

Worst to First

(Esther 8:1 – 8:17)

(preached 2/11/15; Pine Grove BC Wed PM)

Introduction

In June of 2013, heavy rains fell over northern India in the Himalaya mountains.

The rain was so heavy that the Mandakini River flooded.

The Mandakini is a river in the region that had changed courses many years ago.

Rivers are prone to do that over time as river banks erode and the rivers slowly take a new route.

And that had happened to the Mandakini 50 years or more before when the river took a new course to the west.

In the years that followed as people settled into the area where the river once ran.

The old river bed was flat and a good spot to build in the valleys of the Himilayas.

So, folks settled into the old river bed than had been dried up for decades and not only built homes...

They also built shops and markets.

Well, on June 12, 2013, the clouds opened up and much rain fell on the upper part of the Mandakini river.

And so much water flowed into the river over a short amount of time that the river banks couldn't hold it.

Unfortunately, the river changed course again and it went right back to its original path.

As the water roared down its old path this time, it found an entire town in its path...

And over 5600 lives were lost when it roared into town.

Yet, that is the nature of a river.

It can literally change its course overnight.

And in the morning, the water can be flowing down an entirely new path.

With this picture in mind, listen to the words of Proverbs 21:1...

***¹The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord;
He turns it wherever He wishes.***

That is a wonderful testimony to the sovereign hand of God.

God can direct the heart of even the king any way He desires.

That is the witness of Scripture about the power of God.

No man and no nation is beyond his reach.

And though we have seen this time and time again in the OT...

And even in the book of Esther, we are going to be reminded of it again tonight.

King Ahasuerus is the King of the Persian empire in the book of Esther.

He is a powerful ruler that ruled over an incredible area of the world.

127 provinces were under his rule.

Countless governors were under his authority.

Thousands of soldiers were under his direction.

Yet, Ahasuerus was ultimately under the authority of God.

And we will continue to see even tonight.

When we left off last week in chapter 7, the king had heard Esther's plea to save the Jews from destruction.

Haman, the second in charge under the king had wanted to destroy all the Jews in the Persian empire because one Jew refused to bow to him.

Yet, Esther the queen went before the king to beg Him to save them.

The king asked who had come up with such a plan to destroy all the Jews and Esther pointed to Haman.

The king loved Esther and ordered Haman to be hanged, and we left off with chapter 7 as Haman was hanged for his evil plot.

All of that brings us to chapter 8...

Haman is dead...

But what does that mean for the Jews?

Is it just the safety of knowing that an evil man is no longer a threat to them?

What we are actually going to see is not just a removal of a threat...

It is a complete change of fortune for the Jews.

And that is really the grace of God.

God grace doesn't just rescue you, it overwhelms you.

God grace doesn't just provide for our needs, it meets our wants as well at times.

God doesn't just rescue Israel in the book of Esther, he sets them above their enemies.

And the same is true for you and me.

He doesn't just save us.

He molds us and makes us more like His Son.

He doesn't just provide for our needs at times.

He blesses us in the ways that we desire.

That is an incredible, gracious, merciful God.

Who doesn't just say, "Ok, you are saved. Do the best you can from here on out."

No, God says, "You are saved and here's my Spirit to transform your life. To help you understand my word. To help you fight sin and obey Me."

And that's the God who will show up here in the book of Esther.

He will not only save Israel from disaster, he will do much more.

He's going to go above and beyond for Mordecai...

And for Esther, and then for all the Jews...

Let's first look at what he does for Mordecai in the opening 2 verses of chapter 8...

I. Mordecai Gets His Reward (1-2)

8 ¹On that day King Ahasuerus gave the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews, to Queen Esther; and Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had disclosed what he was to her. ² The king took off his signet ring which he had taken away from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.

The time has come for Mordecai to be exalted.

His honesty had saved the king 5 years earlier.

But beyond that, his willingness to take in an orphan girl many years before that has been rewarded.

We don't know the circumstances of how Esther came into his care, but that willingness to take her in has led to a great blessing.

He is now being recognized by the king and given authority over Haman's estate.

This would lead to great power and wealth.

His life has come full circle.

He has gone from a death sentence to a life of abundance in just a matter of days.

Just a few days ago, he was weeping over the king's law.

