

Text: Esther 7-8

Theme: Series-When God appears silent: The Greatest Reversal (The Downfall of Haman the Wicked)

Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi during Service of the Word on 28/08/2016 at 10.30am

We have seen in the previous chapters how Haman in his hatred for God's covenant people concocted a story against the Jews, plotted to kill Mordecai, Esther's uncle, and all the Jews living in the Persian Empire. Through the advice of Mordecai, Esther embarked on a "Mission Impossible" – to go and appeal to the king though not summoned by him – to reveal her identity as a Jewess and plead for her people. A decree had already been written to kill all the Jews, and according to the legal system of the Persian Government once a law had been passed and written on the statue book it can never be repealed.

But the silent God can do the impossible. He can make a way to redeem His condemned people.

The close of the last study in Esther chapter 6 saw the events drawing to a dramatic conclusion. The hatred Haman had for Mordecai had only intensified as he saw the king exalt Mordecai and not himself before the adoring crowds. Queen Esther had called for a second banquet where she planned to unmask her people's enemy before the king. Haman's gallows that he had constructed specifically for Mordecai was still empty but Haman was holding on to the hope that he can still win favour with the king and have Mordecai swinging from it by lunch time. Well, by the end of the chapter one thing is for sure and that is that someone will be swinging from that gallows. But who will it be?

Here is what we will look at in this study, and also God's perfect timing. Many of us do not doubt God that He is able to do that which He says He will do. Our problem has to do with when will He do it. In Acts 1: 6, after Jesus had spent 40 days with his disciple after his resurrection they asked him the question: "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set... The disciples believed Jesus, but their minds are agitated about God's timing. You see, faith is holding on to the Lord's promise and believing it will come to pass at his own time, whether now, in this world or in the world to come.

Still talking about God's perfect timing, you may ask, "What was God doing until Haman suddenly changed his mind and decided to erect gallows to kill Mordecai the next day instead of waiting for another 12 months when Mordecai could have been killed along with the rest of the Jews? Consider God's perfect timing; how after a Booze party, instead of the king to doze away, he was sleepless and restless, till the following morning; consider also how he commanded the history books to be brought to aid his insomnia and after some reading, he came across how Mordecai had frustrated the plot to assassinate him and how nothing had been done to compensate Mordecai; consider how Haman walked him at the time Xerxes was asking what should be done to Mordecai. All these occurrences are not coincidence but a demonstration of God's perfect timing. Left to Esther, or Mordecai or me, I would have expected God to do something drastic much earlier, but...God's timing is the best. Although His name is not mentioned in the book, He is still the One who moves the heart of the king like water.

Now the king and Haman came to drink wine with Esther the queen. And 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." (Esther 7:1-2)

Up until now Esther had been silent and kept her peace... yet it hadn't been a time of inactivity. Esther had asked all the Jews to fast for three days as she sought God in preparation for coming before the king and exposing Haman. This was no small event! We saw in chapter 4 when Esther got to the point where she accepted the "Mission impossible", saying 'if I perish I perish'. But the beauty of what was unfolding is that the events are unfolding in accordance to the perfect precision of God's timetable.

Too often we try to run ahead of God instead of setting aside time to seek His will and ways and his perfect timing. We can learn a lot from Esther in this regard. But now the time for silence and holding her tongue had past. The stage was now set as the king, queen and Haman sat down at their second banquet and Esther would courageously declare her nationality and expose the wicked Haman!

A jaw dropping revelation

Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favour 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. " (Esther 7:3-4)

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 queen. (Esther 7:5-6)

You can imagine how the king would feel, knowing for the first time that his Queen was a Jew, just like Mordecai who had saved his life, and with his own decree had ordered that both of them be killed along with their people. And that Haman his right hand man was behind it all!

Haman's jaw and heart would have dropped as he learns for the first time that the Queen herself belongs to the race of people he desires to annihilate! Oh boy... Haman's own wife had said to him that day that – *"Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him--you will surely come to ruin!"* Now to drive home the final nail, he has found out that the Queen is Jewish as well!

It was about now that Haman began to turn a ghostly shade of grey! What a change in fortunes! What a fall from grace! It was only yesterday that Haman believed there was no one within the kingdom that the king would desire to honour more than himself. Now there was no one within the kingdom that stood to face such great wrath from the king. Yesterday Haman had the world at his feet. Today, death itself was calling his name.

Let me ask you a personal question. How confident are you that your carefully planned future plans will happen? We act as though we are the ultimate reality of things and that we are in perfect control. We want to be centre-stage in the drama of our existence. We may think our current position is secure but as the story of Haman reminds us our fortunes can change in a moment. The beginning of the day? Yesterday Haman had the world at his feet. Today, death itself was calling his name.

