

INTRODUCTION

Tonight is the last message in the series, "Big Events of the Old Testament." We have been talking about how the children of Israel returned after the Babylonian captivity to rebuild and restore Jerusalem and Israel. Not all of them returned. Some of them remained in the area we would call Persia and the book of Esther is set during this time. There are two books in the Bible named after women. This book, Esther, and also the wonderful Old Testament book of Ruth. I did not preach from Ruth in this Old Testament series, so you'll just have to say that this series has been "ruthless." Esther is one of the greatest stories in all the Bible. Four hundred years before Jesus was born, there in an area we would call Persia, an exciting story takes place.

I mentioned to you yesterday that when they found the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1948 there were portions of all Old Testament books except one: The book of Esther. You may know why that is. It is because the name of God never appears in the Book of Esther. Not one time do you read the name "God" there is no reference to God. There is not even a reference to praying or really anything like that. That is why many who settled the community there at Qumran did not include Esther in their collection; although we are going to see today that God is standing behind the scene in the book of Esther. Tonight is going to be a little bit different message. I am going to tell you the story of Esther and then as we conclude, I'll bring you four life lessons, four applications to this great story. I want to call your attention to several passages throughout the book.

Esther 1:1. "This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush."

The King James Version calls him Ahasuerus. That's a word that literally means a title like Caesar. We really don't know who this man was. We're just going to call him "the king" tonight, because he was the king over northern Africa in the West to India in the East. Well, the king can do what only kings do. He had a lot of money. He had a lot of fame, so he decided to throw a huge party. He put on an exposition, kind of a World's Fair at the great city of Susa in Persia. For six months all the nobles from all of these one hundred and twenty-seven provinces came to visit the riches of his kingdom. At the end of this, he had a huge banquet that lasted seven straight days of non-stop eating, drinking, music and dancing. The Bible tells us by the end of those seven days he was a little bit woozy, because he had consumed a great deal of wine!

It was true as is the custom today, sometimes the men get over there with the men and the women get over here with the women and the two shall never meet when it comes to parties and things. So here are all the men standing around the king and the king must have said in his semi-inebriated state. "I'll tell you what, guys. This queen I have now she is a knockout! I'll just show her to you." So, he sent for one of his servants. He said, "You go tell Queen Vashti to put on her best dress and her queenly crown and I want her to parade right here in front of all these guys so I can show them how beautiful she is. I want to show her off to the boys, if you know what I mean!" This was a terrible breach of etiquette. It was a humiliating request given to the queen. When the servant went to the queen and said, "The king calls you to put on your best dress and come parade and put on a one-lady fashion show in front of all the other male party-goers she said, "I ain't gonna do it! You tell the king NO!" So, the servant has to crawl back in there and

say, “I’m sorry, sire. The queen says she is not coming!”

That sobered him up in a hurry! It was such a terrible thing for the wife of a king not to obey the king that they had to have a huge meeting about it and they painted the worst-case scenario. Some of the guys said, “Listen, king. If your wife disobeys you, guess what is going to happen next? All of *our* wives are going to start disobeying us and so we’re going to be in a heap of trouble! They had a meeting right there. They called in the legislature and they established a law of the Meads and the Persians that because this queen had disobeyed the king she was to be banished. So that’s what the king did. He banished Queen Vashti. Well she’s gone and after a while he sobers up and gets lonely in that big old palace by himself. He is so lonely he says, “I need a queen!” Some of his advisers came up with a good idea. They said, “Well we will search throughout all of your kingdom, all of these one hundred and twenty-seven provinces that stretch all the way from Africa to India all the way up into Asia Minor and we’re going to seek out the prettiest girl we can find! We will bring them to the palace and we will let you look at each one. We will have a royal beauty contest and you can choose the one you want to have as a replacement for Queen Vashti!”

