

DEADLY DILEMMA (DYNASTY AND DESTINY, PT 2)

CONTINUING in Esther - turn in your Bibles to Esther 3, today we will be covering Esther 3:1 through 5:1.

- Thank worship team and tech team
- PLUG YOUVERSION
- PLUG FB LIVE ON WEDNESDAY AT 7:30.

REVIEW:

1. We met Xerxes. He was generous and merciful, but also made swift and just decisions when needed. He sought counsel from a group of close advisers. Rather than kill Queen Vashti for publicly disrespecting him, he deposed her and eventually sought another woman to take her place as official Queen of Persia.
2. We met Esther. **Esther was not only beautiful, but she was humble, teachable, and likeable.** She was probably forced into this competition for Xerxes' heart, but she won anyway, and we will see that God had her in this influential position for a reason.
3. We met Mordecai. He was Esther's guardian and cousin who found himself responsible for her when her parents died. Imagine a 20-year-old young man suddenly having to care for a 6 year old girl. Somehow they both survived and Mordecai rose in the ranks of Xerxes' servants. Many scholars suggest he was a judge of some kind.

LAST WEEK: Esther's story teaches us that even if the journey to your current location is rough or less than ideal, God can turn that situation around and make it your destiny.

Who we haven't met yet is one bad dude named Haman. We heard Dan eloquently read that Haman was an Agagite. Jewish tradition says that he was a descendant of the king of the Amalekites named Agag. If you'd like a refresher on that story, it's in 1 Samuel 15. Other scholars say that Agag was the name of a province in Persia and Haman was from that province.

Regardless of his genealogy or geographical heritage, from what tradition says about Haman, we can confidently say that he was a ruthless, arrogant, self-made money grubbing man who would lie, kill, cheat and steal his way into any benefit he could find. He climbed the ladder and on his way up, killed the people in his way, so he wouldn't have to worry about them on his way back down. I can't say anything good about Haman because, well there's nothing really good to say, except he was a husband and a father of ten sons.

MISPLACED TRUST, 2:22-3:1

Do you remember back at the end of chapter 2 when Mordecai uncovered a conspiracy to kill Xerxes? Esther revealed it to the king and gave Mordecai full credit for the intel. The king's chroniclers wrote it down and surely, surely, this would be the beginning of a new chapter in Mordecai's life. His noble service in the judiciary, and his courage in telling the truth against a conspiracy that he was close to, would surely land him a great promotion in the dynasty. He was about to level up!

The promotion came. But it came to Haman. Haman? The ruthless, arrogant self-made money-grubbing man who would lie, kill, cheat and steal his way up the ladder? That guy? Yes, that guy... *Haman* was suddenly Xerxes' second-in-command.

With all that power came something Haman wanted even more than power. With all that power came respect. On his way up the ladder, people learned to fear Haman. But no one gave him the kind of respect and adulation he desired. Until now. Xerxes commanded that everyone had to bow down before Haman just as they would before Xerxes.

Have you ever been skipped for a promotion? Have you ever been overlooked and a less-deserving individual was promoted instead of you? How did that feel?

It didn't feel good to Mordecai. Now, there are many attempts to make Mordecai out to be a hero to Haman's villain, because you know, we all like balance in our stories, and if Haman is the villain, Mordecai MUST be the good guy, right? It is possible though that Mordecai refused to bow to Haman because he just didn't respect him, and that's the end.

Remember that Esther's story teaches us that God is the main protagonist. **God is working everything out for good, even when it looks like unmitigated disaster.** God doesn't need Mordecai, Haman, Esther, or Xerxes to be good in order for God to still be God. And we know that God is good... [all the time], and all the time... [God is good].

BOW DOWN... OR ELSE (3:2-5)

Mordecai's refusal to bow down eventually got the attention of Mordecai's coworkers. It could be that at first if Mordecai knew Haman was coming, he would quickly duck out of the area. Then maybe he would pretend that he was busy doing something in the back of the

room and didn't realize Haman was there. But after a while, as Mordecai remained standing while everyone else bowed down as if to the king, it became obvious that Mordecai was not cooperating.

