

All This Is Worth Nothing To Me  
Esther 5  
November 6, 2022  
Rev. Dave Dorst  
CenterPoint Church

Read Esther 5

*"The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times."* (Psalm 12:6)

### **Introduction**

I was in high school and college when Michael Jordan mania was at its peak. I loved watching Jordan on the court - the great jump shot, the thunderous dunks, the clutch shots, the tongue wagging, all of it. Watching the Bulls win three straight championships twice was a very defining experience as a sports fan in my formative years. There was one night, though, when I lost a lot of respect for Michael Jordan, and it didn't have anything to do with his baseball years or his gambling or divorce or any of his off-court issues. It was the night he gave his Hall of Fame acceptance speech. On the perfect night to thank everyone, he did thank his family and his coaches. But then Jordan spent most of his time talking about all the obstacles he had overcome. He talked about how his high school coach had cut him, how the veterans had frozen him out in the All-Star game his rookie year, how the media doubted him, and how many players he dominated. He showed zero grace and no class- just a desire to cut down other people to make himself look better.

Now we have to always remember that there are two sides to pride: arrogance and insecurity. On the one hand, prideful people talk about themselves a lot, like to show off what they have or what they know. This looks like arrogance, and it can be outwardly powerful. But that outward toughness and bragging is almost always a cover for insecurity. They're covering up deep wounds or weaknesses that they don't want people to see. Michael Jordan was always afraid that he wasn't good enough- so he pushed himself to be the best, and he stepped on anyone who got in his path. Cynthia Heimel wrote a book about celebrities called *If You Can't Live Without Me, Why Aren't You Dead Yet?* She said this:

"I pity [celebrities]... more than any of us, they wanted fame. They worked, they pushed... the morning after... each of them became famous, they wanted to take an overdose... because that giant thing they were striving for, that fame thing that was going to make everything okay, that was going to make their lives bearable, that was going to provide them with personal fulfillment and... happiness, had happened. And nothing changed. They were still them. The disillusionment turned them howling and insufferable."<sup>1</sup>

This morning we will see both the arrogance and insecurity of a very accomplished person, but this time in the ancient culture of the Persian Empire. The king's right-hand man that we met in chapter 3, Haman, displays both his ego and his self-doubt in this passage where he is both flattered and disrespected. We'll see him turn howling and insufferable. We'll spend time today looking at a woman who was struggling to keep her people alive at the same time that a man was struggling to keep his ego and self-worth pumped up high enough to find life worth living.

As we head into chapter five today, remember that Esther has made the big decision to ask the king to stop Haman's wicked plan to destroy her people. She had been urged by her cousin/adopted

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<sup>1</sup> Cynthia Heimel, *If You Can't Live Without Me, Why Aren't You Dead Yet?* (New York: Grove, 1991), pp. 13-14.

father to use her position as queen to gain access to the king that very few people had. Of course, she couldn't just walk up to the king unannounced; there was a law against that, even for the queen, and the penalty was death. She had to be granted access, so in the first four verses we see the king

**I. Holding Out the Golden Scepter (vv. 1-4)**

*<sup>1</sup> On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, in front of the king's quarters, while the king was sitting on his royal throne inside the throne room opposite the entrance to the palace. <sup>2</sup> And when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won favor in his sight, and he held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter. <sup>3</sup> And the king said to her, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom." <sup>4</sup> And Esther said, "If it please the king, let the king and Haman come today to a feast that I have prepared for the king."*

One of two things was going to happen when Esther walked into the inner court of the palace: either the king would extend his golden scepter to allow her to enter or else a guard would extend his axe to end her life.<sup>2</sup> Thankfully, the former happened, as Esther found favor in his eyes (which seems to be Esther's specialty). She had no guarantee that this would happen since the king hadn't called her into his presence in over a month; she was probably trembling as she approached. Remember that she hadn't eaten in three days because she had fasted in preparation for this bold course of action, so she might have been close to fainting between the fear and the weakness from hunger. As we think about verses 2-3 and the king's favorable disposition to Esther, we should remember Proverbs 21:1 – *"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He will."* The king was the most powerful human, but not too powerful for the Lord to influence.

In chapter three, the king had granted Haman permission to write up whatever royal decree he wanted, and here he granted Esther a bit of a genie wish, a blank check of sorts: "I'll give you anything, up to half my kingdom." That line was not to be taken literally, he wasn't ready to give Esther half of the 127 provinces that he ruled over. It was just a way of saying that in his delight of her, he was ready to be very generous. I hope you see the irony, though, that the king had unknowingly signed Esther's death warrant two chapters earlier and now he was ready to give her anything that she asked for.