So all these women came in. While this process was taking place, there was a certain Jewish man—because as I told you, there were still perhaps hundreds of thousands of Jews who were living in this area. His name was Mordecai. In Hebrew his name literally means “short man” so I guess his nickname would be “Shorty.” Mordecai understood what was going on and he began to think, “Maybe I can take advantage of this situation.” Mordecai had a cousin. Her name in Hebrew was *Hadassah*, which means “star,” and she really *was* a star! But her Babylonian or Persian name was *Esther*, named after the goddess Ishtar. Mordecai began to think, “If I could just get Esther before the king, I think she’d have a chance, because she is absolutely gorgeous!” So, Mordecai goes to Esther and says, “Esther, you need to enter this royal beauty contest.” She says, “Okay!” So, Esther joins all of these other women and you need to read the Bible for yourself. It’s right there. They spent six months at one spot getting ready to find a queen and then six months at another spot putting on all kinds of perfume and things. The king gave them his credit card and they went on a shopping spree and bought all the clothes they wanted to buy, all the jewelry they wanted to buy, and then one by one, each was summoned to the king. He never found one he really wanted to settle with, so he kept saying, “Send me another one....Send me another one...Send me another one...”

Finally, the time came for Esther to go in. She didn’t get quite as dressed up as some of these other women did, because she had a natural beauty. When she walked out, even in front of the other women, they said, “Oooo! She is beautiful!” That night when she went into the king, he looked at her and said, “Oooo La La! Wow!” They spent some time together and I’m sure he saw below the surface of her outward beauty and he within her personality that inner beauty and he just fell in love with her. The Bible says he said, “I don’t need to look any further. This is the one for me! This is the queen!” And he gave her the crown of Vashti! You have to understand he had a lot of other wives, but there was only *one* number one wife—the Queen, and now that was Esther!

Meanwhile Mordecai is taking advantage of this and no doubt Esther suggested that maybe Mordecai would be a good person to be one of his judges who sat at the gates of the palace and

executed judgment for the king, so he did. Mordecai was the kind of guy who kept his ears and eyes open, and one day he heard about a plot two men hatched to assassinate the king. They were part of what we might call the “Persian Mafia.” Their names could be (very) roughly translated “Big Al” and “Mugsy.” So Big Al and Mugsy decided they were going to snuff out the king. Mordecai heard about this and went to Esther and said, “Esther, you need to warn the king. These two guys down here are planning to kill him!” She told Xerxes and the two men were arrested and executed and the king’s life was saved. Everything was going along fine for awhile until a fourth character comes along. We’ve been introduced to the king, Mordecai and beautiful Esther, but there is another main character in this whole story. He is the man called Haman. I want you to think of him as “Hateful Haman.” He was a man the Bible calls Haman the Agagite. If you read the Old Testament, you’ll find there was a group of people called Amalekites, who, when the children of Israel were coming to the Promised Land, the Amalekites were the ones who stood in their way and fought them and caused them a lot of misery.

Years later when Saul was King and they became strong enough, God said, “Saul, go back and wipe out the Amalekites.” Saul said, “Yes, sir. I’ll do that!” But Saul *didn’t* do it. He allowed their king to survive. That king’s name was Agag, and did you know this same Haman was a descendant of that Agag? Haman the Agagite. He came from a family of people who had hated the Jews for centuries. Haman was a very wealthy man. He got an audience before the king and bribed him and impressed him until the king said, “Haman, you’re just the kind of man I’m looking for. I’m going to make you the Prime Minister of my entire kingdom.” Haman thought, “This is great. I’ve got it made!” Everywhere Haman walked around the palace, everyone either bowed down or stood up in honor of him, except this one little Jewish man, Mordecai. He would not bow down before him. When people asked, “Why don’t you bow down before the Prime Minister?” Mordecai said, “I am a Jew and we are taught that we are not to bow down before anybody except God!”

