

## Introduction:

- A. Haman hated the Jews and he was in a position to do something about it. Haman was the second most powerful man in the vast Persian Empire about 480 bc. He hated the Jews because for 1000 years his people, the Amelekites, had hated the Jews and tried to wipe them out, each time thwarted by the protecting hand of God. Now Haman was positioned to turn the tables on the Jews. No one gets to be the second in command of a vast kingdom like that without some inside help and I suspect Haman had help from a hand he never saw.

Haman loved being powerful, rich, and recognized. He loved it when King Xerxes made him rich beyond his imagination, and he loved it when Xerxes ordered that everyone in the kingdom should bow down when Haman passed by. And he especially loved it when one day he persuaded Xerxes to “destroy, annihilate and kill” an entire bothersome race of people within his kingdom, without ever actually telling Xerxes who they were. Jews, whether they lived in Egypt, Jerusalem, Asia Minor or on the far frontier of India, were doomed to die on one day 11 months later. Haman loved it!

Haman hated one Jew more than all others—Mordecai. He hated Mordecai because he was a Jew. He hated Mordecai because there was ancient bad blood between them. Each of their forefathers had been kings, and Haman’s forefather, Agag, had been humiliated and then ingloriously killed. And Haman hated Mordecai because Mordecai refused to bow when Haman passed by.

Haman knew just about everything that happened in the palace but there were some things he didn’t know. Haman didn’t know, for example, that Xerxes’ new queen Esther was a Jew. He didn’t know that she had been raised by her cousin Mordecai. He didn’t know that Mordecai had

actually saved King Xerxes life by uncovering an assassination plot. And he didn't know or care that after hearing about the edict ordering their elimination, the Jews had barraged heaven with hungry prayers for God's help for three days and nights. And Haman didn't know how closely Almighty God listens to the prayers of his people for salvation.

So when Esther invited him to a private banquet with just herself and the King he went home and bragged about it. He bragged about his vast wealth and his ten sons and how the king had elevated him above everyone else in the empire. And he determined that he had had enough of Mordecai. The very next morning, he would ask Xerxes to pass down a death sentence. Haman even had a 75-foot pointed pole erected on which he would impale his hated enemy Mordecai.

What Haman didn't know was that that night King Xerxes couldn't sleep and that finally he ordered someone to read to him from the annals of his reign, and that what should come up but the story of the time Mordecai saved his life. "Did we ever do anything to honor that guy?" the king asked. "Nope, never did," his executive assistant replied. At that very moment, even though it was the crack of dawn, Haman was waiting outside to ask permission to kill Mordecai before lunch. Xerxes asks the arrogant Haman "what should be done for the man the king delights to honor?" Haman, of course, assumed the king had him in mind but the next thing he knew, he was leading Mordecai through the streets of Susa on the king's own horse, in the king's own robe, shouting, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!" It was the ultimate indignity. It just about killed Haman! Just about.

This incident was like that moment on a roller coaster when after a long, steep climb you finally crest the top and

feel your stomach turn. This time when he gets home, 6:13b-14 tell us...

I want to read what happens next but we're going to adopt an old Jewish custom as I read. A thousand years before this story, God had told Moses that he would "completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven." [Ex. 17:14] Haman was an Amalekite, so the tradition is that whenever the name of the vile Haman is read, everyone creates noise so his name is "blotted out." So as I read this, every time I come to Haman's name I want you to boo or hiss. 7:1-8:2...

Despite all this good news, the Jews still had a serious problem. The king and decreed that they were all to be killed and not even the king could rescind his own decree. Next thing we know, Esther falls at the king's feet, sobbing and pleading that he find a way to save the Jews. She could get herself killed doing that, but Xerxes listened.

Xerxes calls for his royal secretaries and came up with another edict. According to 8:11-12... That was the same day appointed for the Jews to be killed. So basically, he said the Jews could take up arms and defend themselves. Now if you think about it, that's not such a great deal, the Jews being a minority, but remember what Haman's wife had said: "Since Mordecai is Jewish... you cannot stand against him. You will surely come to ruin." The fear of the Jews—and the Jews' God—had a way of getting into people's heads.

Listen to what happened several months later: 9:1-3... That doesn't mean that there weren't any who came against the Jews. In fact, in the capital of Susa, over two days, the Jews killed 800 people who came after them—including Haman's ten sons. And throughout the kingdom, the Jews killed 75,000—all in self-defense, if I read this right. Xerxes had said the Jews could plunder those they killed, but the text pointedly tells us several times that

they didn't take a thing. Their holy God wanted them to have nothing to do with the treasures of their enemies.

Then, after all this, the Jews celebrated, and they are still celebrating 2500 years later, every year at Purim. Esther is ultimately a story about why the people of God have reason to celebrate. This book cues us to party!