At first Mordecai's refusal to bow was confronted by Mordecai's coworkers. This confrontation went on over time. You can imagine everyone trying to coax Mordecai to play along and bow to Haman. But Mordecai wouldn't do it. Mordecai finally explained to his coworkers that he could not and would not bow down before Haman because Mordecai was a Jew.

And in one moment the secret he asked Esther to keep for years (!), he blurted out as the reason for his behavior. "I'm a Jew and that's why I'm not bowing down to Haman."

[Mordecai's official reason for not bowing to Haman was that he was a Jew.]

As you know, news like this travels quickly - especially when someone else wants your spot - so Haman was almost instantly informed, [sing-song playground voice], "Mordecai doesn't bow down to you because he says he is a Jew."

A Jew? A Jew? He's one of those rebellious, stiff-necked good-for-nothings? The ones that Xerxes' Dad made a deal with to rebuild their little Temple that Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed? The Jews... the ones Xerxes always seems to be intervening for and sending money to for reasons he can't even explain? Mordecai is one of ... ***those people***? They're the Dynasty's greatest headache! And Mordecai is one of ***them***?

Haman saw an opportunity for a solution to a problem both global and personal. Why take out just one Jew when you can kill them all?

So, he waited for a while as he hatched his plan to kill the Jews. And at New Year's, when the astrological charts said it was best, he cast lots - pur, the Persians called them - to see when the most favorable time would be to execute the mass execution. It was the last month of the year. Perrrrfect, Haman thought as he made arrangements to see King Xerxes.

It's interesting to note that after Xerxes promoted Haman, you never again hear from the advisers who advised him on Vashti and dreamt up the original Bachelor series that gave Xerxes the beautiful Esther. No one knows what happened to them, but given Haman's ruthlessness and ability to lie, one can only imagine.

Haman came to Xerxes with lies about the Jews. But he never identified them as the Jews. It's easier to foment hate when you stick with *those people* and not actually say who they are. To

sweeten the pot, he offered to pay for the scheme with his own money, the equivalent of 750,000 lbs of silver!

Xerxes, disinterested, trusting Haman and admiring his determination to get things done, signed off and gave Haman his signet ring so Haman could write up what he wanted and send it off in Xerxes' name. Soon, Haman's edict was read and posted everywhere, including Susa. The order said that on this day, the thirteenth day, of the last month of that year, all the Jews should be killed, and those who killed them could plunder their belongings. It was a "Purge" called against all Jewish people.

WHAT DID I MISS? (Esther 4:1-5)

Have you ever been late to a party or family gathering and it was clear to you that you missed something significant that must have occurred a few minutes before you arrived? And have you ever entered that party or gathering and no one would tell you what happened, or the first few people you talk to say something like, "I don't know - I got here just before you did."

It's been a minute since we left Esther in chapter 2 and heard Haman's edict in 3:12. Esther has been Queen for several years. Her life on the streets with her single Dad cousin guardian Mordecai is far behind her now. And part of her comfortable life is being able to live in a bubble of almost complete isolation. Until now.

Her servant girls brought her news that there was a man wandering through the heart of the city, carrying on some sort of loud, wailing protest. Day after day he would wail and scream and walk from wherever he started, through downtown and stop at the palace gates. He was wearing sackcloth and sprinkling ashes on his hair and smearing them on his face. He was clearly in mourning, but doing so very publicly. The servant girls didn't know what to think of this, but eventually they discovered his name... Mordecai.

Esther is worried and mortified. Why is my cousin, Mr Keep-A-Low-Profile now carrying on this way, and in public? So, she tried to cover up the problem by sending new clothes and maybe a message to quiet down. But he wouldn't.

