

Text: Esther 5-6

Theme: Series-When God appears silent: Pride comes before a Fall

Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi during Service of the Word on 21/08/2016 at 10.30am

When Esther accepted the task that Mordecai had presented to her, she was agreeing to embark on “Mission Impossible.”

Last week, we learned that Esther was expected to speak to the king without being summoned, which would amount to breaking the law for which the penalty was death. In appealing to the king, Esther had to confess that she deceived the king by not telling him she was a Jew. Esther had to oppose Haman who was-more-or-less number 2 to the king.

Being very aware of the huge task ahead of her, she requested that all Jews fasted for three days for her after which she would go and see the king. Let us now turn to Esther 5 to see what the unseen hand of God has in store.

Although we are not told that the people prayed to God (as God was not mentioned in the book of Esther), to the Jews, fasting is deemed as a time of humbling oneself before God, believing that He can do all things-even the impossible. No king has ever intimidated God no matter how powerful his armies or wealthy his treasury. God can handle anyone. He can handle your husband, your wife, your pastor, your kids. He can handle that person who made all the promises to you and broke most of them. Charles Swindol says;” God can handle the most intimidating situation because in the hand of the Lord, any heart is like water”. With this understanding, Esther walked confidently before the king.

The Entrance of Esther (Esther 5:1-2)

On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king’s hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. We can breathe a sigh of relief here! She lives! The first part of the mission is accomplished. The king sees her standing in the court, and he is pleased with her. He is probably pleased with both her beauty and her boldness, and so he extends his golden scepter to spare her life. Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.

Notice what Esther did. She put on her royal robes, dressing respectfully before the king. She did not run foolishly into the king’s presence, crying hysterically and pleading with him for mercy. She stood, poised and dignified and waited until the king called her in. And when the king saw her, she obtained favour in his sight, and he extended the golden scepter to her.

Verse 3. Before she spoke, the king asked her: “...What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you.” The king realizes that Esther put herself in jeopardy by coming, and also, realizes that since she put her life in danger, she must have some special request to make, and asks her what her request is.

The king’s offer of “up to half the kingdom” should not be misunderstood. It did not really mean that someone could have half the kingdom if they wanted it. It was a way of saying that the king was generous and any request within the king’s power would be granted. This offer sometimes got kings in trouble. You remember King Herod got into trouble with this offer when Herodias daughter asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter (Mark 6:23). Wow! Is this the moment to bring down Haman? Esther did not fall into a fit of revenge. She knows, after waiting on God with fasting, that God’s timing is the best. We get in a hurry and do rash

things when we do not wait on God. God was at work and I believe he filled Esther's thoughts with a plan. Give a banquet. Invite Haman, and here's what you need to say...

Verse 5. "Bring Haman at once," the king said, "so that we may do what Esther asks."

And Esther said, Verse 4, "If it pleases the king, let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared for him." While fasting, Esther had prepared a banquet for her husband who loves to party.

So, the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared. Verse 6. 'As they were drinking wine, the king again asked Esther, "Now what is your petition? It will be given you. And what is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted."

The Request of Esther (Esther 5:7-8)

Esther replied, "My petition and my request is this: ⁸If the king regards me with favour and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfil my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king's question." At this stage, we do not know why God's timing required another day, but we see Esther not in a rush to take her pound of flesh.

The king is no dummy and he would know that Esther did not risk her life just because she wanted him to come and party. Also, Persian kings were very protective of their wives, and normally only allowed eunuchs to interact with the women. For Haman to be invited as a special guest to such a meal was a special honour and privilege for him. You can feel the tension as everybody is holding their breath.

The Triumph and Trouble of Haman (Esther 5:9-14)

Haman went out that day happy and in high spirits. But when he saw Mordecai at the king's gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage against Mordecai. ¹⁰Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home. Calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, ¹¹Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials. ¹²"And that's not all," Haman added. "I'm the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me along with the king tomorrow. ¹³But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate."

Haman has just been honored above every other man in the kingdom with a private banquet with the King and Queen and another banquet the following day. He is feeling joyful and in high spirits. At this stage, nobody wants to offend him as he has the king and Queen's ears. But Mordecai, having changed his mourning clothes, has returned to the king's gate and would not bow to Haman. Again, Haman is furious, but this time, he waited until he got home to tell his close associates about his importance in the kingdom, his wealth, his large family and his irritation with puny Mordecai.

Well, Haman's wife and all his friends have a solution for him, as we see in Esther 5:14. Then "His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Have a pole set up, reaching to a height of fifty cubits, and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai impaled on it. Then go with the king to the banquet and enjoy yourself." This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the pole set up. He went to bed that night to the sound of the construction workers erecting the pole on which Mordecai would be killed the following day. The plot now thickens.

Where is God and why won't Esther just get on with the job of asking for Haman's head? Was she over confident that no harm would come to them until 12 months' time? Has Esther chickened out? Esther's delay in making her request to the king is backfiring and could cost

Mordecai his life! Esther may be saved and the Jews might get spared, but by the time Esther makes her request, Mordecai will already be dead. But God is in control, and though Haman builds the gallows, we will see that it is actually God who wanted the gallows built. What is that purpose? We don't know yet. The text has not answered that question for us yet.

Esther 6 – Pride goes before destruction

But that night, the night before Mordecai's anticipated execution, the king could not sleep. I am sure Haman would not sleep well too while ensuring the gallows was completed on schedule.

That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. ²It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. ³"What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this?" the king asked. "Nothing has been done for him," his attendants answered.

Verse 1 said, that night, the king could not sleep. This is the night. The king knew nothing about Haman's plan to kill Mordecai. But God steps in and does the unexpected. When no one seems to notice and care, God does. Just at the right time, he moves the heart of the king who suddenly realises that he owes his very life on the throne to a Jew named Mordecai.

God is not so unjust as to forget His own people. When no one else notices, God does. Undoubtedly a bureaucratic oversight had occurred. However, if Mordecai had been immediately rewarded for his saving the king there would have been no need for the elaborate plan which would soon be carried out by the king through the mouth of Haman (6:6-10). Once again unusual circumstances worked to preserve God's people. God wanted the king to stay awake because He had something to tell him.

Xerxes needed help in planning how to honour Mordecai. And there and then, he heard someone was in the court. It turned out to be Haman who had come to petition the king for the head of Mordecai but because the king called him in, he had to listen to what the king had to say.

Verses 6-9

When Haman entered, the king asked him, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honour?" Now Haman thought to himself, "Who is there that the king would rather honour than me?" ⁷ So he answered the king, "For the man the king delights to honour, ⁸ have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head. ⁹ Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king's most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honour, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, 'This is what is done for the man the king delights to honour!'" For the time being, he forgot about Mordecai and the permission he had come to seek for his death.

Verse 10

Go at once," the king commanded Haman. "Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended."

Haman must have thought this was a great mistake or a slip of the tongue. In his pride, Haman assumed that the person the king would most like to honour would be him., so he listed every honour he could imagine for himself.

Haman illustrates the depravity of the human heart. It is easy to stand in judgement over him but we need to understand that without God's mercy we would be like him. He was desperate

to wear the king's robe and crown and ride on the royal horse. He became proud like Satan, who wanted everything God had and ended up being demoted from being an archangel to the devil. Haman was increasingly becoming like the king he served – proud, selfish, and egocentric.

But the king we serve and called to emulate is the complete opposite. Jesus stripped himself of honour and reputation. He gave up his royal robes and crown and instead wore a crown of thorns. He is full of forgiveness and unrelenting in His pursuit of lost people who need a Saviour.

Verses 11

Haman got the robe and the horse. He robed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city streets, proclaiming before him, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honour!" The man the king wants to honour does not deserve to be impaled on a 50 feet pole like a common criminal.

This task has humiliation written all over it. I can't think of a more deflating task than this one. If Mordecai was a vengeful man, he would have said: "Say it louder Haman". But according to the text, Mordecai did not utter a word. Instead, we are told in verse 12 that Mordecai returned to his post afterwards, while Haman rushed home shamefaced and in grief. The Persians were a very superstitious people, and the advisers saw in the events of the day a "bad omen" for Haman's future. Perhaps they were also familiar with God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3), I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. Or maybe they just knew Jewish history. At any rate, they saw Haman falling from his place of prominence; and this dire prediction should have brought him to the place of humility and repentance.

But the Haman types always blame other people for their misfortune. It is never, "I have learned a valuable lesson on humility from this experience or through this loss, I have gained insight into what really matters or God has crushed my spirit and has taught me to rely on him. While his confidants were still talking, a knock came at the door. And before he could even get his thoughts together, Haman was swept out of the house and escorted to the place for the banquet that would spell his doom. I am sure that on the way, he would pass by the gallows he had erected for Mordecai and he would shake his head. He would even see Mordecai back to his post at the gate, still not bowing to him. What do you think would occupy his thoughts now?

What would happen next? And what was the mysterious petition that Queen Esther would reveal at the banquet?

You remember this story called *the burning hut*.: The only survivor of a shipwreck washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him, and every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming. Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect him from the elements, and to store his few possessions. But then one day, after scavenging for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, the smoke rolling up to the sky. The worst had happened; everything was lost. He was stung with grief and anger. "God, how could you do this to me!" he cried. Early the next day, however, he was awakened by the sound of a ship that was approaching the island. It had come to rescue him. "How did you know I was here?" asked the weary man of his rescuers. "We saw your smoke signal," they replied.

Everything the marooned man owned had to be destroyed before he could be discovered, and rescued. God seemed distant for so long but he was working on both ends – to bring the

marooned man to nothing in order to bring him to his knees. Can you see yourself in the picture? Is God uncaring to have allowed Mordecai to get to the brink of disaster?

It is easy to get discouraged when things are going bad. But we shouldn't lose heart, because God is at work, even in the midst of pain and suffering. Paul wrote, "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want" (Philippians 4:12). Paul had confidence that good would come out of everything (Romans 8:28), so he learned to be thankful, not bitter, even when he was suffering.

Remember next time your little hut is burning to the ground, when your hopes seem to be dashed to pieces—it just may be a smoke signal that summons the grace of God.

We will conclude our studies in Esther next week as we look at Chapters 7 and 8, a great finale to our studies.