position in the Persian kingdom. And in that position the king had commanded that all bow to him. However, there was one man named Mordecai who refused to bow, and he happened to be a Jew. This so infuriated Haman that he came up with a plot not only to kill Mordecai but also the whole of the Jewish people.

Haman in a crafty way got the king to sign a decree which called for the annihilation of all the Jews on a certain day which was then signed into law by the king. This decree was then published throughout the entire kingdom.

That brings us to where we are in the story at Esther chapter 4.

Esther 4:1–12 (NKJV)

1 When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry.

When Mordecai learned of Haman’s murderous scheme now made official law which could not be changed, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes. This was a way of expressing extreme grief in the ancient Near East (cf. Gen. 37:34; 2 Sam. 1:11; Job 1:20; Isa. 15:1-3). Sometimes it also expressed the brokenness of deep repentance (Neh. 9:1-2; Jon. 3:6). It certainly expressed brokenness and grief.

Sackcloth even looks like it would be miserable to wear.

Slide # 2

Sackcloth was very rough material made out of goat skins or camel hide. Again, the wearing of it signified mourning and brokenness.

Mordecai went out into the streets of the city and cried aloud with a bitter cry. He was quite a miserable sight to behold. He had told his peers that he was a Jew (cf. 3:4) and now he is on public record by his actions that this murderous decree ripped at his heart and that he was broken over it.

When it says he “cried out with a loud and bitter cry” this literally means he cried with a great cry. In the OT this language described a loud howl either over personal or national tragedy (cf. Gen. 18:20; 2 Sam. 13:19; Ezek. 9:8).

Many commentators think that in Mordecai’s mind what aggravated his grief may well have been that he realized his revealing that he was a Jew in 3:4 was what brought Haman’s wrath against his people. When Haman realized that the man who would not bow to him was a Jew his response was to seek to kill all the Jews.

And Mordecai undoubtedly felt like he was personally responsible for this. That is a heavy weight on the soul of a person. It is estimated that there were about 10 million Jews in the kingdom at this time – so Mordecai was very probably feeling responsible for the lives of 10 million people. That is heavy!

2 He went as far as the front of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth.

There was strict court etiquette that allowed no one wearing sackcloth to enter the king's quarters. The king didn't want a sour/dour demeanor around. When Nehemiah served under king Artaxerxes (the son of Ahasuerus who succeeded him) even being sad in the presence of the king was terrifying.

Slide # 3

Nehemiah 2:1–2 (NKJV)

1 And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before.

2 Therefore the king said to me, "**Why is your face sad**, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart." So I became **dreadfully afraid**,

The king wanted only "happy" countenances in his presence – certainly no sackcloth and ashes were allowed.

3 And in every province where the king's command and decree arrived, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

Everywhere the decree was broadcast the response of the Jews was the same as that of Mordecai involving mourning, weeping, wailing, fasting, with sackcloth and ashes. They were a broken people! This was an ethnic disaster of dire proportions.

Even though God is not mentioned in the book, and neither is prayer; even so regularly in the OT fasting was accompanied with prayer. Consistently prayer and fasting go together and is therefore probably implied here (cf. Joel 1:14). So even though God is not mentioned in the book this seems to be a veiled reference that implies they were appealing to God.

There is little brokenness over sin today.

When is the last time that you heard a sinner, saved or lost, cry out to God for mercy? At the beginning of my ministry I saw a great many tears, I saw people cry out to God. I do not see that today.

– **J. Vernon McGee**

The Bible contrasts worldly sorrow in which the sorrow is self-centered and cries over personal loss with godly sorrow which is keeping with true repentance. Godly sorrow grieves over my sin against God while worldly sorrow is just sorry for self because of consequences.

Slide # 4

James 4:8–9 (NKJV)

8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

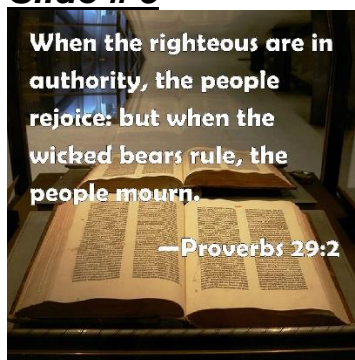
9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to **mourning** and your joy to gloom.