Now, he is reaping blessings from the king's hand.

Such is the providence of God.

I want to point out a few principles in this text...

First, remember what Peter wrote in 1 Peter 5:6...

⁶ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,

The truth behind that statement is this...

When God's hand has brought trials into your life, accept that trial but also expect to be exalted at the proper time.

But that leads to the second principle, which is to not expect to be exalted in this world.

Though Mordecai received honors many years after his deed, we are not promised that exaltation will even come this side of heaven.

Sometimes, the reward doesn't come until heaven.

Yet, that should not discourage us from doing the right thing.

Mordecai had taken in an orphan and for years, it may have been more of a burden than a blessing.

Mordecai has reported a plot to kill the king, but he didn't immediately get praised for it.

Yet, we know that God saw this, and Mordecai was eventually rewarded.

Which is a great reminder to all of us.

We don't do the right thing so that the eyes of the world are on us...

We do the right thing because the eyes of the Lord are on us.

Now that Mordecai has received his reward...

Let's look at this next section where....

II. Esther Gets Her Law (3-14)

³ Then Esther spoke again to the king, fell at his feet, wept and implored him to avert the evil scheme of Haman the Agagite and his plot which he had devised against the Jews. ⁴ The king extended the golden scepter to Esther. So Esther arose and stood before the king. ⁵ Then she said, “If it pleases the king and if I have found favor before him and the matter seems proper to the king and I am pleasing in his sight, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the king’s provinces. ⁶ For how can I endure to see the calamity which will befall my people, and how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?”

Notice a couple things here...

First, Esther is going back to the king to ask him to spare Jews.

Though we assume that he will, it hasn’t happened yet.

So Esther again risks her life to appeal to the king for her people.

What a great picture for all of us.

She is pleading for her people.

They are still under the death sentence that comes from the law that the king has already passed.

Tonya and I had forgotten a lot about raising little ones by the time that John Andrew was born.

The girls were 8 and almost 10 when he was born.

And one thing that he has reminded us of in recent months is how he doesn't understand the concept of asking for something once and then waiting.

No, his idea of asking is to say "cup," and if we don't move in 1 second, he repeats it.

Cup, cup, cup, cup, cup...

And he has incredible endurance.

WE figure that he would give up soon, but not a 2 year old.

They can say cup nearly 100 times in 60 seconds...

Yet, that is also a great picture for us as children of our heavenly Father...

Like Esther and like a 2 year old, we need to be continually going before our Father with requests...

You got a family member who isn't saved?

You got a marriage that needs help?

You got a sick child or friend?

Go before the Lord continually with that request...

Keep it going to the Father...

Keep asking.

Keep knocking.

And also look at how Esther goes the king this time...

One her knees weeping for her people.

The king shows mercy again by extending his golden scepter..

And then Esther rose from her knees and offered her request once again in verse 5...

Again, we see carefully chosen words here..

This is speech seasoned with grace.

Though she is more confident this time, it doesn't go to her head or her words.

She stills speaks with respect toward the king.

Proverbs 25:15..

With patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue will break a bone.

Though we talked about this last week, we see the importance of saying the right thing in the right way.

And here Esther once again, chooses the right words and the right way to persuade the king to reverse his law to annihilate the Jews.

She is asking the king to revoke the law that Haman had written.

And we see the passion of her request in verse 6..

She has a love for her people and wants to see them live....

In verse 7, the king responds...

7 So King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "Behold, I have given the house of Haman to Esther, and him they have hanged on the gallows because he had stretched out his hands against the Jews. 8 Now you write to the Jews [a]as you see fit, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's signet ring; for a decree which is written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's signet ring may not be revoked."

What is the dream of everyone of us?

Someone walks up to us, gives us a blank check and says use it on whatever you desire.

But that is exactly what the king has given to Esther and Mordecai in these verses.

The king essentially tells them in verse 8 to write a law that suits their needs.

He will approve whatever they write and it will be done for them as they wish.

And in verse 9, we see the law that Mordecai and Esther will write...

⁹ So the king's scribes were called at that time in the third month (that is, the month Sivan), on the twenty-third ^[b]day; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded to the Jews, the satraps, the governors and the princes of the provinces which extended from India to ^[c]Ethiopia, 127 provinces, to every province according to its script, and to every people according to their language as well as to the Jews according to their script and their language.