We don't know why Esther didn't immediately get to the heart of the issue and ask the king to stop Haman's evil plan to kill her people. We don't have access to her thoughts at this time, but we must assume that she wanted to time that request just right. She wanted to get the king happy and sitting around with a full belly before making the "big ask." The way to a man's heart is through his stomach, right? So she invited him and his closest advisor, Haman, to a feast that she had prepared. Her plans could all still blow up in her face, we'll have to wait and see. Last week I talked about risk, and how God often calls us to step out in faith. This is all a continuation of Esther's resolve to move forward in faith and boldness, saying *"if I perish, I perish,"* but I'm going to do the right thing anyways.

Will the king accept Esther's invitation to her banquet? The next four verses show her

**II. Holding a Royal Feast (vv. 5-8)**

*<sup>5</sup> Then the king said, "Bring Haman quickly, so that we may do as Esther has asked." So the king and Haman came to the feast that Esther had prepared. <sup>6</sup> And 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." <sup>7</sup> Then Esther answered, "My wish and my request is: <sup>8</sup> If I*

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<sup>2</sup> Bryan R. Gregory, *Inconspicuous Providence: The Gospel According to Esther* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2014), p94.

*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."*

Comedian Steven Wright once asked, "What happens if you get scared half to death twice?" This seems to be the second time that Esther's courage has failed her, and that perhaps this feast she gave to win the favor of the king has failed. It's easy to think that Esther has lost her nerve as we think about how monumental the request of the king to save her people was going to be: First, she would be asking to change or nullify an irreversible law that had already been signed by his signet ring, giving it the full force of the law, unable to be changed without him losing power and credibility. Second, she would be asking the king to forgo a massive sum of money that Haman had promised to give in exchange for the execution order. And lastly, she would be revealing her Jewish identity, showing her to have deceived her husband and king for the last five years.<sup>3</sup>

But there's a possibility that this is a very shrewd move by Esther. Look at how she worded her invitation for the next night in verse 8: "*if it please the king to grant my wish and fulfill my request... come to the feast... and tomorrow I will do as the king has said.*" She has essentially bound the king to keep his word if he shows up the next day! Just by attending the second banquet, "the king will have already implicitly committed himself to grant whatever request Esther makes of him."<sup>4</sup> Giving the king another day to digest his food and wine and getting excited to feast again was a wise move. Esther was embodying Jesus' recommendation that His followers should "*be wise as serpents and innocent as doves*" (Matthew 10:16).

The last six verses pivot to giving us insight into Haman's heart and how he was

### **III. Holding a Grudge (vv. 9-14)**

*<sup>9</sup> And Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai.*

*<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and brought his friends and his wife Zeresh. <sup>11</sup> And Haman recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the servants of the king. <sup>12</sup> Then Haman said, "Even Queen Esther let no one but me come with the king to the feast she prepared. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king. <sup>13</sup> Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." <sup>14</sup> Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows fifty cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged upon it. Then go joyfully with the king to the feast." This idea pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made.*

Haman walked out of the feast that he had attended with the king and queen feeling the highest of highs. "*Glad of heart*" in the ESV is translated as "*in high spirits*" in the NIV, and it surely indicates that Haman was drunk. And he quickly went from a happy drunk to an angry one. And it only took one person to bring him to the lowest of lows: that blasted Jew, Mordecai, who refused to show him the respect he deserved. Before Mordecai wouldn't kneel and bow to Haman, now he refused to stand up in his presence. I wonder if the thought crossed Mordecai's mind to beg Haman to rescind the royal decree to kill his people; to try to reason with him and solve their personal feud before things got out of hand. But there is no indication that Mordecai was going to do something like that. They both ignored each other.

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<sup>3</sup> Iain M. Duguid, *Esther and Ruth* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), p. 62.

<sup>4</sup> Gregory, p. 100.

But Haman was like the most insecure person that you know. He went home and gathered his wife and his friends around him so that he could brag about his money, his high position at work, even the number of sons he had (as if his wife didn't know these things). "I'm so great that I'm invited to two feasts that the queen is throwing for just the king and me. But Mordecai is still sitting there disrespecting me, so all of this is worth nothing." Now, true friends and good counselors would have challenged Haman to see that his happiness should not just center on one person's attitude towards him. They could have pushed back and helped him see that all the great things in his life outweighed one man's disrespect; and that if it didn't, there was something wrong with his view of success in life. There will always be a Mordecai in your life, they could have said, and rather than have them eliminated, you should learn how to ignore their disrespect and find joy anyways. Our true friends and family will push back on our egos and challenge us in our blind spots and weaknesses, exposing our faulty thinking so that we can grow as Christians and human beings.

But that was most definitely not the case for Haman's friends. What a sweet wife he had, who, with his sycophant friends nodding along, said, "Hey honey, if you build a gallows seventy-five feet high and hang Mordecai on it, you'll feel better!" I mentioned this before, but most commentators think that while we assume a gallows is where you hang someone with rope, it was actually a tall pole on which someone would be impaled. The only way Haman could feel good about himself and enjoy that second feast is if his enemy was grotesquely executed beforehand. He could no longer wait until the appointed thirteenth day in the twelfth month when all the Jews would be killed, Mordecai with them. No, he had to die the very next day!

