

The Hatfields and Mccoys 1.0

(Esther 3:1-15)

(preached 1/14/14; Pine Grove BC Wed PM)

Introduction

Most of you are familiar with the Hatfield/McCoy rivalry in the United States.

It is the story of two families that lived near the WV-Kentucky line.

Most experts on the rivalry agree that it began over the ownership of a hog.

Floyd Hatfield had a hog but Randolph McCoy claimed that it was his based upon the notches in the hog's ear.

So, they took the matter to the local judge, Anderson Hatfield (known as Preach Hatfield) who ruled in favor of the Hatfield.

The deciding factor in the case was the testimony of Bill Staton, who was a neutral party, and said that the hog belonged to Floyd Hatfield.

Two years later in 1880, Staton was killed by 2 McCoy brothers who were tried and found not guilty.

The judge saying that they acted in self-defense.

Well, the feud was born and from 1880 to 1891, over a dozen people from both families were killed.

It is still known as the one of the bloodiest family feuds in history.

The feud is so well known that the phrase “fighting like Hatfields and Mccoys is used to two or more people who can’t seem to get along.

Unfortunately, family feuding didn’t start with the Hatfields and Mccoys.

As we arrive at Esther 3, we get to see another feud between families that stretches back hundreds of years.

The feus is so bad that in Esther 3, one person on one side of the feud wants to not only kill a member of the opposite side...

He wants to wipe out millions of people.

And the amazing thing is that the king will grant him his wish.

But before we get to that, let’s review the book of Esther so far.

In chapter 1, we met the Persian King Ahasuerus along with his queen Vashti.

Because of the king’s great wealth and fame, he throws a huge party for the kingdom.

The celebration lasts 6 months, and in the final week of that party, the king asks Vashti to dance before his guests.

When she refuses, the king bans Vashti from his presence and passes a law to have her replaced by someone more worthy of the title of queen.

And in chapter 2, a royal pageant was planned to crown a new queen.

Actually, pageant is not the right word.

It was more of an evil plan to exploit the women of the kingdom for the king's pleasure.

However, the plans went forward to hold this event.

Then, we meet Mordecai and Esther.

Mordecai is a Jew living in Susa, one of the capitals of the Persian kingdom.

Though the Jews have been freed from bondage for some time, Mordecai has not returned to his land and chosen to stay in Susa.

While we may question that decision, the truth is that God has placed him there for a reason.

We also meet another person who is central to God's plan in the book of Esther, and that person is Esther herself.

She had grown up an orphan in the Persian kingdom.

But Mordecai, her cousin, had taken her in and raised her.

When this contest to select a new queen was announced, Mordecai enters Esther, who is known for her beauty.

We talked about the lack of wisdom in doing that but we know that God works out his plan despite the evil intentions of men.

Once Esther is entered, she immediately finds favor with one of the pageant officials...

And when she goes before the king, she ultimately finds favor with him and becomes the queen.

The final part of what we covered in the first two chapters occurs in verses 21-23 of chapter 2.

After Esther is queen, Mordecai overhears a plot to kill the king.

As the chapter ends, he relays it to Esther who tells the king.

His life is spared, but the men plotting to kill him are hanged.

And now, we get to chapter 3....

But before we read it, you need a little bit of history because we are going to meet a new character in this story by the name of Haman.

As chapter 3 begins, the Bible will simply describe him as an Agagite.

But what does that mean?

So, let's take a minute and kinda set the stage for what we will be reading tonight in chapter 3....

Take your Bible and turn with me to Exodus 17:8...

⁸ Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim. ⁹ So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." ¹⁰ Joshua did as Moses ^[i]told him, ^[i]and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. ¹¹ So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand ^[k]down, Amalek prevailed. ¹² But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set. ¹³ So Joshua ^[l]overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

¹⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this in ^[m]a book as a memorial and ^[n]recite it to Joshua, ^[o]that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." ¹⁵ Moses built an altar and named it *The LORD is My Banner*; ¹⁶ and he said, ^[p]*The LORD has sworn; the LORD will have war against Amalek from generation to generation.*"

In Exodus 17, the Jews are headed out of Egypt...

But on their way to Mount Sinai, they are attacked by the Amalekites.

God gives Israel victory over the Amalekites, and He also curses the Amalekites for their attack.

And in Exodus 17:14, God promises to wipe out the Amalekites from the face of the earth.