This is the spirit of true repentance which is representative of godly sorrow.

An old preacher was informed that during one of his services someone had gotten the joy, but his penetrating question was, **“Did they ever get any sorrow?”** Proper repentant grief comes before joy. Popular Christianity today is all about “the joy” in the sense of wanting to have a good time. For many its all about the “fun” but there is little emphasis on repentance. Yes, by all means joy, but it is to be joy that flows out of repentance – not joy without repentance. It is “godly sorrow” that produces true repentance and out of that comes the joy of the Lord (cf. Mt. 5:4; 2 Cor. 7:10-11; Gal. 5:22; Phil. 4:4).

By the way there is consistently sorrow where evil reigns. People foolishly think that wicked leaders will make society better. They don't! It inevitably leads to sorrow.

Slide # 5



With Haman as second in command and manipulating the king it was groaning time for the Jews in Persia.

4 So Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her, and the queen was deeply distressed. Then she sent garments to clothe Mordecai and take his sackcloth away from him, but he would not accept them.

Realize that in these days there was no quick form of communication. And it would appear that Esther was rather secluded in "queens quarters" and was not really aware of what was happening. At this point she was informed of the spectacle that Mordecai was making of himself in sackcloth and ashes out in the public square, but that is all she knew.

This report about Mordecai troubled Esther and so she sent garments to him so that he might change out of his sackcloth. However, he would not accept these garments. In doing so Mordecai was communicating that this was not merely about a personal issue but rather a national issue. This was not something he could just personally deal with and move on. And so he remained clothed in sackcloth.

5 Then Esther called Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs whom he had appointed to attend her, and she gave him a command concerning Mordecai, to learn what and why this was.

We see in context that both Esther and Mordecai trusted this eunuch named Hathach. Various commentators have suggested that perhaps he was a Jew. Perhaps? However, people tend to get close to those they work with day in and day out and Esther had a trusted relationship with this particular eunuch for whatever reason.

Esther dispatched Hathach to go and find out what was so troubling Mordecai that he was going about publicly in sackcloth and ashes.

We know nothing about Hathach other than he was this trusted eunuch that was used in a very unique way for such a time as this.

Warren Wiersbe makes this observation...

So often in the work of the Lord, He uses obscure people to accomplish important tasks. What was the name of the young boy who gave Jesus his loaves and fishes? Who were the men who rescued Paul by lowering him over that Damascus wall in a basket? What was the name of the little servant girl who told Naaman to go see the prophet? We don't know, but God used these people to accomplish His purposes. Here the eunuch Hathach is named, but we know nothing else about him. – **Warren Wiersbe**

6 So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square that was in front of the king's gate.

7 And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries to destroy the Jews.

Mordecai filled in the details as to what had happened regarding his refusal to bow, Haman's national scheme to annihilate the Jews and Haman's promise to the king to pay 10 thousand talents of silver into the national treasury if he would sign the decree – which he did (cf. 3:9).

Mordecai was privy to these behind the scenes details because of his high position in the government. We saw in verse 5 that God often uses “nobodies” like the eunuch Hathach to accomplish His purposes, but on the other hand He often providentially places people like Mordecai into a position of prominence as well to serve His ultimate purposes.

Joseph was so used in the land of Egypt (cf. Gen 41); Daniel was so used (cf. Dan. 2); as was Nehemiah (cf. Neh. 1). We serve according to God's sovereign appointment and we should accept where He places us for such a time as this. Most of us will serve in not very prominent roles (humanly speaking) but there are always a few exceptions. It is good to remind ourselves that we are not self-made people or self-placed people.