NEW PHONE, WHO'S THIS? (Esther 4:6-10)

So Esther sent a trusted servant who she could count on to keep a secret. She sent the eunuch Hathach with instructions to find out what on earth was wrong. Out came the story of his conflict with Haman and how Haman in return planned the destruction of the Jews. He sent her a copy of the edict and an urgent plea to go to appear before Xerxes and plead for her people. Her people.

Still, Esther was used to the high life. She wasn't sure that this was something in which she needed to be involved. It was quite a risk to appear before the king. "Everyone knows that for any man or woman that approaches the king in the inner court there is but one law: unless Xerxes extends his scepter you're dead. Real dead. Xerxes hasn't called me for thirty days and it's been good because I have been working on me. But still, he hasn't called me and unless he does, huh-uh honey I don't think I want to risk all that." (Esther 4:11, ISP)

CHANGE OF HEART (Esther 4:12-5:1)

Does this story look hopeful so far? We have a ruthless, vindictive, bloodthirsty villain. We have a passive king who is like, "Whatever Haman," and doesn't even bother to ask who those people are that Haman wants to annihilate. We have two people who could be heroes. One of them got his people into this mess by refusing to bow to a man he didn't respect and then announcing to his co-workers that the reason he wouldn't do it is that he was a Jew. And the other hopeful character has become too accustomed to being Queen to be bothered to do the right thing.

But this is the moment of greatest hope so far in the story! **Even if everyone else is faithless, God is faithful.** The faithful Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote these words in 2 Timothy 2 (verses 11-13):

**If we died with Him, we will also live with Him;
if we endure, we will also reign with Him.
If we disown Him, He will also disown us;
if we are faithless, He remains faithful,
for He cannot disown Himself. (2 Timothy 2:10-13)**

Even in this hopeless moment, God was faithful to carry out His covenant made with 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; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (Genesis 12:2-3)**

Mordecai gathers his wits about him and reminds Esther that she has a destiny in the dynasty, and it depends on what she does at that moment in time! He reminds her that she is part of the people who Haman has ordered to be eliminated. It's not enough to *not* be part of the problem! She must be an active part of the solution!

Suddenly Esther saw herself in “those people!” Oh, that we would do that today! Part of the Church has long been silent while another part of the Church has been persecuted in faraway lands. Part of the Church has long been silent while another part of the Church has been the target of racism, even here in our nation. Part of the Church is now silent when other parts of the Church are now suffering in many different ways, in many different places - some very close to us. Had we actually seen ourselves as members together of the body of Christ, had we actually seen ourselves as we are, as ***those people***; had we not responded to the first injustice with silence, perhaps now there would be less for us to be vocal about. **It's not enough to not be part of the problem. We must be active in the solution.**

I don't know what that looks like, but I know it's true. And I know that if we pray - and an important part of prayer is listening - God will show us His way. But the time to pray, and the time to act, is now.

God uses the words of Mordecai to drive home this point with Esther. “Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For **if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows that you have been placed in the kingdom for such a time as this?**” (Esther 4:13-14)

God can move around you, over you, under you, or through you and in you, but GOD WILL MOVE. The question is: **Do you want to be part of what God is doing?** It will require great risk and sacrifice, and may demand your life. But will you be part of what God is doing?

In words that foreshadow stirring words from a great reformer, Esther says, “I will go... and if I perish! I perish!” Esther is courageously moving toward her destiny in the dynasty. Esther goes in to face Xerxes. We see her enter the royal hall. Xerxes looks right at her. Will he raise his scepter, or will she perish? We will find out next week!

Almost two thousand years later, Martin Luther would write that for Christ's sake we must, "Let goods and kindred go! This mortal life also! The body they may kill! God's truth abideth still! His kingdom is forever!"

May the Lord Jesus Christ fill us with urgency today to boldly stand for Him and for the people for whom He died - for we are one of them, and we are one with them! Amen!