So we come to the end of chapter five: Esther has put off her request of the king for another day, but now that Haman has decided to kill Mordecai in between the feasts, that looks like a bad decision. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger: will Mordecai meet a gruesome end before Esther can intervene with the king? Don't read ahead, just come back next week to find out!

## **Conclusion**

Esther's risking everything in her life is contrasted with Haman's essentially having everything in this world, but letting the one thing that he didn't have gnaw at him. Haman could not enjoy all of the good things in his life as long as there was one person who opposed him! "*All this is worth nothing to me*" as long as Mordecai stands there reminding me that I'm not as great as I think I am. His insecurity drove him. Can you imagine Haman on Twitter or reading the comments section about his job performance? He would blow a gasket and constantly be sending soldiers to attack anyone who criticized him. He would be like Kevin Durant, who seems to always be defending himself online; you just want to remind him that he's one of the greatest basketball players on the planet – isn't that enough? "Haters gonna hate." Absolute esteem and respect from others was the great idol in Haman's life; that continues to be an idol for many today.

What is the idol in your life that you absolutely have to have or else the rest of your life feels worthless? Maybe it's a certain level of income you have to reach, maybe it's an accomplishment or a possession (a house or a sports car), maybe it's another person. The Bible warns us over and over about bowing to idols, but they're often so subtle in our lives. Idols used to be statues that people bowed before and worshipped; now they are the things in this life that we set our hearts on and wrap all of our happiness around. How do we identify our idols? Iain Duguid suggests that it's what drives our highest highs and our lowest lows: Our idols are "most easily exposed by analyzing our strongest emotions, both good and bad. What is it that causes us to be angry out of all proportion to the offense? There is a clue that one of our idols is being threatened. What is it that makes us feel

an unusually strong sense of achievement? It may be one of our idols being stroked. Our strong emotions are clues enabling us to read our own hearts better.”<sup>5</sup>

If our idol is being known for our appearance and beauty, we'll feel thrilled by compliments of our clothes and looks, but devastated by criticisms of our weight or our hair. If our idol is our effectiveness at work, then promotions and awards will inflate our ego, but losing a client or bombing a project will depress us. If academics and being known for our intelligence is our idol, then only A+s will do and not getting into an Ivy League college will devastate us. I played golf with three of my neighbors recently. It was a fantastic time to get to know them, share my faith with them in a non-threatening way. And you know what I thought about the whole time? The fact that I played poorly from the first hole on. Normally I shoot in the 90s, which isn't bad for a hack, but I shot a 112. I was humiliated and angry at myself because one of my many idols is impressing other people and fitting in with the guys. If you can identify your idols and remind yourself that they're not really important in the grand scheme of things, maybe you can take the sting out of them and concentrate on what's really important in life. I wish I could live out my own advice.

The Apostle Paul once said something similar to Haman's declaration that all this means nothing to me; Paul said that *"I count everything as loss."* Was Paul as upset as Haman at what had gone wrong in his life? Was he sour about how he was being treated or resentful of how someone threw his self-worth off-kilter. No, Paul came to his conclusion from a very different angle. Hear the whole context – turn to Philippians 3:7-11:

*"<sup>7</sup> But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— <sup>10</sup> that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."*

Everything good in Paul's life faded in importance when He looked to what His Savior, Jesus Christ, did on His behalf. Paul realized that he didn't have to earn salvation, favor before God – Jesus had earned it for him! He learned that just by trusting in Jesus, that he could be given eternal life, the assurance that he would be raised to life after he died. Compared to that knowledge, everything else in life was of little value. If we can get Paul's perspective and truly value what Jesus has done for us, we're wise to come to that same conclusion – that everything is rubbish, nothing compares in the slightest to the treasures we have in Christ.

I had kind of a strange thought reading this chapter: God is actually a little bit like King Ahasuerus in this way: no one can come into His presence without His permission or they will die. Fallen, sinful people cannot simply walk into the throne room of the Lord of the universe uninvited. In Exodus 33:20 God said, *"You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."* No one can stand in God's presence on their own because we are all unworthy and unholy. But thankfully, God has invited us into His presence, to come before His throne with joy and not fear. It's because He has found us worthy and treated us as His bride because of the work of Jesus on our behalf. **Jesus is God's Golden Scepter**, forever held out to humanity. You cannot come into the heavenly King's presence without Him – Jesus said in John 14:6, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* And then He surrendered His life on the cross as an atoning sacrifice in our place. And now we trust Him in faith for salvation. -> **Transition to Communion**

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<sup>5</sup> Duguid, p. 67.