

A Tale of Two Plots

Esther 2:19 – 4:17

Friends can you imagine yourself in Esther's predicament?

Now last week we asked the question "what will Esther do as Queen?" And perhaps this week it would appear that she had found the answer to that question, when she and Mordecai foiled the plot to kill King Xerxes.

Because of Esther's position in the palace, Mordecai just happened to be in the right place at the right time to overhear the plot - and he is able to report it to Queen Esther.

Esther sees that her King's life is in danger, so she immediately goes and reports the conspiracy to him – if there was any purpose to being the Queen at the very least it would be to protect the King's life!

So I'm sure that she was aware of the fortuitousness of her just having just become Queen - and thus being in the right

place at the right time to prevent such a terrible event from occurring.

She had done the Empire a great service in preventing a bloody rebellion and insurrection from taking place and contributed to the continued peaceful reign and rule of King Xerxes.

I don't think it would be too far off to suggest that Esther would have felt like she has found her purpose and place in being the Queen of Persia.

And I can't help but notice in this first plot how easily Esther is able to report this plot to the King – I can't find anything in the text which would make me think that she sent the report via a servant (like we portrayed in the drama) and didn't tell him directly herself...

So this has me wondering – why is Esther so hesitant to approach the King again when Mordecai informs her about the second plot – Haman's evil plan to kill all the Jews...

Well friends perhaps this is because Esther has almost forgotten who she really was?

After all – she was supposed to keep her Jewish identity a secret and she has successfully done so now for almost five years.

She has been living in the royal palace, surrounded by and having to observe customs and traditions which have nothing to do with obedience to the Law of Moses; there would be no one reminding her of the story about the Exodus from the Land of Egypt and the journey to the Promised Land...

She would not celebrate the Passover, or any of the other important feasts, she would not be able to observe the dietary laws – that would be an obvious giveaway to her true identity.

So time goes by and with her contributions to the Empire and being constantly surrounded by Persian custom, religion, and culture - Esther the Jew loses herself in her role as Esther

Queen of Persia, she probably doesn't have to work very hard to keep it a secret anymore.

Now brothers and sisters, there is a lesson for us here - a warning about becoming too familiar and comfortable with our secular Canadian culture and losing our identity to it.

Our Canadian culture wants little or nothing to do with the message of the gospel and no one wants to tell the stories of the bible or really promote Christian holidays and celebrations.

In fact our society would rather celebrate the customs and stories of any other religion rather than observe those of Christianity.

Our culture values the pursuit of individual happiness and self-expression/identification as what is most important - and so long as Christians do not interfere with this pursuit we are tolerated and we can get along quite well with our society...

We can even make good and important contributions to our society's pursuit of happiness, by telling people what sorts of benefits they will experience from being a Christian.

But in this kind of relationship with our culture, we are always in danger of forgetting that we belong to God's chosen people – just like Esther seems to have.

So when Mordecai tells Esther of the terrible plot to destroy the Jews – Esther balks at the idea of taking some kind of action.

Her reply about not being able to see the King might technically be true but there is a bit of an excuse in it...

“Mordecai I can't really do anything about this, because I can't go see the King on my own – I will be putting my life at risk if I do - you of all people should know this!”

I wouldn't discount that Esther may have heard rumors going around the court that Mordecai was refusing to honor to Haman.

So when Esther hears that it is Haman who is behind this plot that has Mordecai in such great distress that she puts two and two together.

If Mordecai hadn't been so obstinate about bowing down to Haman none of this would have happened!

Why should she be expected to risk her life and position as Queen for Mordecai's insolence and disobedience to her husband's command to honor Haman!

So Esther balks at going to the King like she did last time – she's not so eager to use her position to try and intervene as Mordecai suggests she do.

And we might well sympathize with her as we have also struggled with our own call as Christians to use the position and power that God has blessed us with to intervene on behalf of God's people.

Are we willing to put pressure on our gov't to deal with other countries around the world that are persecuting, even killing Christians?

Do we protest the anti-Christian bias and negative Christian stereotypes which most the media and entertainment industry loves to promote these days?

Do we speak out against changes in the education curriculum and others pieces of legislation that undermines the ability for the Church and Christians to freely and openly pursue obedience to God?

