

The Man Whom the King Delights to Honor  
Esther 6  
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CenterPoint Church

Read Esther 6

*"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."* (Isaiah 40:8)

## Introduction

Matthew McConaughey tells the story of going to Las Vegas with his brother in 1994 when the Dallas Cowboys and the Buffalo Bills were in the Super Bowl for the second year in a row. They made a series of bets based on the point spread and their hunch that there would be an upset. (Disclaimer: I don't endorse sports betting, never done it, think it's a terrible habit to get into.) They put \$4,000 on the score against the spread, \$250 that Thurman Thomas would outrush Emmitt Smith, \$250 that Andre Reed would outgain Michael Irvin, \$250 that Jim Kelly would throw for more yards than Troy Aikman, \$100 that Bruce Smith would be the MVP, and \$100 that Dallas would have at least 2 turnovers. All of these bets had really good odds. They bet every penny they had brought with them except for \$100 for food and drinks. (This was before McConaughey had become a successful actor.) At halftime they were dancing, declaring themselves geniuses, and dreaming of upgrading to first class on the flight home because the Bills were winning 13-6. If you know much about football in the 1990s, though, you know that the second half looked completely different, and they lost every single one of their bets. They left with \$20 between the two of them.<sup>1</sup>

The cliché "don't count your chickens before they're hatched" is a helpful one to remember in a lot of different situations in life. I know a man who started pastoring at a new church in a new state. Everything was going great, except that he moved there and started working before he passed the transfer exams at the Presbytery, which is usually just a formality. But when it was all said and done, this Presbytery did not accept his transfer and informed the church they could not approve him for some big theological reasons. "Don't jump the gun," "Don't put the cart before the horse," "Don't get ahead of yourself" would be other ways to say it. Today's Scripture passage is the story of a man who thought he had a perfect plan to hurt his enemies and bring himself glory and vengeance. But his chickens had not hatched, his plans had not been accomplished before he started getting excited about how things would work out for him. And then huge wrench got thrown into his plans by the one man that he couldn't control. Haman's downfall started here, and his pride and impatience contributed to it.

If you read my Pastor's Thought email yesterday or this morning, you'll know that I pointed out the turning point, the hinge that this story turns on is the first sentence of verse 1. Feel free to underline/highlight that in your Bible, everything in the story starts to reverse after a night of being

### **I. Sleepless In Susa (vv. 1-3)**

<sup>1</sup> *On that night the king could not sleep. And he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king.* <sup>2</sup> *And it was found written how Mordecai had told about Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, and who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.* <sup>3</sup> *And the king said, "What honor or distinction has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" The king's young men who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him."*

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew McConaughey, *Greenlights* (New York: Crown, 2020), pp. 130-31.

What do you do when you can't sleep? Do you lay there and count sheep or play some other mind trick to get back to sleep? Do you get up and read a book or get on a screen and stream a show or scroll social media? That's probably more likely to get you so agitated that you won't get back to sleep. Maybe you choose the best option and you pray. Because maybe God has awoken you for His purposes. That seems to be what happened in Esther's story.

Instead of sending an angelic messenger to appear to the king or sending a prophet to the city to rebuke the nation, God used a case of insomnia in the royal bed to start to turn things around in the story. Rather than counting sheep, the king ordered his servants to read the palace chronicles that recorded everything that had happened in his reign thus far. This incident with Mordecai exposing two men who were plotting to kill the king was recorded at the end of chapter 2. By this point in time, that incident was five years old, so it would seem to be completely random chance that the king heard that exact incident. But, of course, with our God, there is no such thing as random chance. Keep in mind that builders are constructing a gallows in Haman's backyard with Mordecai's name on it, and Haman is on his way to the palace to make sure it gets used for that purpose. This might have been the only way to save Mordecai's life at this point.

Now, if a king wants to stay safe and keep his throne, he is wise to reward those who are loyal to him, especially those who have fought for him or saved his life. Ahasuerus realized that he had never done that for the man who saved him, so our next eight verses show us this man

## **II. Paraded Around Persia (vv. 4-11)**

*<sup>4</sup>And the king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to speak to the king about having Mordecai hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for him. <sup>5</sup>And the king's young men told him, "Haman is there, standing in the court." And the king said, "Let him come in." <sup>6</sup>So Haman came in, and the king said to him, "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?" And Haman said to himself, "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?" <sup>7</sup>And Haman said to the king, "For the man whom the king delights to honor, <sup>8</sup>let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and the horse that the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown is set. <sup>9</sup>And let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials. Let them dress the man whom the king delights to honor, and let them lead him on the horse through the square of the city, proclaiming before him: "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor." <sup>10</sup>Then the king said to Haman, "Hurry; take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Leave out nothing that you have mentioned." <sup>11</sup>So Haman took the robes and the horse, and he dressed Mordecai and led him through the square of the city, proclaiming before him, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor."*

Another one of those "random chance/coincidences" that the king started looking around for who was in the court hoping to get input and advice, and it happened to be Haman, Mordecai's enemy who has made plans to kill him twice. This is one of the funniest, most ironic passages in the OT. Haman was so sure that he was going to be the one that the king honored that he designed this amazing scenario for how the king could lavish his thanks on him: dress him in royal robes, put him on the king's horse, place a crown on his head and parade him through the city for everyone to see. Do you know the word "Solipsistic"? It means that you think the world revolves around you; other ways to say it are ego-centric, self-absorbed, narcissistic. That was Haman, who must have thought, "Who else could the king possibly be planning to honor but me? It has to be me, I'm his favorite!"

One writer explains how Haman used the king's inquiry to essentially put himself on equal footing with the king. Two men had tried to overthrow the king physically, Haman was doing it in his heart:

“Haman wants to masquerade as the king; indeed, Haman wants to *be* the king. He already occupies the highest position at court (3:1), is the person to whom everyone must bow (3:2), possesses the king’s signet ring authorizing him to make edicts (3:10), and has been invited by the queen to two private dinner parties (5:12). It is but a small step to the kingship itself, and Haman now tries to take it.”<sup>2</sup>

Proverbs 18:7 tells us that “*A fool’s mouth is his ruin.*” And, of course, the man who ended up receiving Haman’s dream scenario is the very last person that he wanted to receive it: Mordecai, the man who wouldn’t bow to him. The man who was his sworn enemy. The man who should be impaled on Haman’s gallows in a few hours would instead be paraded around the city to receive great honor. This was the height of dramatic irony. If Haman had known the king was planning to honor him, he would have responded very differently to the king: “You know what, that man probably knows that you delight in him, so I wouldn’t worry about doing anything for him.” Not only would he have to see his enemy honored, he got the “honors” of leading the parade. Once he was told to take Mordecai around the city, he couldn’t refuse a direct order from the king. His dream scenario turned into his nightmare because of his unquenchable pride.

Can you just envision Haman during this parade and hear him proclaiming through gritted teeth what the king told him to announce about Mordecai: “*Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.*” Trying not to choke on the words or roll his eyes out of his pure hatred of the one being honored. I wonder if Mordecai had a little fun with this: “Hey Haman, can you speak up a little, I couldn’t quite hear you. Let’s take a couple more laps around the city, why don’t we?” Maybe not, Mordecai doesn’t seem like one who rubs things in. He was probably still upset about his people being plotted against and was trying to figure out how to use this to save them.

The last three verses describe the aftermath of these events:

### **III. Humiliated in Haman’s House (vv. 12-14)**

<sup>12</sup> Then Mordecai returned to the king’s gate. But Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered. <sup>13</sup> And Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, “If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him.” <sup>14</sup> While they were yet talking with him, the king’s eunuchs arrived and hurried to bring Haman to the feast that Esther had prepared.

If you humble yourself, you will be exalted – that’s Mordecai. If you exalt yourself, you will be humbled – that’s Haman. Mordecai, as far as we can tell, never grumbled or petitioned the king to be rewarded for saving his life. He simply went about his business and continued serving the king, even knowing that the king should have honored him. Haman has already been honored by the king above every other person in the entire kingdom, but it was never enough, he needed more. He has boasted of how great and glorious he was to his wife and friends, but it was still not enough. He yearned to put himself on equal standing with the king. So the turning of tables and him having a front-row seat to Mordecai receiving all of those things stung even deeper. We can and should laugh at Haman... until we realize that we are wired the exact same way!

Whose heads were covered and in mourning earlier in the story? All the Jews when they found out they were targets for execution. Now Haman had his head covered in mourning because of the shame and indignity of these events. He probably headed home to be consoled by his wife and

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<sup>2</sup> Adele Berlin, “The Book of Esther and Ancient Storytelling,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120: no. 1 (Spring 2001): 11.

friends, maybe have them tell him a new idea about how he could get revenge on Mordecai, but he was in for a surprise. Zeresh and his friends realized what was happening. Where before they counseled him exactly what he wanted to hear, now they gave him some very difficult advice – you’re starting to lose to Mordecai and that probably means you’ll lose in a big way. They started to see the writing on the wall. They realized that the Jews might have unseen forces on their side. Careful readers of the Scripture might call to mind the speech of Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, when the Jewish counsel wanted to silence the apostles in the book of Acts: *“Keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!”* (Acts 5:38-39).

But there was no time to think about this, no time to process this warning that the tide was turning against him. Haman had to hurry to the second feast that Esther had invited him to. Perhaps this feast will restore his ego and his good mood; or perhaps it will hasten his downfall. Another cliffhanger - come back next week to find out how it turns out.

### **Conclusion**

As we look to apply this passage, the first thing we should ask ourselves is whether we act like Haman. Do we resent it when other people are honored? Romans 12:10 says, *“Outdo one another in showing honor.”* Philippians 2:3 says, *“in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”* We should ask ourselves if we really enjoy when someone else is praised and singled out for honor and recognition. You see it in award shows: when an Oscar is given out, say for Best Actress, and they’ve got cameras on all five nominees: do the four that aren’t awarded smile and clap and actually mean it that “she really deserves it”? Or do they inwardly seethe with resentment? How about you? Are you like Haman, mourning and furious that someone else got honored instead of him? How does your heart handle it when you get passed over for a promotion at work or you don’t get recognized for your service, for helping others, or when you don’t get invited to the big social event? When someone else gets the MVP award in your sport or first-chair in the orchestra in your instrument and you have to be second chair, are you happier for them than you are pitying yourself? Those are helpful gauges to determine whether you live a contented life or whether you long desperately for recognition and reward. The Lord can use the one who has a godly contentment and is just thankful for what He has given him in life; the devil can often use, as he did in this story, the one who is resentful and has a chip on his shoulder for not being flattered and rewarded.

We should look to act more like Mordecai in this passage, particularly as we think about the concept of delayed rewards.<sup>3</sup> There are times in life when we have done something deserving of recognition or thanks, but it never comes. We could let it bother us and get angry and bitter, or, like Mordecai, we can trust that the Lord will make all things right in the end. Either we will have a delayed recognition later in life or we will be rewarded in heaven. Hebrews 6:10 guarantees that: *“For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for His name in serving the saints, as you still do.”* In John 12:26, Jesus says, *“If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.”* When no one else notices, God does. He will reward us for acts done in His name. We should be prepared to do them whether people notice or not, and our ultimate aim should be God’s glory, not our own reward. But it is encouraging to know that part of God’s ultimate justice is seeing His people justly rewarded. Whether or not we are acknowledged by earthly kings or the important people of our day, we are loved and adored by our Heavenly Father when we are one with Christ.

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Charles Swindoll, *Esther: A Woman of Strength & Dignity* (Nashville: Word, 1997), p. 115.

I had never heard the story before that there was an attempt on President Truman's life back in November 1950. The White House was being renovated, so Truman was staying at the Blair House, which is the presidential guesthouse in DC. Two men who were determined later to be terrorists attempted to break into the building in the afternoon but were met with White House police at the entrance, and a shootout in the street began. One of the officers, Leslie Coffelt, was killed in the attack. The next day, the President said, "It's a strange thing to know that you are alive because another man has died. I will never forget what he has done for me."<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps if you are unable to sleep, rather than bingeing shows on Netflix or some other mindless activity, maybe you'd consider opening the pages of your Bible to see the chronicles of the things that have happened to God's people through the ages. And maybe you'd be drawn to the story of the Man who gave His life for you. There were dark forces looking to take our lives by condemning our souls, but this one Person intervened to save us. He gave His life so that you and I could live forever.

This is "the man that the heavenly king delights to honor." It is His Son! Twice during Jesus' life on earth, God broke through the heavens and said, "*This is my Son, with whom I am well-pleased.*" God was pleased with Jesus for following His plan to live a perfect life and die in our place, and that came with the greatest honor. Philippians 2:9-11 – "*Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*" Jesus was exalted to the right hand of the Father, honored before everyone. And one day Jesus will be held in front of the whole world to be praised and honored, and every knee will bow in His presence. Mordecai was held up for honor in one city, Jesus will be held up for the entire creation because He is truly the One to whom we owe all praise and thanks and honor. And all those who confess Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father said, "Amen."

#### Benediction

Philemon 6, 25 – "*I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.*"

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<sup>4</sup> Ray C. Stedman, *For Such a Time as This: Secrets of Strategic Living from the Book of Esther* (Grand Rapids: Discovery, 2010), p. 84.