This made Haman very angry! First of all, he hated Jews. When he found out Mordecai was a Jew, he hated him even more. So Haman went home and hatched an evil plot. “Not only will I get even with this little Jewish guy, Mordecai, I’ll get even with the entire race of the Jews. I’ll wipe them all out, because this little Jew won’t honor me!” So he went before the king and said, “King I want you to know there are some people living in your kingdom who are a different kind of people! They have different laws. They have a different God. They don’t honor you. They won’t bow down before me and that means they won’t bow down before you! We need to do something about these people!” The king said, “Okay. Here’s my signet ring. Make any law that you need to make to take care of this problem.” Haman got with some of his buddies. They liked to throw dice. In Hebrew or in Aramaic the word is *pur* and they would throw these dice to find out when the right time was to do something. Finally, the roll of the dice was right, and they said, “This is the date that we are looking for. This is the date when it should happen.” They said, “The fourteenth day of the Jewish month of Adar is when we are going to decree that every Jew in every province is to be killed” So Haman sent out a decree. He had it stamped with the king’s ring. It was the law of the Meds and the Persians and it went out to all one hundred and twenty-seven provinces all around the civilized world at that time.

The decree said, “On this day 14 Adar it is ‘free kill-a-Jew day. You have a legal right to kill all the Jews you can kill on that day and you won’t be prosecuted for it. Furthermore, if you kill a

Jew, you get to claim whatever property he has." When Mordecai heard this, he said, "That's terrible. This could be the end of the people God has chosen!" By the way, this wasn't the first time someone tried to wipe out the Jews. Remember Pharaoh? "Let's kill every boy baby born in Egypt." Neither was Haman the last one to try to wipe out the Jews, because that's basically what Adolf Hitler said during WWII. When Mordecai heard this, he fasted. The Bible doesn't say he prayed, but when every Jew fasted, they always prayed. He took off his clothes and he put on sackcloth and ashes, which is a picture of humility. When Queen Esther heard about it, she sent him a new set of clothes and said, "Don't dress like that, Mordecai. Put on some fancy clothes." He said, "No, I can't do this, because we are in trouble." She said, "What's the problem?" He told her about the decree to kill every Jew. He said, "You need to talk to the king about this. Maybe he can do something!" She said, "Oh no I can't do that, because there is a law that says no person can go in and see the king unless he invites that person in and I haven't been invited. I can't go in!"

I want to read you the words Mordecai says to Esther.

Esther 4:14-15. "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this? Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 'Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.'"

You might call the title of this message "For Such a Time as This." Esther said, "I'm going to die trying to do what's right!" Sometimes you may have to do what's right even though the world says you can't.

After the time of preparation, Esther walked down the corridor from her bedroom to the royal throne room. She stood there knowing if the king did not give her permission to enter, she could be immediately killed by the guards. As she walked in, unbidden by the king, I am sure the guards were at attention with their hands on their swords and spears; their arrows came out of the quiver and put to the bow, waiting for just a sign from the king for this one who has broken the law and dared enter the throne room without invitation. Esther stood there, not trusting her beauty, not trusting her intelligence—but trusting Someone whose name is not mentioned in this book. The king looked at her and smiled! "Esther It's so good to see you. I haven't seen you in a month." He holds out his scepter, a sign that meant, "Approach." So she approached and he was so happy to see her, she is so beautiful, such a sight for his eyes. This is why he says, "Esther, it's good to see you. I'll give you anything you want. Just ask me. I'll give you half my kingdom. What do you want? Just name it, sweetheart. I'll give it to you." Do you know what most of us would have asked for? Most of us would have said, "I want Haman's head on a platter! Let's get right to the point and get rid of this bad guy!" but Esther is smarter than that. She uses that God-given gift of what I call, "female intuition" to know what to say and how to say it. She just smiled at him and said, "Sweetheart I just came to ask you to let me cook dinner for you tomorrow night. Oh and could you bring your Prime Minister, Haman. I just want to cook supper for you two." He said, "Is that what you want? Well, you've got it! We'll be there tomorrow

night!” He tells Haman. “Haman, you’re coming to my house tomorrow night. Queen Esther is cooking us supper.” Haman thought, “This is it! I’ve got it made I’ve been invited to the Queen’s house for supper.”

They go and Esther feeds them. She is the perfect hostess. Everything is perfect. The table is set, the food is perfect. She entertains them and they have a great meal together. Now the king knows there is something more behind this. He says, “Okay, Esther. Come on. I know you want more than just for us to have supper with you. Come on. Ask me anything. I’ll give you anything you want up to half of my kingdom.” She says, “Okay. Would you come back to supper tomorrow night you and Haman? If you will do that, I will tell you what I want. He says, “Sure!” Haman leaves the palace that night and he is walking on air thinking, “I have finally arrived! Not only am I the Prime Minister but I get to have dinner with the king and his wife! This is really it!” He is walking down the halls of the palace there and everybody is bowing before him, standing up in his honor—except he comes to the gate and there is that troublesome Mordecai! Mordecai just looks at him! That makes Haman so angry it spoils everything else good in his life.