It might be tempting to think - as Esther did - that these issues and plots have little to do with us and why should we risk getting involved to speak out against them?

But friends, the fact is that these instances, these oppositions and persecutions are part of something much bigger and much larger than ourselves – which has been going on for a

very long time – even longer than the 1500 odd years since the Story of Esther...

We need to rewind things back almost 1000 years from Esther's time in 473 B.C. - all the way back to 1040 B.C. when Mordecai's distant relative, a certain King Saul had captured Haman the Agagite's distant relative King Agag of the Amalekites after defeating him in battle. Saul had delivered King Agag to the Prophet Samuel who then brutally executed Agag by hacking him to pieces.

A horrible and violent act! What in the world would have caused the Prophet Samuel to do this? Wasn't he that sweet little boy whom God spoke to in the middle of the night?? What happened to him??

Well... we need to rewind things back another 400 years to 1447 B.C. when Moses was leading the people of Israel out from slavery in Egypt.

Now you probably know the highlights of the story; the Israelites escape after God kills the first born sons of the Egyptians, they are pursued by the Egyptian army trapped at the Red Sea...

They are miraculously rescued when Moses parts the Red Sea by God's power and they cross through on dry land and the Egyptian army ends up drowning in the Red Sea.

So, now this rag-tag group of former slaves, this people of Israel - who were going to inherit the Covenant Promise which God had made to their fathers – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - were free!

And while this very large, unorganized, and very vulnerable group of former slaves was following Moses over to Mt. Sinai – figuring out where they would get enough food and water to provide for an entire nation - the Amalekites, King Agag's and Haman's ancestors, came and attacked them without cause or provocation. (Exodus 17:8-16)

You may have heard the story about this battle – it's where Moses went up a hill to raise his hands in prayer, while Joshua led the men in the battle down in the valley.

Then end result was that the Lord gave Joshua the victory over the Amalekites, and for the unprovoked attack God had this to say to Moses afterwards; *“Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven.”* (Ex 17:14)

And later on when God gave Moses His Law and the Ten Commandments, He included a special command to Israel about this.

Deuteronomy 25:19 reads; “When the LORD your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land he is giving you to possess as an inheritance, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!”

Now I'm sure this has us wondering - why in the world would God do this? This is not good for His current PR situation – trying to overcome all that angry Old Testament God and come across more loving and such...

Well... let's rewind back some more, this time we're going back to when God revealed Himself to Abraham and chose to make an unbreakable Covenant promise to him.

In Genesis 12:1-3 God swears to Abraham; *"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse..."*

So when the Amalekites attacked Israel unprovoked – they were cursing Israel – and God's promise to Abraham was still in effect and thus He would curse the Amalekites.

So – fast forward to back King Saul and the Prophet Samuel and we now understand that they were fulfilling God's curse on the nation of the Amalekites, by being obedient to God's

command in going to war against them and executing King Agag.

So – fast forward again to the story of Esther and now we understand far better why Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman and honor him. He is an Agagite, a descendant of King Agag, an Amalekite – and you know the history now...

And when Haman discovers that Mordecai who is refusing to honor him is a Jew... well this only adds fuel to the fire. It's no longer a personal matter – it's all about national pride and revenge for his ancestors.

So Haman decides to use his position to not only destroy Mordecai, but all the Jews in the Empire!

So there is real danger now friends, because up to this point in their history the Jews had never been really close to being wiped out. Sure, they had been conquered, enslaved and eventually exiled – but now they were in very real danger of being wiped out as a people – it was all but done.

And if was carried out – how would it fit in with God’s track record of keeping His promise to Abraham to make him into a great nation that would bless all the other nations on earth...

What was going on?

Ok – one more time... to understand why this is happening we need to go back even further than King Saul and Samuel, further than Moses, and further than Abraham...

We have to go all the way back to the Garden of Eden where Eve was deceived by the devil and ate from the tree along with Adam - and the creation was radically distorted by the evil and sin which disobedience ushered into it.

Now – in spite of these terrible consequences that occurred, there was also grace, mercy and the promise of redemption.

God graciously and mercifully put enmity - a holy hatred - between the woman and the devil, so there would be no more collaboration or alliance between them. From this point on there would be those who are children of the serpent who live

in rebellion against God - and those who are children of the woman, those who will belong to God.