Now, the time line is important to understand what is going on here.

If you remember, Haman went to the king way back in chapter 3 and asked to kill all the Jews in the kingdom..

The king granted his request, and it was to be carried out on the 13th day of the 12th month.

The law to destroy the Jews was issued on the 13th day of the 1st month.

To make it easier, think of it this way.

On April 13th of the year 450 BC, the Persian king issued an order that all the Jews of the kingdom would be killed on March 13th of 459 BC.

Well, it is now June 23rd 450 BC.

It has been two a little over two months since that law was passed.

The Jews have been mourning.

Esther and Mordecai have been taking action over these two months and now all their efforts have been rewarded.

So, now on June 23rd, Mordecai writes a law to counter the first law of destruction.

And this law will go throughout all the kingdom as well...

And the key to understanding what is happening here is found in verses 10-12..

¹⁰ He wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, and sealed it with the king's signet ring, and sent letters by couriers on horses, riding on steeds sired by the royal stud. ¹¹ [d] In them the king granted the Jews who were in each and every city the right to assemble and to defend their lives, to destroy, to kill and to annihilate the entire army of any people or province which might attack them, including children and women, and to plunder their spoil, ¹² on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar).

Here is the point of this law.

Mordecai issued a law in the name of the king.

The law came out in June, and it said that on March 13th of next year, the Jews could arm and defend themselves against who would attack them...

On that day based on the law that Haman issued.

Not only could they defend themselves, they could go on the offense and attack and destroy all the enemies that came against them.

This was a game changer.

Now, the Jews would hear this law and have 9 months to plan to defend themselves from any attack.

That is what we see in verses 13-14...

¹³ A copy of the edict to be ^{lel}issued as law in each and every province was published to all the peoples, so that the Jews would be ready for this day to avenge themselves on their enemies. ¹⁴ The couriers, hastened and impelled by the king's command, went out, riding on the royal steeds; and the decree was given out at the citadel in Susa.

So, in verse 14, the horses are saddled and the good news goes out to all the Jews in the kingdom.

And I don't need to dwell here, but what an incredible picture for all of us.

The horses and couriers were carrying great news to the people in the kingdom.

No longer were they under a death sentence without any hope in the world.

No, help was on the way.

That is the message of the gospel.

Your death sentence has been lifted.

Jesus has paid for your sins.

God sent His Son to win your battle against sin.

That is the good news.

Help has come.

Jesus has fought and won for you.

And the good news came to the Jews in this law.

They are to ready themselves for battle, but more importantly, the good news was this.

God will fight for them.

The Jews knew that God would defend them.

They knew the promise given to Abraham.

It had been engrained in their heads as kids.

It had been written on their hearts as Jews.

God will bless those who bless Israel and He will curse those who curse Israel.

Though they can take up arms now, they know that God will fight for them on that day when the enemy approaches.

Do you remember what David said when he went to battle Goliath?

⁴¹ Then the Philistine came on and approached David, with the shield-bearer in front of him. ⁴² When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him; for he was but a youth, and ruddy, with a handsome appearance. ⁴³ The Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. ⁴⁴ The Philistine also said to David, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field.” ⁴⁵ Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. ⁴⁶ This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, ⁴⁷ and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord’s and He will give you into our hands.”

David understood what he was up against in Goliath, but he better understood who Goliath was up against.

He knew that the battle was the Lord’s to fight.

The Philistine giant never stood a chance, and neither did the Philistine army.

God guided the stones to Goliath’s head.

And the Jews in Esther know that God will defend them 9 months from the day this law was written.

And we see that confidence in the celebration that follows in the end of chapter 8...

Mordecai has gotten his reward...

Esther has gotten her law...

Now,.....

III. The Jews Get their Joy (15-17)

¹⁵ Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of ^{lf}blue and white, with a large crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced. ¹⁶ For the Jews there was light and gladness and joy and honor. ¹⁷ In each and every province and in each and every city, wherever the king's commandment and his decree arrived, there was gladness and joy for the Jews, a feast and a ^{lg}holiday. And many among the peoples of the land became Jews, for the dread of the Jews had fallen on them.

In light of verse 15...

Listen to Proverbs 29:2...