Now, fast forward 450 years in to the book of 1 Samuel..

1 Samuel 15:1....

15 Then Samuel said to Saul, “The LORD sent me to anoint you as king over His people, over Israel; now therefore, listen to the ^[a]words of the LORD. ² Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘I will ^[b]punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. ³ Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.’”

Though some time has passed, God has not forgotten his pledge to punish the Amalekites..

So Saul becomes king over Israel and he is ordered to carry out God’s plan to kill the Amalekites.

And though Saul obeys and goes and destroys the Amalekites, he spares their king, who is named Agag.

God is not pleased with this.

He had vowed to completely destroy the Amalekites, but when Saul spared Agag, he hinders God's plan.

Therefore, God sends Samuel to kill Agag, and he does.

All of that was not lost on those who were descendants of King Agag.

The fact that God had destroyed their family left a sour taste in the family for years to come.

So when we meet Haman and learn that he is an Agagite, which means he is a descendant of Agag.

We know that behind the scenes that hates Jewish people.

Even though the events of Esther are 500+ years after Agag was killed, he is still holding a grudge.

Well, on the other side of that grudge will be Mordecai who is Jewish.

Mordecai would know of what the Jews did to the Amalekites.

He would know that Haman was a descendant of the king of the Amalekites.

And with that, we see the first edition of the Hatfields and McCoys right here on the pages of Scripture.

And once again even before we get into the verses tonight, we see a great lesson for us all.

Bitterness is a deadly disease that can infect your body and be passed on from generation to generation.

You should fight bitterness in your heart.

You should correct bitterness that you see in your family.

You should correct bitterness that you see in the church.

And what is bitterness.

It is wounded pride that must have revenge.

It must have the last word.

It must get the upper hand.

And it grows in your heart when you hold on to your rights.

When you refuse to accept being wronged by other people, you are planting the seeds of bitterness and jealousy.

And what is the cure for feuding, jealousy, rivalry and bitterness?

Turn with me one more time and I promise we will go to Esther and stay there..

But turn with me to 1 Cor 6.

In the context of what Paul is writing here, he is discouraging Christians from suing other Christians.

He is saying that Christian lawsuits are a horrible testimony to the world.

1 Cor 6:1..

6 Does any one of you, when he has a ^[a]case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the ^[b]saints? ² Or do you not know that the ^[c]saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to ^[d]constitute the smallest law courts? ³ Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life? ⁴ So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, ^[e]do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? ⁵ I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, ⁶ but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?

The point is...

Don't sue other Christians.

Work out your disagreements within the church.

Let the church decide the matter....

But then he writes this in verse 7....

⁷ Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?

Paul is saying that it is better to suffer injustice than to lose your witness to the world.

Simply put, swallow your pride, accept the defeat and maintain your witness to the world.

That is a great remedy for bitterness.

Know that your testimony to the world is more important than you being right....

Your character before the world is more important than winning an argument.

Your witness is more important than getting the last word.

Unfortunately, the people in Esther 3 didn't do that.

They held on the past with both hands.

They were in it to win.

And that leads to sin nearly every time.

So, let's turn back to Esther 3 and read a few verses to get us started...

The first 6 verses, I simply entitled....

I. Getting Disrespected (3:1-6)

Verse 1...

3 After these events King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and ^[a]established his authority over all the princes who were with him. ² All the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down ^[b]and paid homage to Haman; for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage. ³ Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why are you transgressing the king's command?" ⁴ Now it was when they had spoken daily to him and he would not listen to them, that they told Haman to see whether Mordecai's reason would stand; for he had told them that he was a Jew. ⁵ When Haman saw that Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage to him, Haman was filled with rage. ⁶ But he ^[c]disdained to ^[d]lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him who the people of Mordecai were; therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.

The first time that Elvis Presley played the Grand Ole Opry, the manager was not too impressed and hired another act instead.

Talk about passing over the wrong person for a promotion...

But that is what happened.

And as chapter 2 ends, we see something very incredible happen in the opening verses of chapter 3..

King Ahasuerus promotes Haran in his kingdom.

Now think about this, we just left off where Mordecai had done such a noble act in alerting the kings of plans to kill him...

Yet, in the next verse, the king not only overlooks Mordecai, he honors his rival with a job.

Now that you know the feud between the Jews and the Amalekites that had raged over the years...

You see the huge insult of hiring Haran over Mordecai.

Now, the king would have not been aware of this.

But that is what happened here, and I am sure that Mordecai felt a little slighted and insulted by the king's actions.

And that is why he most likely refuses to bow to Haman in verse 2.

Now, to be fair to Mordecai, he may have been trying to honor the second commandment by refusing to worship someone other than God.

Which seems to be a stretch in this situation.

Furthermore, Jews bowed to other men of authority in the Bible.

So, I think the most reasonable explanation is the ongoing rivalry between the two men.

Once Haman learns that Mordecai is not bowing to him, his is filled with rage in verse 5...

So much rage that he doesn't just want to kill Mordecai, he wants to kill every Jew in the world.

Sound familiar?

It should.

The list of people who have wanted to eliminate the Jewish people is long.

And that desire didn't stop with Haran.

There have been other men with the same desire...

Hitler.

The last president of Iran said that he wanted to wipe Israel off the map.

Such is the nature of evil.

It is not content with the death of one, it insists upon the death of many.

So, Haman has been disrespected and he wants to gain revenge...

And that brings us to verses 7-11, which I entitled...

II. Gaining the King's Favor (3:7-11)

Verse 7....

⁷ In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, ^[e]Pur, that is the lot, was cast before Haman from day to day and from month to month, ^[f]until the twelfth month, that is the month Adar

For those who don't believe in the God of Scripture, they turn to superstition and magic.

And what the author of Esther is describing in verse 7 is a superstitious practice of casting lots..

Haman wants to destroy the Jews, but he wants to do it on the right day..

So for one year (from the first month to the twelfth month according to these verses) Haman cast lots to determine the date to kill the Jews in the empire.

He was looking for a pattern of a day that consistently came up on the lots.

And when he was satisfied with the date, he went to win the king over to his plan...

Verse 8...

⁸ Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of all other people and they do not observe the king's laws, so it is not

in the king's interest to let them remain. ⁹ If it is pleasing to the king, let it be ^[g]decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who carry on the king's business, to put into the king's treasuries."

First published in 1936, Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* has been a world wide best seller.

It was updated in 1981, and copies still sell today.

One of the sections of the book is entitled.. "Six Ways to Make People Like You."

The #5 way is "Talk in terms of the other person's interest."

And #6 is make the other person feel important – and do it sincerely.

Well, Haman must have owned an earlier copy of this book because he does both of those in trying to influence the king.

First, he makes him feel important by suggesting that no one be allowed to break the king's laws.

A definite effort to make the king feel important...

But then he appeals to the king's interest by adding, "I'll make you rich if you let me destroy this group of people."

He promised 10,000 talents of silver, which would equal around 330 billion dollars today!

Notice that Haman never mentions the name of the group of people.

Why?

Well, who would be included in this group?

Esther, who is the queen that Ahasuerus loves.

I think we are reminded here of how the enemy comes to us at times.

He speaks to us like Haman.

He doesn't say anything that is highly objectionable.

He appeals to our flesh at times.

He talks to us about fairness.

He talks to us in ways that are areas of weakness.

If you struggle with showing mercy and tend to only see things in black and white, the enemy says things to you like...

“This isn't fair. You have the right to be treated better.”

If you struggle with knowing what to do and you have a hard time seeing things black and white, the enemy says things like..

“Well, you just need to love people and overlook their sin.”

Or if you struggle with trusting God financially, the enemy says...

“You don’t need to give. You need to have this much in the bank at all times.”

Haman doesn’t say anything too bad.

He makes the king feel important and he promises a financial reward...

But behind those words are an evil man with an evil plan.

So, be careful who you listen to...

If you aren’t reading the Bible, it may not be God whispering in your ear...

It may be the enemy.

And in the case of Haman, his words were successful...

Verse 10...

¹⁰ Then the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. ¹¹ The king said to Haman, “The silver is ^[h]yours, and the people also, to do with them as you please.”

The taking off the ring is an indication that Haman has the stamp of approval from the king to carry out his plan to kill every Jew in the empire.

And the king even adds that he can keep all the silver that he acquires from the Jews destruction.

And with that...

Haman has gone from getting disrespected to now gaining the king's approval to wipe out all the Jews.

And the final verses are about Haman....

III. Gloating in Victory (3:12-15)

Verse 12...

¹² Then the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and it was written just as Haman commanded to the king's satraps, to the governors who were over each province and to the princes of each people, each province according to its script, each people according to its language, being written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring.

The order goes forth to kill the Jews in the first month of the year.

Actually on the 13th day of the first month, which has been calculated to be April 17, 474 BC.

On that day, a law was passed and it was announced that the Jews would be destroyed.

And why is that date important?

It would have been one day before the Jews were supposed to celebrate Passover...

Which would have been April 18, 474 BC.

So, on the day before the Jews are supposed to celebrate the incredible deliverance that God provided in their escape from Egypt...

The king where they are currently living issues a law saying that they are to be destroyed....

On Thursday, you hear that the king of Persia is going to destroy your people...

On Friday, you celebrate that The King of the Universe has always delivered your people...

Was that just by chance?

Certainly not, God gives his people hope in the worst of situations.

It seems like we always find a glimmer of hope when our days appear to be the darkest.

That is how God often works in the lives of his people.

There are days of discouragement in my ministry.

Days when I wonder if I am even making a difference in God's kingdom.

Then I get a call from someone who is not even in my life now but is someone that was in a Sunday School class or listened to a sermon I preached...

And they may not be calling to say thanks or anything like that...

But it is just a reminder to me that God sees it all.

He knows it all.

And he knows His people better than we know ourselves....

And sometimes, we just need to be reminded that He has it all under control.

That is what he is doing here.

He is reminded the Jews that no king can destroy what He has set out to protect.

And the same is true for me and you.

He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

Amen.

The details of Haman's plan are found in verse 13....

¹³ Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces to destroy, to kill and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to seize their possessions as plunder. ¹⁴ A copy of the edict to be ^[U]issued as law in every province was published to all the peoples so that they should be ready for this day.

The meaning of that is that the Jews have almost a year to prepare for this day because it will not occur until the 12th month.

The truth is that God's hand was on the lots cast in verse 7 of this chapter.

Haman picked a day that was ordained by God who even controls the roll of the dice.

Proverbs 16:33..

The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD.

Though Haman thought his superstition supplied the right day, the truth is that God sovereignly selected the day when all of his plans would work to perfection.

The God of the Scriptures is the God of the big and the small.

No detail escapes His notice or is even unimportant in his plans.

So the date is set.

In the meantime, we read this in verse 15...

¹⁵ The couriers went out impelled by the king's command while the decree was ^{lil}issued at the citadel in Susa; and while the king and Haman sat down to drink, the city of Susa was in confusion.

A law has been issued that an entire people be killed.

Not only are the Jews upset, the Bible says that the whole city was confused about such an order.

Yet, Haman and the king have not a worry in the world.

They sit down to drink and enjoy.

And what a picture that is for us.

The wicked seem to prosper, while the righteous are persecuted.

Psalms 37 and 73 are psalms about the apparent prosperity of the wicked.

And the apparent suffering of the righteous.

And we see this right here in Esther 3:15..

The king and his high official have a drink while Israel is facing its own destruction.

And if you read both of those psalms, you will see that they teach an incredible truth about this world..

The temporary success of the wicked becomes eternal failure for them.

While the temporary defeat of the righteous ends in eternal victory.

And though I don't want to ruin the next few chapters...

Haman may be drinking wine now, but he will be drinking God's wrath very shortly.

And we will stop right there tonight.

Conclusion

But let me say this to sum this chapter up.

Once again ,we see the ugliness of the human heart in chapter 3, just like we saw in chapter 2.

And really just like we saw this past Sunday morning in the death of John the Baptist.

But we are reminded once again that God works out his beautiful plan against the ugliest of backdrops at times.

If your mind goes to the cross for a minute, you are reminded that the vilest of men sent Jesus to his death.

An evil disciple betrayed our Lord into the hands of evil religious leaders who took Him before an evil government that sent Him to the cruelest of deaths.

Yet, in the midst of all that sin and deceit and betrayal, we find the most beautiful of pictures.

A sinless man dying in the place of sinful people.

And if death can ever be called beautiful, it was the death of Jesus on that cross.

That is God's sovereignty at work.

To bring good out of evil, and that is true of the life of every believer.

You were born an evil creature with evil intentions,
yet the wonder of salvation is that you can now do
good in the world.

And that is what we should do.

And that is what we must do.

Let us pray.