Have you ever known sad people that most everything in their life can be going great, but you let *one* little thing bother them and it ruins their whole life? That’s Haman! He went home and his wife asked, “How was dinner tonight, sweetheart?”

“It was terrible!”

“Terrible? What was wrong? Was the food bad?”

“No, the food was great!”

“Terrible? What was wrong? Was the conversation bad?”

“No, it was great!”

“Why do you say it was terrible?”

“When I walked out the back door, Mordecai didn’t stand up and honor me.” he whimpered. She says, “Listen. I’ll tell you what to do. You just build a platform. You build a platform that is seventy-five feet high to hang that little troublesome Jewish man on.” Now when we’re talking about hanging back then, we’re not talking about the West Texas hanging around the neck! We’re probably talking about a couple of spikes that stick out upon which you hang the whole body. “We’re going to hang him up and we’re going to kill him! Do that!” So Haman cried, and he sent orders that his workmen were to start building this huge gallows upon which he would hang little Mordecai. Then that night when the king went to bed after that delicious supper, for some reason he had insomnia. He tries to get up and he just can’t. So he says to one of his servants, “Hey, would you bring me one of those books that we keep all the records in. Maybe it’s so boring that I’ll read it for a while and then go to sleep.” So his assistant starts reading to him about some of the acts that have happened there in the kingdom and in the palace years ago. By coincidence, the servant reads about the time Mordecai revealed the plot to kill the king. The king said, “Wait a minute! I remember that! Was Mordecai ever rewarded for that?” “No, sire. He wasn’t!” The king says, “I need to do something about that!”

Meanwhile Haman had not been sleeping either. He had been choking on the bitter gall of his hatred for Mordecai. So, he arrived at the palace early the next morning, because he wanted to ask the king for permission to hang Mordecai. He stood outside the king’s room and the king says, “Is there anybody important here? If so, I need to talk to them.” They told him Haman was out there and he said, “Well, bring him in! Bring him in!” So, Haman came in and the king says,

"I have a question for you. What should I do for the man who really, really pleases me?" Haman thinks. "He's talking about me!" "Well, king. I'll tell you what you ought to do. You ought to take one of your robes and let him wear it. You ought to take your finest horse and let him ride it. and you ought to take one of your crowns and let him put it on his head and then you ought to let somebody lead him around the streets of the city crying out in a loud voice, 'This is how the king treats the man who pleases him!' The king says, "That's a great idea, Haman. Go get Mordecai and do that for him!" "m-m-m-m-Mordecai??" "Yeah, he saved my life one time!" So, Haman does it. He gets a robe, a crown and the king's horse and he leads him around all day long in the streets of Susa having to call out, "Here is how the king treats the one who pleases him!" I just ruins his whole day! He goes home so angry and suddenly a messenger comes who says, "Don't forget you have to have supper in the Queen's bedroom tonight." He had forgotten all about it. So, he runs back to the palace as quickly as he can. He goes in and the king and queen are already sitting down ready for dinner. Finally, the king says, "All right, Esther. No more of this pretense. Tell me why are you doing all of this?"

Esther 7:3-7. "Then Queen Esther answered, 'If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king. King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, 'Who is he? Where is the man who has dared to do such a thing?' Esther said, 'The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman.' Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen. The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden."

