

Title: "Living By Faith in God's Sovereignty"

Text: Esther 2:19-23; 6:1-14

I invite you to turn with me again to the Book of Esther in the Old Testament.

-Last week we told you a bit of Esther's story, and how God used her, while in exile in Persian, to save her people, the Jews from annihilation.

Today we will fill out the story some more, by focusing on Esther's uncle Mordecai.

-Mordecai was the man who took Esther in as a young girl, and adopted her when her parents both died.

-He raised her as his own child, and as far as we can tell from the story, was a single parent in doing so.

I am going to read you two sections of the story which focus on Mordecai, in the period after Esther has been chosen to be the Queen of King Xerxes of Persia.

-First I will be reading from chapter 2:19-23, and then we will skip over to chapter 6:1-14.

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So when we first encounter Mordecai here in this section of the Book of Esther, he is "sitting at the king's gate."

I want you to know that this does not mean that Mordecai was just lounging around the streets of Susa.

-No. The gate of ancient cities was the commercial and legal center of the city.

-It was the place where markets were held, business transactions were made, real estate deals were enacted.

-The gate of the city was also where courts of law would be held by the elders of the city.

-It was where the King himself would periodically hold audiences to decide certain cases himself.

So "sitting at the king's gate" in the ancient world meant that a person had some kind of a civil service job, which was performed at the city center.

-It may have been a government job, or a legal job, or a business job.

Mordecai could well have been a scribe, who wrote down the transactions that took place at the king's gate and recorded them for the legal register.

I mention this because Mordecai's daily duties at the king's gate are what put him at the epicenter of all the events of Esther's story.

-As we read here in chapter 2, it is while he is performing his duties at the king's gate that Mordecai overhears a conversation between two disgruntled guards who serve at the king's gate.

-They are angry about something the King has done, and they are secretly plotting to assassinate the king.

Mordecai hears their plotting, and passes a warning along to his adopted daughter Esther, who is now the Queen.

-She then warns her husband, the King, and gives credit to Mordecai as the source of her information.

-The two guards are arrested, the plot is thwarted, and the record of the event is placed into the King's chronicles.

And that seems to be just a little side note story of no great consequence.

-The plot is thwarted. The King lives unharmed. And the news cycle turns to other events in the Empire.

And the big news to which the news reporters turn is the king's appointment of Haman the Agagite to become the new Prime Minister of the Empire.

We met Haman last week as we told Esther's story, but if you weren't here last week,

-let me bring you up to speed.

Haman was not a Persian, but was an Amelikite, and a descendant of an Amelikite king named Agag.

The Amelikites were ancient enemies of Israel from all the way back to the time of Moses,

-and King Agag himself had been a hated enemy of King Saul during his time as king of Israel.

The Jews hated the Amelikites, and the Amelikites hated the Jews.

- So it is no surprise when Haman as Prime Minister comes up with a new policy idea for the Persian Empire,
- and it is to annihilate all of the Jews in the Empire.

And Haman is particularly mad at the Jews for personal reasons.

- Whenever he goes out in public, everyone is supposed to bow down to honor him as their Prime Minister.
- But guess who is working at the king's gate every day, and refuses to bow down to Haman when he passes through the gate on his way to work every day? Mordecai.

Mordecai will not bow down to this ancient enemy of his God and of his people no matter what position he holds in government.

- And this infuriates Haman.
- He wants Mordecai dead, and he decides he might as well wipe out all the rest of the Jewish people, too.

So Haman comes up with a policy to carry out this scheme and takes it to the king.

- The king doesn't care anything about the Jews, and so he tells Haman to do whatever he has in mind.

Neither one of them know that Esther, the king's lovely new wife and queen, is a Jew herself.

We saw last week how Mordecai challenged Esther to step out in faith and take the risk to speak to the king on behalf of her people.

- He told her that maybe God had placed her in this position as Queen for just such a time as this, to save her people.

She does so, as we saw last week, and God was with her.

- But let me fill in some of the details this week of how God brings this all about.

Haman has received permission from the king to kill all of the Jews in the Empire,

-and he has set about to erect a huge gallows to start hanging Jews.

Meanwhile Mordecai is still going about his duties every day at the king's gate,

-and every day still refuses to bow down to Haman as he passes by.

So then the plot thickens as Queen Esther goes to her husband, King Xerxes, and invites him and his right hand man, Haman, to a banquet she has prepared for them.

-They are both pleased to attend, and have a lovely luncheon with her.

-The king asks what he can do for her in return even up to half the kingdom,

-and she simply requests that they do this again the next day.

-The King and Haman are pleased to comply, and they set up another luncheon for the next day.

Haman goes home feeling great that night.

-He is being honored by the king and queen, and has the gallows for the hated Jews being erected,

-and he thinks that by next week, Mordecai and all the Jews will be a thing of the past.

-He throws a little banquet that night of his own, and invites his family and friends to join him in celebrating.

At the party, his wife and friends suggest that he make

Mordecai to be the first Jew to be hung on the new gallows, -as the most satisfying way to get the new policy started.

He loves the idea, and gets up first thing morning to go to the king with this great new idea.

But meanwhile, that same night, the King is having a hard time sleeping.

-He is up at 2am in the morning and can't go back to sleep.

-So he calls his attendants and has the book of the chronicles of his reign brought in for them to read to him.