- B. We as the people of God, grafted into the vine of Israel by Christ, also have reason to celebrate. We can celebrate what God did for Esther, Mordecai, and the Jews, but we have an even greater story of our own—one that draws on the same reasons for the joy of the Jews. We celebrate because:

**I. THE ANCIENT, VILE ENEMY WHO ONCE CONTROLLED OUR LIVES HAS BEEN BROUGHT LOW BY THE MIGHT OF OUR GOD**

- A. Haman had a spiritual father—Satan. Haman, second in power only to the great king, could have anything he wanted. He could finagle the annihilation of an entire people. But what he could not tolerate was anyone who would not bow down to him. That's the DNA of Satan. He wants all the glory, but like Mordecai, we refuse to bow to him who will not bow to God.
- B. We are no match for Satan, anymore than the Jews could stop Haman—except through their prayers. The Lord is the strength of our lives! He will come to our aid. We believe 1 Jn 4:4, “the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” Some here need that word right now!
- C. One of the distinct things about the downfall of Haman was how he is ultimately trapped in his own scheme. Esther 9:25, in recapping this story, says that the king “issued written orders that the evil scheme Haman had devised against the Jews should come back onto his own head.” That is how God works. We are saved because God traps Satan in his own scheme. Satan stage-managed the death of Jesus—Judas's betrayal, the blind pride of the

Pharisees, the violent arrogance of the Romans. He succeeded in killing the very Son of God, the Hope of the world, and God's only remedy for mankind's sin and death. Yet as every Christian knows, Jesus did not die a victim, but a sacrifice; and he did not die forever as all other mortals had, but rather he rose again, seizing the very keys of death from the grip of the devil. Col 2:15 says, "And having disarmed the powers and authorities [meaning Satan and those he controlled], he [Jesus] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." Haman was not merely defeated; he was hoisted on the pole he had erected to disgrace and destroy Mordecai. According to Rev 20:10 Satan, who is now the prince of the power of the air, will be "thrown into the lake of burning sulfur... [to be] tormented day and night for ever and ever."

Summary: We celebrate because the ancient, vile enemy who once controlled our lives has been brought low by the might of our God. "Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" [1 Cor 15:57]

There is another, even more wonderful reversal in this story.

## **II. A CONDEMNED AND HELPLESS PEOPLE ARE NOT ONLY SAVED, BUT EXALTED AMONG THE NATIONS**

That, of course, is the story of our lives!

- A. We are saved by a far greater edict than that of Xerxes! On Ash Wednesday many of you will stand before me and I will put a smudge of ash on your forehead and say, "Remember, from dust you came and to dust you will return." Each time I say these words to someone—words first spoken by God to the sinful Adam—to someone standing inches from me it almost takes my breath away. It is a death sentence. And our souls were equally destined for an everlasting death. Ezek 18:20 says, "The one who sins is the one who will die." But then Jesus came saying,

“The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news.” It was an edict of salvation! A turning of the tables!

- B. There’s an interesting detail in Esther when the king’s edict was issued. 8:10,14... Even though the death sentence was overruled, the condemned Jews didn’t know it. Such news couldn’t get to them soon enough! Those couriers were evangelists, of a sort. They are our models. “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” [Is 52:7] Each of us know people whose lives are heavy with death, and our Christian privilege is to tell them that God has provided for their salvation. We may not go galloping into people’s lives shouting, “You’re saved! You’re saved!” but neither do we dare to pass silently without ever a whisper of the good news from us!
- C. Here’s another fascinating aspect of this story: 8:15-17... When God’s people were saved the whole city of Susa held a joyous celebration! And if that isn’t amazing enough, many throughout the realm became Jews. God’s name is never mentioned in this whole story, but there is no doubt about God’s presence or his saving power! Remember God’s promise to Abraham? “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” Here is a fulfillment of that.

If the fear of the Jews drew people to join them, how much more does the grace of God poured out on us through Jesus Christ draw people to our sovereign, saving Lord! Ultimately, our salvation is the joy and hope of the whole world. This is the very point of the gospel: “Go into all the world and preach the good news!” John saw a vision of our future—“a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm

branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.' [Rev 7:9-10] God not only saves us, he exalts us till we worship with the nations in his presence!

### **III. LET US CELEBRATE AS ONLY THOSE CAN WHO HAVE BEEN RESCUED FROM DEATH BY GOD**

- A. 9:21-22... Purim, which is what this celebration is called, is a kind of Jewish Mardi Gras. Eugene Peterson writes, "The rabbis had a saying that although moderation is required throughout the year, on Purim it was permitted to drink wine 'until you didn't know the difference between blessed be Mordecai and cursed be Haman.'" [Five Smooth Stones, p.158] We don't need to get drunk to celebrate, but we should know how to party over our salvation. Eph 5:18-20, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." If the Jews celebrated so exuberantly, how much more should we!
- B. If they feasted, how much more should we--at the table of the Lord where our Great Savior dines with us, and in all our meals together, till we dine in glory with the Lord our Bridegroom. After all, we eat with people once condemned who will now live with us forever! Maybe between bites we should breathe a sigh of relief, and say, "Whew! That was close one! Thank God that the good news of Jesus reached us!"
- C. If they were generous with gifts to one another and to the poor around them, how much more should we be joyfully generous. After all, "you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he

became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” [2 Cor 8:9]

D. Let’s celebrate our salvation.