Xerxes was so angry, he wanted to think before he said anything so he walked out into the garden. Meanwhile, Haman said, "Oh, no! This is the WORST thing that could happen! Maybe I can beg the queen to show mercy." He runs over to her couch where she was reclining before the table, because that is how they did it back then, and he fell down at her feet and covers up the bottom part of his body, begging and that's the very moment the king walks back in! He sees Haman in close proximity to his favorite queen, and his anger dials up 100 notches! "Not only do you hatch this plot, but you also try to force yourself upon the queen? What am I going to do with you?" And he orders his soldiers to grab him. One of the soldiers just happens to say, "O king, look. This is something that's just been built out here in the courtyard. It is a hanging tree 75 feet tall. Haman built it to hang Mordecai on." The king makes this decadent decision. He says, "You take Haman and you hang him on the platform he built to hang Mordecai on!" Later on he hanged Haman's ten sons on the platform as well.

You may think that's the end of the story, but when you have the law of the Meads and the Persians, you can't change it and the law had already been established that "on 14 Adar you can kill all the Jews in the Empire." Now that was probably all the Jews that existed on earth at that time! Esther said, "O, King what are we going to do about this decree? We can't change it." The king says, "No, the law of the Meads and the Persians can't be broken!" Mordecai had an idea. "Well, king, let's issue another decree that also says on the 14th of Adar the Jews are allowed to arm and defend themselves to be ready to protect themselves from anybody who does try to kill them." So, the king says, "Do it!" He gave Mordecai his ring and Mordecai issues the decree,

stamps it with the king's ring, and all the messengers pass it out to the one hundred and twenty seven provinces around that part of the world until finally the day came.

I imagine the day before, the Jews were wondering what was going to happen as they gathered their families and their weapons. The Bible says some of the Persians even joined together with the Jews to protect them from some of those who were going to try to kill as many Jews as they could. When the day was all over and the dust had settled, many of the Persians had been killed instead of the Jews. When word came back that God's people had been delivered from this terrible, terrible decree, Mordecai said, "On this day 14 Adar We're going to celebrate that our sorrow has been turned to joy and our sadness has been turned to gladness. We're going to celebrate this day 14 Adar from now on!" Today, that's why our Jewish friends still celebrate in the spring of the year, The Feast of Purim from the *pur*, the dice that was rolled to celebrate how God can take sorrow and turn it into joy. Today, in synagogues all around the world on the day of Purim 14 Adar, the story of Esther is read and every time the name of Haman is read the Jewish men spit, stomp their feet and make ugly noises!

LESSON ONE: God may put you in a special place for a special purpose for a special time

What a great story! Lesson number one: God may put you in a special place for a special purpose for a special time. Place, purpose and time! Esther didn't know *why* she became Queen, but God knew why. God may have you in a special place for a special purpose, for a special time and you don't even know what it is yet. Your job is to be faithful, be patient and honor God. Who knows, but that you have come into your position for such as time as this? Bloom where you are planted. Brighten the corner where you are, because God could have you exactly where he wants you and you don't even know it yet!

LESSON TWO: Your choices always affect those closest to you

Lesson number two: Your choices always affect those closest to you. Esther made a good choice. "I will go to see the king and I will ask him to help me." Her choice saved the entire Jewish race. Your good choices affect those closest to you in a positive way. Haman made a terrible choice in choosing to kill the Jews. Not only was he hanged on those gallows, but his ten sons were hanged. By the way, the bad choices that you make not only hurt you, but also hurt those closest to you!

LESSON THREE: The gun of hatred and bitterness always backfires

Lesson number three: The gun of hatred and bitterness always backfires. When you point anger and hatred and animosity and hostility toward others, you always end up being hanged on the gallows you build for someone else.

LESSON FOUR: You can trust God even when he seems to be absent

Lesson number four: You can trust God even when he seems to be absent. You can trust God even when he seems to be invisible.

I've told you God does not appear in the book of Esther, but you and I know He does! He was in the shadows prompting Mordecai, prompting the team. Why do you think it was that on the night Esther first walked into his bedroom, the king said, "WOW! What a woman!" Why do you think it was when the Queen walked in for an audience, he was favorably disposed toward her? Because Proverbs 21:1 says "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases." God was in control! Sometimes it seems like you can't see God. Sometimes it seems like you can't hear God. My advice to you is learn from the book of Esther. You can *still* trust Him! When you go through such times and it seems like you can't find Him, He's still there. and He is still in control.

OUTLINE

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LESSON THREE: The gun of hatred and bitterness always backfires

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes