

Let My Life Be Granted Me
Esther 7
November 20, 2022
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CenterPoint Church

Read Esther 7

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” (2 Timothy 3:16)

Introduction

In Shakespeare’s play, *Hamlet*, the audience finds out early on that Hamlet’s uncle, Claudius, has killed the king (Hamlet’s father and Claudius’ own brother) by poisoning him. And he adds to that offense in marrying the queen, Gertrude. Much of the play is Hamlet’s wrestling with how he will respond, whether he will get revenge. Midway through the play, Claudius sends Hamlet to England with two of his old friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The prince finds out that they are carrying a letter to the king of England to have him killed when he arrives, so he changes the letter to put the two of them to death instead. And the end of the play (*spoiler alert if you haven’t gotten a chance to read it in the 400+ years it’s been out*) has Hamlet triumphing over his uncle by stabbing him and then forcing him to drink from his own poisoned cup. In both cases, poetic justice happens to those who have plotted evil.

That concept of “poetic justice” is a great literary device and often a satisfying way to end a story. But we should not always expect it in real life where evil people often get away with their crimes. Life’s not fair, deal with it. But every now and then, poetic justice happens in life as well. We saw it in Exodus where Pharaoh drowned Hebrew baby boys but ended up having his whole army drowned in the Red Sea. More recently, Saddam Hussein was sentenced to death by a tribunal made up of his own people for his crimes of murder. In our Scripture passage today, we will see the ultimate schemer, the wicked man who was always planning evil receiving poetic justice. His mischief and violence will return on his own head; it is one of the most satisfying deaths in all of the Bible.

As we come to the passage, we have to remember that this is Esther’s second banquet. At this banquet, we have three people. There’s Esther, who knows everything behind the scenes because her cousin, Mordecai, has informed her that Haman has set up her people to be exterminated. Then there’s Haman, who has kept the king in the dark about his evil plans, but himself is unaware of the fact that Esther is one of the Jews that he has targeted for death. And there is the king, who is just excited to get a second feast from his queen, unaware of either her true ethnic identity or Haman’s specific upcoming plans. So the one who should know everything and be in charge is actually naïve and uninformed, while the one who has hidden details of his crime from the king has had other things hidden from him, and the one who used to be blissfully unaware of everything around her is now the only one who knows all the facts. Let’s join this intriguing scenario around the table and hear

I. Esther’s Request (vv. 1-4)

¹ So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. ² And on the second day, as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king again said to Esther, “What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.” ³ Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request. ⁴ For we have been sold, I and my people, to

be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have been silent, for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king."

Esther had been building up to this moment, having made two meals for Ahasuerus and Haman, and had pleased the king. For the third time, the king offered his queen whatever she wished, up to half of the kingdom. She prefaced her answer with the standard formality of *"if I have found favor in your sight."* Then she finally stopped stalling and just gave it to him straight: I want to live. Forget about giving me half of the kingdom, how about just saving me and my people? He had no idea what she was talking about, she had to explain that her people were about to be wiped out. Esther used the same verbs that the original decree had used for what was to happen to the Jews: destroyed, killed, and annihilated (Esther 3:13). She said that they had been sold to be killed – who sold them to whom? Haman paid a bunch of money to the king, so that means Ahasuerus is the one who sold them. But Esther didn't make that accusation directly, she used a passive verb *"have been sold"* so that the king doesn't feel directly accused. Very astute of her. She needed to accuse Haman without implicating the king.

The king had been reminded of a plot against his life early that morning when he was having the palace chronicles read to him. Esther framed her information for the king in a way that made it sound like someone had been plotting against the queen; they had come in and sold her and her people. She also shrewdly told him that she would not even have troubled him if it was just a question of her people being sold as slaves. She would have silently borne that tragedy, apparently, but the fact that the decree was for genocide, a complete wiping out of her people, compelled her to intervene.

We learn in this chapter that we should identify with God's people. Esther hid her identity for a long time, but the only way to save herself and her people was to claim them and see herself as one of them. It's fashionable today to say, "I'm spiritual, but I'm not religious. I like Jesus, but I don't like the church." OK, you don't have to go to church to be a Christian, but let's think about this. Have you ever talked to someone who said something like, "You know, I'm great friends with Jeff. He's a fantastic guy, we're really close. But I really can't stand his wife, I don't ever want to be around her." Guess what? He's not a good friend to Jeff because he doesn't accept his bride; they're never going to be really close. In the same way, you can't love Jesus and reject His bride, the church. I know that people get burned by churches, I know that Christians do a lot of damage to those inside and outside the church. And it's true that Jesus's bride is not just each particular local church – she is the church as a whole. But you can't expect to have a great relationship with Him when you completely neglect His wife and refuse to find a church to be part of. Jesus established His church here on earth to help grow and nurture His people; "lone ranger" Christians get very isolated and more often than not walk away from their faith eventually.