-The chronicles of his reign: that ought to put him to sleep, right?

But lo and behold, as the king is listening, one of the events of his reign catches his attention.

- It is the chronicle of how a man named Mordecai uncovered an assassination attempt on the king's life,  
-and faithfully reported it so that the attempt was thwarted.

He had forgotten about that event, but that night it all came back to him, and he was grateful for still being alive.

- So he asked his attendants what was ever done for that man Mordecai to thank him for his service to the king.
- His attendants told him that nothing official had ever been done for the man, Mordecai.
- So the king decided that very minute that he was going to honor Mordecai for this act of loyalty and service.

And here's the kicker!

- First thing in the morning, who is the first government official to come hurrying into the king's presence but Haman.
- He has come first thing to announce his great idea of hanging Mordecai on the gallows as a way to kick off his new policy of exterminating Jews.

But the King speaks first to Haman, as was proper protocol.

- And the king asks Haman his opinion on what the king should do for a man that the king delights to honor?
- And Haman, who thinks the king is speaking of honoring him, (for he thinks, "Who else would the king want to honor besides me?!")
- Haman says, "Have a royal robe brought forth that the king himself has worn, and a royal horse the king himself has ridden,  
-and place the robe on the man, and let the horse parade the man through the city streets.
- And have one of the king's most noble princes lead the horse proclaiming throughout the city:  
'This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor.'

And the King says, "Go at once and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai, and you be the one to lead him through the city."

And there stood Haman with his mouth hanging open.

“What?! Mordecai?!” he thinks to himself.

“No! That can’t be! Not Mordecai!”

And I think he knew it was the beginning of the end.

-I think he knew that the God of the Jews was coming to their aid once again.

-I think he knew that his own plans for their annihilation were beginning to crumble.

So he had to go to Mordecai of all people, and dress him in royal robes, and parade him through the streets of Susa, -proclaiming the King’s favor on him.

And it was mortifying.

-The only thing that consoled him was the thought that he was himself still in the King and Queen’s good graces, -and had a private banquet with them ahead of him that day.

-So he suffered through the parade, and then went to the banquet.

But it only went from bad to worse for Haman that day.

-At the banquet, the lovely Queen Esther fed them royally,

-but when the King asked her what it was that he could do for her in return, up to half the kingdom,

-she said, “Save my people. That is my request.”

“For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation. If we had been merely sold into slavery, I would not have bothered you, O King, with this request. But we have been sold for extermination, and so I plead with you for life and that of my people.”

And the King is aghast! “Who has dared to do such a thing?” he asks.

“This vile man, Haman,” says the Queen. “He has done it.”

-And the king is enraged and leaves the room he is so mad.

And Haman is completely flabbergasted.

-He had no idea the queen was Jewish, too.

And he goes and begins to plead with Esther and beg for his life.

-And in his desperation he grabs her just as the king returns.

The King is now even more enraged that Haman would lay hands on his wife,

-and he demands Haman's execution.

And one of the king's attendants says, "Well, Haman himself has just built a huge gallows in the city, 75 feet high.

"Hang him on it," says the king.

So they hung Haman up on the very gallows that he had built to hang Mordecai and the Jews.

And that very day, Esther was given the whole estate that belonged to Haman.

-And Mordecai, was brought into the king's presence and it was revealed that he was Esther's adoptive father.

The king gave his signet ring to Mordecai,

-the very ring that he had taken from Haman,

-and the king elevated Mordecai to take Haman's place as the king's new "right hand man."

And a decree was issued that all of the Jews in the whole Persian Empire had the right to assemble and protect themselves from anyone who sought to do them harm.

My friends, we saw last week how the hand of God is displayed at every juncture of this story,

-even though God himself is never overtly mentioned anywhere in the telling of the story.

It is God who is weaving together all of the seemingly insignificant daily events and decisions that are going on, -and somehow sovereignly working out his purposes in and through them all.

-Even if the people don't know it.

A large part of what it means for us to have a living faith, is simply believing that this is how God works,

-and that he hasn't stopped!

Living faith for them, and for us, involves somehow trusting that God is also weaving together the daily events of my life,  
-and is working them together for His purposes.

Mordecai has no idea when he decides to take in his orphan niece and raise her,  
-that this will have eternal consequences.

-He has no idea she will end up as the Queen of Persia.

-Just as he has no idea that while he's just doing his job in the city gates he will overhear of a plot to kill the king.

-And after reporting it, he has no idea that this little act will end up as the king's bedtime reading a year or two later.

-He also has no idea that his little act of rebellion at not bowing down to Haman will endanger not only him,  
-but every Jew in the Empire.

-Nor does he know that God will end up even using this to show the entire empire how the God of Israel comes to the aid of his people.

But isn't this how God works in your life and mine?

-We are not usually conscious of His presence in the events of our lives.

-We are just going along, doing our job, trying to make ends meet, making decisions we aren't sure are the best, but making them as best we can.

And it's only later that we look back and see God's hand was at work.

-Somehow he was orchestrating things, working them out.

-Weaving them together into a rather remarkable tapestry of grace,.... of saving and sanctifying grace.

It's a 3 dimensional tapestry of all the threads and events of our lives, remarkably woven together.

-The glimpses we get of this, here in Esther and Mordecai's life,

-but also those occasional glimpses we get of this in our own,

-they are what show us how wide and long and high and deep the love of God truly is.