And God also promised that one day – a descendant of Eve would crush the head of the serpent – defeat the devil, while enduring only minor injuries in the process. (Gen 3:15)

So from that point on the scripture tells the story of how God begin to put his plan in place to fulfill this promise by selecting and choosing people to participate in it, like He did with Abraham.

We’ve already heard about the promise God made him –that all nations would be blessed by him – and as the story of the bible progresses we see that this means a promised messiah who would come to save humanity from their sin, and change their hearts to be faithful to God.

So as God reveals more and more of his plan to Abraham’s descendants, the enemy begins to work harder and harder to

try and prevent its success. He can't fight God, but he can try to destroy Israel.

So with every trick, deception, and destructive plan he has worked behind the scenes to attempt to destroy the people through whom God has planned to save the world. He leads Israel astray, causing God to punish them, He instigates the empires of the world to come and attack them, to enslave them.

And in the story of Esther we see His most concentrated effort yet, working through Haman, taking advantage of the hatred in his heart, and his position of power in the Empire.

In reality it is the Enemy, Satan, who orchestrates this plan to attempt to wipe out the source of salvation for the world - and it looks like it will succeed.

But the good news friends, is that God is greater than the Devil. He's always one step ahead of him, outsmarting him, even using what seems to be an apparent victory to undo him.

He has subtly and quietly positioned Esther in a position of power in the Empire as well, and Mordecai can see this and so He says to Esther – perhaps you have come to the throne for such as time as this.

Mordecai knows that God's people must survive, the promise must be fulfilled, not only because God's Word must come true but because our world needs it!

And as Mordecai sees it, Esther is well positioned to play an important role to ensure this can happen.

So brothers and sisters what do we get out of all this? Well it's the conviction that God is working in all of our lives as just He was working in Esther's - because in Romans 8:28 it says *"God works in all things for the good of those who love him"*

So whatever happens to us as followers of Jesus Christ we can count on the fact that God is equipping us, positioning us so that at a particular time He can call on us to play a some role

in His plan to save this world – and move things forward to the return of Christ when all things will be made new!

So I asked the question at the beginning of this message – can you imagine yourself in Esther’s predicament?

Perhaps the better question now would be is God calling you to be in Esther’s predicament – for such a time as this?

We might be tempted to respond as Esther first did saying *“I can’t do anything, if I take action on behalf of God’s plan and God’s Kingdom I’m putting myself at risk!”*

I could get fired for pointing out that our newspaper has an anti-Christian bias; I could lose my job if I don’t do this shady deal for the company...

I will be ostracized for speaking out against the gov’t ideologically driven curriculum; I could lose their respect and friendship by telling them I believe Jesus is God’s chosen one who is the only way...

But friends, we need to remember Mordecai’s warning to Esther – don’t think that we are safe and secure because we seem to fit into society and have a position of power and prestige!

If you refuse to participate when God needs you - he can find someone else, nothing will stop God’s plan – but it will be your loss, perhaps even to the point as the Apostle Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 3:15 of suffering a loss where you escape with only your life as you would escape a burning building.

But friends – here is some more good news! There are things which can help us remember our identity and overcome the fear of putting ourselves at risk for the sake of God’s Kingdom.

We can Fast as Esther did, because Fasting is not just about avoiding food – Fasting is breaking away from all those things around us which so easily define us and become our identity.

Fasting is getting the jump on the loss we might suffer from standing up for the Kingdom of God so that we realize we can handle it, we can deal with the loss.

Fasting strips everything away so that we are reduced to our most basic state and we realize that all we truly have, the only thing which can really define us is our relationship with God through Jesus Christ – and that is enough.

Fasting helps us to remember and regain our identity.

So brothers and sisters, because it is in the scriptures the story of Esther has much to teach us – but if we only learn one thing let it be this – Esther was placed by God to preserve the Jews so that Christ might come as the promised Messiah through them.

And we can be equally confident that God has been working quietly behind the scenes in our lives, directing everything, so that just when it looks like the Church and the gospel message might be destroyed by our secular, pluralistic society – we will

find we have been well placed to play a crucial role for such a time as this.

We can act and use our influence and position so that future generations can hear the good news and believe – that all nations have been blessed, and that salvation for this world has come from the Jews.

Because Christ was promised, Christ has come, and Christ will come again.

Amen.