

LEVERAGE (DYNASTY & DESTINY PT III)

July 26, 2020 – Andrew Irvin

PREVIOUSLY ON DYNASTY & DESTINY...

We have had a great time in Esther so far. In week 1 we met three of the main characters: King Xerxes, Esther, and Mordecai. Last week we met the evil villain Haman, an enemy and oppressor of God's people. But the main protagonist in the story of Esther is God, who is working even when we do not see Him at work... and that's one of the main ideas of this wonderful, historical, story.

Haman, ironically, received a promotion that everyone thought would go to Mordecai, because Mordecai had uncovered a plot to kill King Xerxes. But Haman was given the promotion, made second-in-command, and Xerxes ordered that everyone bow down to Haman. And everyone did, except Mordecai.

Fueled by rage at Mordecai's disrespect, Haman swindled King Xerxes into letting him write an edict in Xerxes' name that all Jews throughout the far-flung Persian Empire should be slaughtered – and plundered – on the thirteenth day of the last month of the year. Haman's edict was read out as law all throughout the empire.

In response, Mordecai mourned publicly and loudly... that was a big deal in Persia. He was a one-man protest, but even though he was just one man, he was loud and impossible to ignore.

Embarrassed because of her cousin, Esther sent him stylish new clothes to replace his sackcloth and ashes. A dialogue ensued, that went back and forth between Esther and Mordecai through the eunuch Hathach. [Verizon vs. Hathach :)]

Mordecai was shocked that the Queen had become so comfortable being Queen that she wasn't sure if she wanted to get involved. The status quo had become her comfort zone. Sure she saw some random acts of racism once in a while, but they never touched her and this edict from Haman... it will blow over won't it? And besides, Mordecai, you worry warrior, worry about this: if I go to Xerxes now and he doesn't feel like receiving me, I would be dead. Real dead. Then who would deliver your precious little messages?

We can all be thankful that God doesn't need stellar behavior from Mordecai or Esther for Him to still be God. [‘cuz if Mordecai and Esther wouldn't have made Him want to give up, we surely would, right? :)] The Apostle Paul reminds us in 2 Timothy 2, “**Even when we are faithless, God will remain faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.**” (2 Timothy 2:13) Regardless of Esther, Mordecai, Xerxes, or even evil Haman, God was still going to carry out His covenant protection that He swore to Abraham.

Perhaps, MAYBE, Mordecai had an inkling of that in his spirit when he declared (4:14) that help for the Jews will come from some other place if it doesn't come from Esther, but that Esther, Mordecai, and the other Jews in Susa would likely be killed. But they weren't the only Jews in danger of destruction.

ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES

Our actions have far-reaching implications, over years and over miles. This time period of Xerxes was during the time that the Temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt. This rebuilding was ordered by Xerxes' Dad, Darius. (You might remember King Darius from Daniel and the lion's den.) At Darius's invitation and God's command, a large number of Jews returned from old Babylon, now part of the Medo-Persian empire. They had reinstated worship in the Temple and were faithfully living according to the Law of Moses: “**Hear, O Israel, the Lord is One! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength.**” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

These faithful people of God were scheduled to be slaughtered mercilessly under Haman's edict, and the Temple would be plundered, and surely destroyed once again. And don't forget God's Ultimate Plan to send the world the Savior through the Seed of Abraham. Haman's hatred, Xerxes' indifference, Mordecai's disrespect, and Esther's comfort could seemingly put this plan in jeopardy. But God is God.

Through Mordecai's words, **Esther was stirred out of her comfort zone to identify with her people, those people.** Last week, I talked about our need as members of the body of Christ to see ourselves not only with but *as* the members of the body who are being persecuted faraway, and who are targets of racism nearby. If we don't see ourselves *as* Black, or *as* Chinese, we will lack the passion to truly stand up for them to effect the change that they need for their lives. God is looking for His body to stand in support of each other, and to cry out against every form of injustice.

FAST FOR YOUR LIFE

Esther agreed to go before King Xerxes even though it meant risking her life. And as she agreed to go, she asked for Mordecai to do something: get the community of Jews together to fast.

The Jews that were still there in Susa were likely not observant... they were the ones that would skip weekly Sabbath observances and enjoy a little bacon-wrapped shrimp from time to time. But they were still Jews, and they were still called to be God's people.

SHOULD WE FAST?

I admit I do not regularly fast. Preparing this message has caused me to think about it more and consider the power of fasting. Bill Bright, founder of "Cru" – formerly "Campus Crusade for Christ" – was a fasting champion, coming to it later in his life, but realizing its power in many ways. I've linked an article from Dr. Bright in the outline on the YouVersion Bible App.¹ (ask for video) [**Bible app icon? >> More >> Events >> First United Methodist Church**] He offers these thoughts.

"Fasting and prayer can also work on a [grand] scale. According to Scripture, personal experience and observation, I am convinced that when God's people fast ... God will hear from heaven and heal our lives, our churches, our communities, our nation and world. Fasting and prayer can bring about revival—a change in the direction of our nation, the nations of earth and the fulfillment of the Great Commission."

