

Text: Esther 5-7

When to Disregard Laws, and God's Providential Control

Now it came about on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace in front of the king's rooms, and the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room, opposite the entrance to the palace. 2When the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, she obtained favor in his sight; and the king extended to Esther the golden scepter which was in his hand. So Esther came near and touched the top of the scepter. (Esther 5:1-2)

As we resume the story of Esther this morning, recall that Mordecai had instructed her to petition the king to spare the people of Israel from Haman's plot to destroy them. She worried, however, that violating the king's law in this way would lead to her death.

11" All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live. And I have not been summoned to come to the king for these thirty days." (Esther 4:11)

On the surface, this would seem to be an "open and shut case." After all, does the Bible not command that we obey all civil laws and authorities?

1Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, (Titus 3:1)

The Bible does allow one exception to this: when we have to choose between obeying the civil authorities and obeying God's Law, we are to choose God.

29But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. (Acts 5:29)

How, then, do we know that what Esther did was in the will of God? The short answer would be that God blessed her efforts with success. We must remember that even though Ahasuerus was the king that had to be addressed and convinced, God is ultimately in power, and in control of all things.

1Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. (Romans 13:1)

3And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (Hebrews 1:3)

For Esther, though, she did not know whether or not God would bless her efforts—she only knew that God had promised to retain Israel as His people forever, and their annihilation would abrogate that promise. One way or another, she knew God would preserve Israel, and she hoped that she would be the instrument used to this end.

21" And what one nation in the earth is like Your people Israel, whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people, to make You a name by great and terrible things, in driving out nations from before Your people, whom You redeemed out of Egypt? 22" For Your people Israel You made Your own people forever, and You, O LORD, became their God. (1 Chronicles 17:21-22)

How to Petition Others Graciously

3Then the king said to her, "What is troubling you, Queen Esther? And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be given to you." 4Esther said, "If it pleases the king, may the king and Haman come this day to the banquet that I have prepared for him." 5Then the king said, "Bring Haman quickly that we may do as Esther desires." So the king and Haman came to the banquet which Esther had prepared. 6As they drank their wine at the banquet, the king said to Esther, "What is your petition, for it shall be granted to you. And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be done." 7So Esther replied, "My petition and my request is: If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and do what I request, may the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king says." (Esther 5:3-8)

Note the grace and tact with which Esther approaches and petitions the king. She had already dressed in her best and most appropriate apparel (the "royal robes," v.1). Then, rather than immediately launching into her requests, she offers the king a great banquet—twice! In so doing, she fulfills her duties both as wife and as subject, showing due deference to Ahasuerus before bringing her petition before him.

33Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband. (Ephesians 5:33)

7Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. (Romans 13:7)

Also, from a pragmatic standpoint, Esther has shown us an effective way to deal with those from whom we desire to ask favors—whether they be authority figures or not. Surely such people will be more well-disposed toward us if we meet their needs and desires before asking favors of them!

Haman: A Picture of Pidefulness

9Then Haman went out that day glad and pleased of heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate and that he did not stand up or tremble before him, Haman was filled with anger against Mordecai. 10Haman controlled himself, however, went to his house and sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh. 11Then Haman recounted to them the glory of his riches, and the number of his sons, and every instance where the king had magnified him and how he had promoted him above the princes and servants of the king. 12Haman also said, "Even Esther the queen let no one but me come with the king to the banquet which she had prepared; and tomorrow also I am invited by her with the king. 13"Yet all of this does not satisfy me every time I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." 14Then Zeresh his wife and all his friends said to him, "Have a gallows fifty cubits high made and in the morning ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on it; then go joyfully with the king to the banquet." And the advice pleased Haman, so he had the gallows made. (Esther 5:9-14)

What a prideful man Haman was! After receiving such honor from the king, he cannot stand the thought of anyone not showing fear and reverence in his presence. After Mordecai's refusal to show such reverence—which, as we discussed last week, would have been tantamount to idolatry for Mordecai—Haman comforts himself by calling his wife and friends and telling them about how great he is. Then, he is so arrogantly confident that the king will condemn an innocent man at Haman's whim that he goes ahead and constructs a gallows for Mordecai. The Bible teaches us that such pride precedes a downfall, and is detestable in God's sight.

**18Pride goes before destruction,
And a haughty spirit before stumbling. (Proverbs 16:18)**

15And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God. (Luke 16:15)

Continuing a discussion of the sin of pride for a moment, recall that pride was, along with lust, part of the original sin. Eve not only saw that the fruit looked tasty—she wanted be wise, "like God."

1Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" 2The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; 3but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'" 4The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! 5"For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. (Genesis 3:1-6)

Therefore, pride is at the root of our sin problem. Adam's sin corrupted all of his progeny, leaving us in a hopelessly depraved state, and destined for death and hell. Our only hope for eternal salvation is to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ.

12Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—(Romans 5:12)

21For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:21-22)

Before leaving this point, I want to emphasize again how the Bible commands us to think and behave—it is the antithesis of Haman's attitude.

3Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)

Note that Paul here commands not only a particular behavior, but a particular *frame of mind*. God clearly must work great change in our hearts if we are to be able to obey His commands.

God's Providential Timing, and Haman's Continued Pridefulness

1During that night the king could not sleep so he gave an order to bring the book of records, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. 2It was found written what Mordecai had reported concerning Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who were doorkeepers, that they had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. 3The king said, "What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" Then the king's servants who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him." 4So the king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace in order to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows which he had prepared for him. 5The king's servants said to him, "Behold, Haman is standing in the court." And the king said, "Let him come in." 6So Haman came in and the king said to him, "What is to be done for the man whom the king desires to honor?" And Haman said to himself, "Whom would the king desire to honor more than me?" 7Then Haman said to the king, "For the man whom the king desires to honor, 8let them bring a royal robe which the king has worn, and the horse on which the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown has been placed; 9and let the robe and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble princes and let them array the man whom the king desires to honor and lead him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him, "Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor.'" (Esther 6:1-8)

First of all, let's recall what Mordecai did in order to deserve this place in the book of records.

21In those days, while Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's officials from those who guarded the door, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. 22But the plot became known to Mordecai and he told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name. 23Now when the plot was investigated and found to be so, they were both hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the Book of the Chronicles in the king's presence. (Esther 2:21-23)

Finally, we see God's plan begin to come together. While the Book of Esther does not at any time specifically name God as the orchestrator of these events, we know from throughout God's Word that He is in control of all things, and works them out in His timing, in His way, for the good of His people, and, most importantly, for His glory.

16For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:16-17)

The Tables Begin to Turn...for Haman and for Mordecai

10Then the king said to Haman, "Take quickly the robes and the horse as you have said, and do so for Mordecai the Jew, who is sitting at the king's gate; do not fall short in anything of all that you have said." 11So Haman took the robe and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city square, and proclaimed before him, "Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor." 12Then Mordecai returned to the

king's gate. But Haman hurried home, mourning, with his head covered. 13Haman recounted to Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and Zeresh his wife said to him, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish origin, you will not overcome him, but will surely fall before him." 14While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hastily brought Haman to the banquet which Esther had prepared. (Esther 6:10-14)

At last, Haman and Mordecai begin to receive appropriate "rewards."

11"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 14:11)

28And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

As a side note, Romans 8:28 is a promise often quoted irresponsibly. God *does* work things out for good, but this promise is directed at a specific group: those who love and are called by Him. The unsaved, while they receive some good things from God (otherwise they would be dead!), can ultimately expect only damnation from Him.

11Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. 14Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)

Moving back to our story, when Haman returns home and reports these events to his wife, she wisely states that Haman will ultimately fall before Mordecai the Jew. I do not know what the national origin of Haman's wife was or if she knew of God's decree, but whether out of knowledge or despite her ignorance, she reiterated God's intention toward Haman's people, the Amalekites.

14Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." (Exodus 17:14)

Haman is Recompensed for His Wickedness

1Now the king and Haman came to drink wine with Esther the queen. 2And the king said to Esther on the second day also as they drank their wine at the banquet, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be done." 3Then Queen Esther replied, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me as my petition, and my people as my request; 4for we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed and to be annihilated. Now if we had only been sold as slaves, men and women, I would have remained silent, for the trouble would not be commensurate with the annoyance to the king." 5Then King Ahasuerus asked Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who would presume to do thus?" 6Esther said, "A foe and an enemy is this wicked Haman!" Then Haman became terrified before the king and queen. 7The king arose in his anger from drinking wine and went into the palace garden; but Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that harm had been determined against him by the king. 8Now when the king returned from the palace garden into the place where they were drinking wine, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, "Will he even assault the queen with me in the house?" As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. 9Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs who were before the king said, "Behold indeed, the gallows standing at Haman's house fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai who spoke good on behalf of the king!" And the king said, "Hang him on it." 10So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, and the king's anger subsided. (Esther 7:1-10)

Even in petitioning for her life and for the lives of her people, Esther displays humility and deference to the king. Haman, conversely, is hung on the gallows he intended for Mordecai, who sought only the king's good.

**12Before destruction the heart of man is haughty,
But humility goes before honor. (Proverbs 18:12)**

**2In pride the wicked hotly pursue the afflicted;
Let them be caught in the plots which they have devised. (Psalm 10:2)**

I will end today's lesson by reading Psalm 18. This was written by David while he was being pursued by his enemy King Saul, and provides an apt discussion of how God protects and delivers those who serve Him.

"I love You, O LORD, my strength."

**2The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge;
My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.**

**3I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised,
And I am saved from my enemies.**

**4The cords of death encompassed me,
And the torrents of ungodliness terrified me.**

**5The cords of Sheol surrounded me;
The snares of death confronted me.**

**6In my distress I called upon the LORD,
And cried to my God for help;
He heard my voice out of His temple,
And my cry for help before Him came into His ears.**

**7Then the earth shook and quaked;
And the foundations of the mountains were trembling
And were shaken, because He was angry.**

**8Smoke went up out of His nostrils,
And fire from His mouth devoured;
Coals were kindled by it.**

**9He bowed the heavens also, and came down
With thick darkness under His feet.**

**10He rode upon a cherub and flew;
And He sped upon the wings of the wind.**

**11He made darkness His hiding place, His canopy around Him,
Darkness of waters, thick clouds of the skies.**

**12From the brightness before Him passed His thick clouds,
Hailstones and coals of fire.**

**13The LORD also thundered in the heavens,
And the Most High uttered His voice,
Hailstones and coals of fire.**

**14He sent out His arrows, and scattered them,
And lightning flashes in abundance, and routed them.**

**15Then the channels of water appeared,
And the foundations of the world were laid bare
At Your rebuke, O LORD,
At the blast of the breath of Your nostrils.**

**16He sent from on high, He took me;
He drew me out of many waters.**

**17He delivered me from my strong enemy,
And from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me.**

**18They confronted me in the day of my calamity,
But the LORD was my stay.**

**19He brought me forth also into a broad place;
He rescued me, because He delighted in me.**

**20The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness;
According to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me.**

**21For I have kept the ways of the LORD,
And have not wickedly departed from my God.**

**22For all His ordinances were before me,
And I did not put away His statutes from me.**

**23I was also blameless with Him,
And I kept myself from my iniquity.**

**24Therefore the LORD has recompensed me according to my righteousness,
According to the cleanness of my hands in His eyes.**

25With the kind You show Yourself kind;

With the blameless You show Yourself blameless;
26With the pure You show Yourself pure,
And with the crooked You show Yourself astute.
27For You save an afflicted people,
But haughty eyes You abase.
28For You light my lamp;
The LORD my God illumines my darkness.
29For by You I can run upon a troop;
And by my God I can leap over a wall.
30As for God, His way is blameless;
The word of the LORD is tried;
He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him.
31For who is God, but the LORD?
And who is a rock, except our God,
32The God who girds me with strength
And makes my way blameless?
33He makes my feet like hinds' feet,
And sets me upon my high places.
34He trains my hands for battle,
So that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.
35You have also given me the shield of Your salvation,
And Your right hand upholds me;
And Your gentleness makes me great.
36You enlarge my steps under me,
And my feet have not slipped.
37I pursued my enemies and overtook them,
And I did not turn back until they were consumed.
38I shattered them, so that they were not able to rise;
They fell under my feet.
39For You have girded me with strength for battle;
You have subdued under me those who rose up against me.
40You have also made my enemies turn their backs to me,
And I destroyed those who hated me.
41They cried for help, but there was none to save,
Even to the LORD, but He did not answer them.
42Then I beat them fine as the dust before the wind;
I emptied them out as the mire of the streets.
43You have delivered me from the contentions of the people;
You have placed me as head of the nations;
A people whom I have not known serve me.
44As soon as they hear, they obey me;
Foreigners submit to me.
45Foreigners fade away,
And come trembling out of their fortresses.
46The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock;
And exalted be the God of my salvation,
47The God who executes vengeance for me,
And subdues peoples under me.
48He delivers me from my enemies;
Surely You lift me above those who rise up against me;
You rescue me from the violent man.
49Therefore I will give thanks to You among the nations, O LORD,
And I will sing praises to Your name.
50He gives great deliverance to His king,
And shows lovingkindness to His anointed,
To David and his descendants forever. (Psalm 18:1-50)