OK, back to the text. This revelation results in

II. Ahasuerus' Anger (vv. 5-7)

⁵ Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?" ⁶ And Esther said, "A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!" Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen. ⁷ And the king arose in his wrath from the wine-drinking and went into the palace garden, but Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that harm was determined against him by the king.

Do you remember the story in 2 Samuel chapter 12 where Nathan the prophet went to talk to King David to confront him about his sin with Bathsheba? Nathan didn't come right out and accuse

David of his crimes, instead he told him a story about a man who owned many flocks taking the one lamb that a poor man owned to have for a dinner that he was throwing. David got so mad at that injustice that he said, “*The man who has done this deserves to die!*” And Nathan pointed at him and said, “*Atta ha ish*” in Hebrew – “*You are the man!*” Nathan aroused the king’s anger first before pointing the finger. That’s the same thing that Esther did here – getting the king worked up before turning and pointing her finger at Haman.

The king is a little slow, though, wouldn’t you say? The queen just told you that she and her people are threatened with being wiped out. You don’t remember agreeing to Haman’s request to eliminate a people group within the kingdom for a vast sum of money recently? It’s clear that the king had a blind spot towards Haman. He trusted him greatly and put him in the highest position that he could. You could argue that this might have been the last name that Ahasuerus thought would be spoken as someone engaged in this level of evil and treachery. So when the king heard his name, he was absolutely furious. But most likely he was conflicted as well, which is why he went to the garden to process things. He may have been immediately struck with other feelings like remorse for trusting such a snake, or humiliation that he would look bad for allowing the death of an entire people group, or possibly just hurt that someone who was so close to him had lied to him.¹

Can you imagine the “deer in the headlights” look on Haman’s face when Esther singled him out? One moment he was finishing off his pork chop with a swish of wine, and the next Esther said his name as the man who was targeting her people, bringing a look of fury to the king’s face. Haman was like, “Uh, wait what?!?” He knew the king very well and realized what the man’s anger could lead to, so he had no choice but to beg the queen. Now, no man could be alone with one of the king’s women, so when the king left, Haman should have left.² But he was so terrified that his treachery had been exposed that he begged for his life from Esther. And he made the fatal mistake of leaning into the couch she was sitting on. Esther had the luxury of some time to plan out how she would beg for her life; Haman had no time to think about it, he just knew he needed to beg and plead immediately.

One thing we have to remember here is that Haman did not know that Esther was a Jew and did not know her relationship to Mordecai. He had no idea that his targeting the Jews for annihilation would include the king’s beloved wife. His surprise was as great as the king’s in this passage. This is a good reminder that our sin has far-reaching consequences and can hurt people that we didn’t even mean for it to. I saw this statistic of someone who commits suicide – a team of researchers from the University of Kentucky estimated that every suicide affects to some degree an average of 135 people.³ Murder and other violent crime hurts a wide-circle of people, well beyond the victim. Think of a sin as a pebble thrown into the middle of a pond; the ripples that spread out from there are a visual of the widening effects and consequences of sin. A man who thinks that divorcing his wife is only their business has forgotten all the other collateral damage - that his kids will be greatly hurt, and that may affect their marriages and their relationships down the road, not to mention that it affects every friend of the couple. We can’t control the ripple effects of our sin. Haman didn’t intentionally plan the king’s wife’s death, but everything spiraled out of control for him and came back to haunt him.

The last three verses of the chapter bring

¹ Ray C. Stedman, *For Such a Time as This* (Grand Rapids: Discovery, 2010), p. 99.

² *The NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

³ <https://www.suicideinfo.ca/how-many-people-are-affected-by-one-suicide/>

III. Haman's End (vv. 8-10)

⁸ *And the king returned from the palace garden to the place where they were drinking wine, as Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. And the king said, "Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?" As the word left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face.*

⁹ *Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, "Moreover, the gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, is standing at Haman's house, fifty cubits high." And the king said, "Hang him on that." ¹⁰ So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the wrath of the king abated.*

The king might have been conflicted about what to do with Haman, but when he walked back in and saw him on the couch with Esther, Haman's fate was sealed. That was an easy sentence at that point – your life is over. One commentator noted that it was interesting that the author used the phrase "*Haman was **falling** on the couch where Esther was.*" He could have used a different verb like "bowed" or "approached," but he used fall because this is Haman's great fall. Remember that his wife and friends had told him in the last chapter that "*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.*" He had tried to get Mordecai's people to fall, but now it had all backfired and he was the one falling, literally and metaphorically.⁴ He was not trying to assault the queen, as the king declared, but it's ironic that Haman suffered the consequences of a false accusation, when he had made the great false accusations that the Jews were a threat to the king when he first proposed their elimination.

The servants came and covered Haman's face. Haman had already covered his own head in shame after he had to parade Mordecai around in the last chapter, but here his head is covered in complete defeat by others.⁵ And one of the servants said, "There's actually a gallows at Haman's house that he was hoping to hang that guy that you just honored on." And the king said, "Perfect. *Hang him on that.*" This is the second time that Haman and Mordecai traded places. Haman had thought that he would be paraded around the city and Mordecai would be impaled on the gallows, and the opposite happened; poetic justice.

Conclusion

A professor at a large university was giving a final exam to a very large class of students. There was a strict time limit of 2 hours to finish the test, so when the time was up, the professor called for the exams to be placed on a desk up front as the student left. After most of the students had left, there was one still furiously working on his exam. The professor cleared his throat and said, "Young man, the time for the exam is passed. If you don't turn it in right now, you will receive an F." The student looked up but didn't respond and continued working. The professor waited, knowing that he would immediately rip up the paper when it was handed in. Finally, the student walked towards the desk and asked the professor, "Do you know my name?" The professor said, "I don't know and I don't care." The student answered, "Good," and promptly stuck the exam in the middle of a large stack, straightened the stack so that the professor couldn't find his exam and ran out the door.⁶

You can get away with a lot when you're anonymous, you can escape the consequences if no one knows you and what you've done. But that's never actually the case in this life - we have a God who knows our names and knows everything about us. Haman thought he would get away with his evil. That he could throw his weight and power around wherever he wanted and have anyone crushed

⁴ Linda M. Day, *Esther* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), p. 113.

⁵ Bryan Gregory, *Inconspicuous Providence: The Gospel According to Esther* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2014), p. 135.

⁶ Wayne Rice, *Hot Illustration for Youth Talks 4* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), pp. 68

who got in his way. Unfortunately for him, he didn't realize that there is a God who sees everything and brings justice when He chooses. Psalm 7:14-16 says, "*Behold, the wicked man conceives evil and is pregnant with mischief and gives birth to lies. He makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole that he has made. His mischief returns upon his own head, and on his own skull his violence descends.*" Swap out the pit for a gallows, and that's a perfect description of Haman – his mischief and evil plans returned upon his own head.

Galatians 6:7 – "*Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.*" Haman has reaped what he has sown. And so will every other human being, whether it's in this life or the next. So the question is: how do you want to live your life? Do you want to live a life of pleasing yourself, of striving to get everything you set your heart on and pushing aside anyone who gets in your way? Will you sow anger and selfishness, hoping that you stay one step ahead of God's rebuke and punishment? Or will you sow seeds of love and sacrifice, giving your life to help your family, your friends, and anyone else who comes into your circle of influence? As our song today said, "The fields of hope in which I sow are harvested in heaven."

But that's not the actually the full message of the Gospel. It's good advice – when you have the choice between loving and serving others versus taking advantage of them, I hope that you'll choose the former. But our ultimate message is not "Be good and God will love you." Because none of us is actually good on our own. The deeper message of the Gospel is found in the last words of this chapter: "*The wrath of the king was abated.*" Once again, we see that God is like King Ahasuerus in some way. Not that He is a fickle tyrant with an open marriage and a massive ego. But God sees injustice and hates it. Our sin is an offense to a holy God and He must punish sin, in the same way that when the Persian king found out that Haman had a plot in place to kill his wife and her people, He was angry. And Haman's death was the only thing that satisfied or appeased His wrath. Remember that a gallows was where someone was impaled; Haman was nailed to a pole for his sins. Jesus was nailed and impaled to a pole, a wooden cross, not for His sins, but for our sins. Why did that have to happen? To appease the wrath of the heavenly king. *Propitiation* is the fancy theological term for appeasing the righteous anger of God. On the cross, the wrath of the Father was poured out on the Son. We talk about His justice being satisfied, that means that our sins received the appropriate punishment: death. Not our death, but the death of our substitute.

The Lord Jesus identifies with His people, stands with us under our sentence of death, in solidarity with us, that He might deliver us. So now, we who are covered by Christ's blood no longer need to fear the wrath of God in our lives; we are forgiven and free. But those whose sins are not forgiven in Christ should still fear the wrath of God. Their sins will be punished after their death with eternal separation from Him. Beloved, your sins must be atoned for by death, either yours or a perfect substitute. The best offer in the world is Jesus' free offer to die in your place so that you will have eternal life and be brought into God's eternal family and His kingdom.

We'll be thanking God for a lot of things in our lives this coming Thursday. Let's put the forgiveness of our sins and our being included in His plan of salvation at the top of the list! Amen.

Benediction

Hebrews 13:20-21 – "*Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*"