***“When the righteous increase, the people rejoice,
But when a wicked man rules, people groan.”***

Remember when Haman's law to kill the Jews was issued in chapter 3...

What was the reaction of the people in Susa?

Esther 3:15 says that the city was in much confusion.

And rightfully so.

IF Haman could get a law passed to wipe out an entire group of people...

Who's to say that he wouldn't pass more laws to do the same to other people in the kingdom.

So, there is confusion and groaning when wicked men rule..

But now that Mordecai has been appointed as second in command, the people rejoice.

Though he has issued but one law, it is enough to give hope to the people.

And the Jews were especially encouraged.

What is amazing is that there is partying even though there are still difficult days ahead.

The attacks are still coming but now they have confidence that the Lord will protect and deliver them.

This is why we rejoice in salvation.

Often times, repentance and faith that lead to salvation don't lead to better circumstances in life.

In fact, many people get saved and are faced with more difficult situations than before...

Because they now have a desire to say good bye to an old way of life.

Which means a lifestyle change in many areas of life.

IT means that relationships have to end.

It means that jobs need to change.

IT may mean that they have to find a new place to live.

It may mean that they have to say goodbye to habitual sin.

Even despite all those difficult days that may lie ahead, we celebrate salvation and why do we do that?

Because salvation that comes through repentance and faith is the promise of ultimate victory over sin.

The Jews could celebrate even though hard battles would still come their way.

They could celebrate because they knew that God would ultimately deliver them from their enemy.

And we celebrate our salvation because it is the promise that God will eventually deliver us from death.

And then in verse 17, that celebration and joy ends in a feast.

I think I would have loved the Persian empire in this day.

This is the 8th feast mentioned in the book of Esther.

They ate more than Baptists.

And then notice the final words of chapter 8...

Many of the peoples in the land became Jews.

Though there is some debate over whether these were genuine conversions to the Jewish religion..

I suggest to you that that they were.

What is the motivation for their conversion to Judaism?

Well, the dread of the Jews.

In short, they were fearful of the God of the Jews.

And what is the beginning of true wisdom in the world?

The fear of the Lord.

That is Proverbs 9:10.

Now, just because you fear the Lord doesn't mean you are saved..

But in the context of what is going on in this book, I think this fear leads to genuine conversion.

Remember what we saw in Ruth.

Ruth was a gentile from the land of Moab, but she told Naomi....

¹⁶But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.

She was a one who converted from paganism to Judaism in the OT..

Along with Rahab and other Gentiles who would come to believe in the God of the Jews.

And I think we see here more Gentiles turning to the true God of the world right here in the book of Esther.

Just imagine the simple facts of the outsiders to this story.

A man rises to power and wants to kill all the Jews.

Instead, he is killed and a Jew takes his place.

I think that would cause some people's heads to turn and asks questions about the Jews and their God.

And that is what happened.

Pagan Persians became God fearing Jews as a result of what happened right before their eyes.

And this was really the purpose of God setting his love on the Jews.

They were meant to draw the nations to God by keeping his laws and worshipping him rightly.

Their job was to make God big in the world.

Which is your job as well.

We are people who make God big in the world.

We are to point up whenever we get the chance.

Unfortunately, the Jews often pointed to themselves instead of God.

And that brings this chapter to a close.

We will finish up chapters 9-10 next week and put a period on the book of Esther...

Conclusion

But let me close with this....

I have relied on Chuck Swindoll's book on Esther during my study...

Along with Wiersbe, Baldwin and Ironside..

But I love what Swindoll says about chapter 8 and God working to change the king's heart to preserving instead of destroying the Jews...

Listen to this and I will close...

"....you may have some such individual who has one major goal in life: to make your life miserable. You may work alongside him, or you may go to school with him or even room with him. You may be married to him, or have once been married to him. Now then, it is essential that in the midst of this to remember there is no wall so strong that Almighty God is not stronger still. There is no will so stubborn that He is not able to soften it. If God can change the heart of an Ahasuerus, He can change any heart—any heart! Read that again.

You who live your days intimidated and threatened, anxious over the falling of the next shoe, listen to this counsel! God is able to take the heart of anyone and change it, just as He did with the heart of this king. Yes, anyone.”

Let us pray.