We don't need any of that today, do we? Here are three of Bill Bright's reasons to fast:

- 1 . Fasting and prayer can result in a more intimate relationship with Christ.**
- 2 . Fasting enables the Holy Spirit to reveal your true spiritual condition, resulting in brokenness, repentance, and a transformed life.**
- 3 . Fasting can result in a dynamic personal revival in your own life—and make you a channel of revival to others.**

¹ <https://21days.churchofthehighlands.com/resources/guide-to-fasting-and-prayer>

Imagine this community of Jews in Susa fasting. Imagine a community of Christians in Bakersfield, starting with the people of First United Methodist Church, fasting. As the Jews fasted, they paid attention to God and what He may be saying to them in their unprecedented time. Can you imagine a group of Christians who stopped complaining and started listening for what God was saying in the midst of crisis?

As they fasted, the Jews of Susa saw themselves as God saw them. It humbled them, and drove them to pray. Can you imagine a group of Christians with hearts broken by their own brokenness, driven to their knees in prayer and the knowledge of God's great love for them? Can you imagine what could happen if this group of Christians recognized their dependence on God? How transformative could moment-by-moment dependence on God be for any Christian or group of Christians?

As they fasted, the Jews of Susa began to sense that they needed to rekindle their love for God and return to His ways. Can you imagine a group of Christians rekindled by the revival flame of the Spirit of God? (Powerful! Strong! Able to change a heart, a city, a state, a nation, a world!)

FROM FASTING TO FEASTING

On the third day of the fast, Esther went in to see King Xerxes. She knew as she stood before him it was a moment of her destiny. The next nanosecond may as well have been 5 years. Would he lift his scepter toward her, or would his bodyguards put a bag over her face and lead her to her death?

Our Scripture begins with this scene and says that Xerxes "was pleased with her." As I was researching this text, I noticed a commentator say that in Hebrew, the phrase reads, "**Esther obtained grace in his eyes.**" She obtained - was given - grace in his eyes. Who really gave Esther this grace?

Who has always provided grace, strength, power, deliverance, a pathway for His children to experience their destiny? God did, God does, and God will.

In this moment of destiny, Esther obtained grace in Xerxes' eyes. He smiled and raised his scepter toward her. Imagine the relief she must have felt!

I wonder what may have happened if, after Esther agreed to appear before Xerxes, she *didn't* call for a fast, but went swaggering in to see her husband, demanding that he do something about his bff Haman? I wonder if Xerxes would have raised his scepter toward her then?

Esther knew her need and depended on God, even if she did it imperfectly. The acknowledgement of this dependence was displayed in the fact that she called a fast. And **the results of Esther's fast were grace and deliverance**.

Xerxes beamed at his favorite girl. "My Queen, why have you come to see me? Tell me what you want, even if it's up to half of my kingdom - it will be yours." You know you hear kings say that half-of-my-kingdom stuff a lot, but still, Xerxes never said it unless he meant it.

So Esther asked for a banquet with Xerxes and Haman as the only invited guests. Xerxes gladly accepted Esther's invitation, and when he got there, he again asked Esther what she wanted, "Even if it's half of my kingdom!" There, he says it again.

She answered, "I really want more time with you, honey. Why don't you and Haman come back for another dinner party tomorrow night?"

There's a lesson here from Esther. She was loaded for bear, but she didn't shoot. Instead, she surveyed the situation, and - having had her spiritual sensitivity heightened by her fast - she realized that the timing wasn't right.

Haman was giddy that he had been invited to a second consecutive dinner party with the king! He went right home, gathered his sycophant friends - somehow they were all up late - and bragged about the whole thing.

Everything was perfect until he had to go outside and see Mordecai at the palace gate, just standing there, staring him down. "My life would be perfect without Mordecai," he moaned. "There, there," his wife said, hoping he wouldn't talk himself out of a second night away, "Why don't you build a gallows 75 feet high and ask Xerxes if you can hang Mordecai from it?"

That seemed like such a great idea that Haman built the gallows that night! The gallows Haman built for Mordecai stood higher than anything else in his part of town, a tribute to his wealth, power, and zeal to take out anyone who ... stood in his way.

Meanwhile, back at the palace, Xerxes had insomnia. Weird, he'd had more than enough wine to be completely relaxed. But still... Now you'll notice I skipped over chapter 6. It's a great story and we will cover it during the Facebook Live session Wednesday night at 7:30. At the beginning of chapter 6 we read about Xerxes not sleeping and calling his historian to read his chronicles... because what puts you to sleep faster than hearing meeting minutes read

back to you, right? That night, the historian read that bit about the conspiracy to kill Xerxes, and how Mordecai uncovered the plot and spoke to Esther, and Esther told Xerxes.

God is at work even in finite details as well as in grand schemes. *Really?* You think God was at work in *that*? Yes I do.