Slide # 6

1 Corinthians 12:18 (NKJV)

18 But now **God has set** the members, **each one** of them, in the body **just as He pleased**.

Slide # 7

1 Corinthians 1:26 (NKJV)

26 For you see your calling, brethren, that **not many** wise according to the flesh, **not many** mighty, **not many** noble, are called.

There was an English nobleman called Lady Huntington who was saved during the time of the Wesley's ministry at a particular street revival. She said that she owed her salvation to the letter “***m***”. If the text said NOT ANY wise, mighty, or noble she would have been excluded, but as she pointed out it says **not MANY**. There are some.

8 He also gave him a copy of the written decree for their destruction, which was given at Shushan, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her, and that he might command her to go in to the king to make supplication to him and plead before him for her people.

Mordecai had a personal copy of the decree which he gave to Hathach to show and explain to Esther. But he also sent along a COMMAND for her to go into the king and plead to him for her people – meaning the Jewish people who were being singled out for destruction.

Mordecai at this point is putting it all on the line. Earlier he had charged Esther to not reveal her Jewish heritage (2:10). Then he himself revealed it to the king's servants that he was a Jew as seen in 3:4. Now he COMMANDS Esther to go in and plead with the king and he also reveals to this Eunuch that Esther herself was a Jew (if he didn't already know).

But Mordecai applied lots of emotional pressure at this point. Note the word "command" meaning he was ordering Esther to do this. We saw earlier in 2:20 that Esther followed the order given to her by Mordecai not to reveal her people and the reason given is "Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him." She had been taught obedience and at that time was still respectful of Mordecai's leadership.

Now she is the queen and what would she do with such a command?

**9 So Hathach returned and told Esther the words of Mordecai.
10 Then Esther spoke to Hathach, and gave him a command for Mordecai:**

Here was Esther's response back to Mordecai...

11 "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, he has but one law: put all to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days."

There was some initial reluctance to follow through on such a command because it was a life and death matter.

She explained that everyone knew you could not just go uninvited into the king's presence.

Anyone who tried to do so would be put to death. That is understandable because regularly there were assassination attempts on the king's life. Security in protecting the king was of paramount importance. Recall in chapter 2 that two of the king's eunuchs were planning to lay hands on the king. But Mordecai found out about it who informed Esther who in turn informed the king and consequently these two were promptly hanged on a gallows.

In fact, Ahasuerus about 10 years later ended up being murdered in his own bed. So it was very important to guard who was allowed to come into the king's presence. Only those so invited were allowed to come.

The only exception to death to the uninvited was if the king held out the golden scepter which was a symbol of the king's royal authority (see 5:2).

I like to think of this as a picture of GRACE. In Christ God (as it were) is holding out the golden scepter to us. We now have access to God through Christ. The only thing we have to do is COME! When Esther came – grace was extended and she was allowed in. When we by faith come to God through Christ we too are allowed in.

The last invitation right at the end of the Bible is COME!

Slide # 8

Revelation 22:17 (NKJV)

17 And the Spirit and the bride say, "**Come!**" And let him who hears say, "**Come!**" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever **desires,** let him **take** the water of life freely.

The golden scepter (so to speak) – that is GRACE is extended – but we do have to COME!

But there was one other concern that Esther had. She had not been called to go in and see the king for 30 days. That is quite a dry spell when you are the queen. Had the king grown cold towards her? She wondered.

This was risky. It could put her life in jeopardy if the king was no longer favorable towards her. Courage was required.

This involved high drama regarding the issues of life and death. And yet it was not only Esther's life that was in view – but that of all her people.

And so the pressure of this decision was upon her. We can understand her giving pause to this and counting the cost. Mordecai had one last response which would lead her to her final decision as well.

12 So they told Mordecai Esther's words.

Next time we will see Mordecai's response and challenging question: "who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

That is the penetrating question of the entire book – and really the great question before all of us who serve our Lord.

We serve where God has sovereignly placed us – for such a time as this. And this is a very fitting place to be in our study as have one last evening service in this building – namely next Sunday night (Lord willing) where will consider the theme FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS at length!

We will pick it up there next time.