²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. ³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:29-30)

Nothing escapes God's notice. I believe He worked in this small thing to remind Xerxes that Esther loved him and had his best interest at heart. He could trust whatever she needed to say.

OUR INFLUENCE CAN INSPIRE ACTION

Originally I titled this message "Leverage" because in these chapters Esther uses her influence to accomplish God's purposes. But as I got into this I realized that the real leverage came from the fast. Not that God was *forced* to do anything, but as I read the story of Esther, this fast is the game changer for the whole story!

Nearly 80 years before Esther, the prophet Jeremiah said words that we still claim today, but they were actually written to Esther's generation, ¹⁰**This is what the LORD says: "You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again. ¹¹For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. ¹²In those days when you pray, I will listen. (Jeremiah 29:10-12, NLT)**

You may not see Me, but when you pray I will listen! You may not see Me, but I'm working even in your captivity to bring you home to Me! If you seek Me with all your heart, you're going to find Me! **The act of faith displayed in the fast leveraged God's power into the situation.** And, we now see Esther join God's work and wisely use her influence to inspire Xerxes' action.

THE TIME TO SPEAK UP

The second dinner party has been prepared. King Xerxes appears with Haman not far behind. After the evening got underway, King Xerxes gazed at Esther and asked, "Queen Esther, what

do you want? I will give it to you, even up to half of my kingdom!” She knew then that this was the time to speak.

Sooner or later, you have to speak up and be counted. About 400 years after Esther, our Lord Jesus Christ said, ³²“**Whoever acknowledges Me before others, I will also acknowledge before My Father in heaven. ³³But whoever disowns Me before others, I will disown before My Father in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32-33)** The time will come for everyone, just as it did for Esther, to decide to stand up and admit who you are, and whose you are.

Notice what Esther says here and how she says it. [**Learn from Esther’s example: be humble.**] Here’s the biggest lesson from Esther’s remarks to King Xerxes: Be humble.

Esther’s statement is one of humility: *I don’t want to bother you, Xerxes, but my people have been sold to be slaughtered!* Remember the tons of silver Haman offered Xerxes to finance his Jew-killing scheme? He was buying his privilege. Haman started to sweat just a little, but tried to play it cool. He didn’t know about any other plans for genocide around the palace, but you never know...

Xerxes FIST went down on the table, “WHO IS DOING THIS TO YOU?” And you know the rest of the story.

LEARN FROM HAMAN’S HATE

There are life-changing lessons to be learned today! Call on the power of God through fasting and prayer; be sensitive to the situation and what God is telling you in the moment; be patient and wait on God’s timing; you may be powerless but you have influence and that influence and inspire action; speak up when the Spirit leads; when you do speak up, be humble. And there are lessons about what not to do, too...

Top on the list: don’t hate. Haman hated. Don’t hate. Did you know that, even, today, in Jewish celebrations of Purim, when the name Haman is read, people blow noisemakers, rattle percussion instruments, stomp and shout? It reminds them that we should all stand up for “those people”, and make noise in the face of injustice. We could say “boo”... in fact, the rest of this message, when I say Haman, you all boo. [practice]

We learn two lessons from the hatred of Haman (pause for booing):

1. The hatred of Haman (pause) teaches us first and foremost: **before you hate, evaluate.** Haman (pause) knew Mordecai was a Jew but he was surprised that the Queen was,

too! Before you hate, ask yourself if it's even worth it? You and I both know that the answer is NO, especially when you're hating on *those people*.

2. **You reap what you sow.** (Or, what goes around comes around.) Some people call this karma, but it is the hand of God. **“Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap,”** wrote the Apostle Paul in **Galatians 6:7**. Haman (pause) built a gallows on which he planned to hang Mordecai. But as chapter 7 comes to a close, we see Haman (pause) hanged there himself. Haman (pause) planned to plunder the Jews he killed. Xerxes gave the estate of Haman (pause) to Mordecai. Tragically, as the whole story of Esther wraps up next week, there's more reaping of what was sown by Haman (pause). “Vengeance is Mine,” saith the Lord, “I will repay.”

Haman (pause) is dead. But the Jewish people are still scheduled to be slaughtered in 11 months. What can be done about that? Join us next week to find out. This Wednesday at 7:30 I'll be going live on Facebook to see if you have any questions about Esther so far, and to talk through chapter 6 with anyone who wants to join me.

- Esther knew her need and depended on God. The results of her fast were grace and deliverance.
- God is at work, even in the smallest details.
- Actions have consequences.
- Your influence can inspire actions.
- Speak up when it's time, but be humble.
- Before you hate, evaluate.
- You reap what you sow.

And don't forget, even when the journey to your current location is rough or less than ideal, God can turn that situation around and make it your destiny. Amen.

Let us allow our hearts to say YES to the plans and purposes of God as we sing a stirring hymn of victory, “Lead On, O King Eternal.”

YOUVERSION URL: <http://bible.com/events/26425395>