I am not saying that we should never plan ahead. It is right to be wise as we prepare for the future. But I think God would say the following to us this morning: "If you are not committed to Jesus and love to be in control then wake up, as you are not in control of your destiny. There

are so many circumstances in life that you are powerless to alter. Sometimes God will bring you to your knees so that you will see this for yourself. Maybe you have been learning about the Christian faith for a long time and you believe it's true but your sticking point is that you don't want to give up control. No one is asking you to give up control. You are being asked to give up the illusion of being in control and follow the one who is really in charge of the world. And this brings great peace. As a Christian you can know that the God who died for you is also the God who cares for you and is now working out the circumstances of life for your eternal good. So take heart if you are worried – God is in charge of our daily circumstances. This is one of the lessons we can learn from Esther chapter 7.

Haman's sobbing and the king's rage

The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life. Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining.

The king exclaimed, "Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?" As soon as the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. Then one of them, who was named Harbonah, said, "Haman even went so far as to build a gallows at his house so that he could hang Mordecai, who saved Your Majesty's life. And it's seventy-five feet tall!" "Hang Haman on it!" the king commanded. So Haman was hanged on the gallows that he had built for Mordecai. Then the king's anger cooled down. (Esther 7:7-10)

The king went out of the room in rage, yet bewildered and almost in unbelief that he could have been so wrong about the man he had exalted and put his trust in. And so, when the king learned of the wickedness of Haman, there was only one course of action to take. "Get Haman's gallows and hang him on it!" Revelation concerning the true nature of Haman had come to the king and the only just action for Haman's murderous and deceitful ways was death.

One problem remained however. Haman's plan to annihilate the Jews which was agreed to by the king, was still in place and couldn't be overturned. It was now a law of the Medes and Persians and even the king couldn't annul it.

In Esther 8, we see how God in turn honours Esther and Mordecai and the plan to annihilate the Jewish people is looking more unlikely

Esther 8:1. On that day King Ahasuerus gave Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her.

This is the same day that Esther revealed Haman's plot, and on which Haman was hung on the gallows he had built for Mordecai. So Haman, the villain of the story, is dead. On that same day, the King gave Esther the estate of Haman.

Remember, we saw earlier, that Haman's plot against the Jews was a business venture for him. The Persians had a law that if you brought an accusation against someone, and it turned out to be true, and as a result that person was put to death for their crimes, you, as the one who revealed the crime, might be rewarded by gaining the land and possessions of the criminal, if the state so wishes.

Haman had tried to use this law to his own advantage by bringing accusations against the Jews. He would have become a very rich man if his plan had been carried out. But here in verse 1, we see this law turned against him. Esther brought accusations against Haman, which turned out to be true, and so the King gives to Esther all of Haman's land and possessions. And at the end of verse 1, we see that the King finally learns that Esther and Mordecai are related.

Esther 8:2. So the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai; and Esther appointed Mordecai over the house of Haman.

Esther, being queen and having no use for Haman's estate, gives it to Mordecai as well. The role reversal between Haman and Mordecai is now complete. What Haman had planned for Mordecai — death on a gallows — has become Haman's fate. And all that belonged to Haman now is in the hands of Mordecai.

We, as faithful children of God may not be honoured yet. Satan may still be ruling over this world, but do not despair. Remain faithful, and time is coming when all will be set right, and our faithfulness to God and commitment to Christian living will be rewarded according to God's infinite benevolence. But the timing should be left in God's time.

It will happen to us, just as it has happened to Esther and Mordecai. But, even though Haman is now out of the way, and even though Mordecai has been honoured and is now rich and is second in command in the empire, there is still the matter of that irreversible law to annihilate the Jews.

Esther 8:3. Now Esther spoke again to the king, fell down at his feet, and implored him with tears to counteract the evil of Haman the Agagite, and the scheme which he had devised against the Jews.

She is pleading with the king and weeping. She asks the king here to put an end to the plan of Haman.

Esther 8:4. And the king held out the golden scepter toward Esther. So Esther arose and stood before the king.

Ok, now what happened here? Why did the King extend his scepter to Esther? He only did this when someone went before him without being summoned, right? Right, and that is what Esther has done again here. This might be a bit confusing, but bear with me as I explain from the text apparently what has happened.

Apparently, after the events of Esther 8:1-2, Mordecai and Esther waited for a period of about two months to see if the King would figure out some way to reverse an irreversible law. How do we know it was two months? Well, we know from Esther 3:7, 13 that all the events of Esther 3-7 all took place in the time span of about one week in the first month, the month of Adar. Now, look down with me to Esther 8:9. *So the king's scribes were called at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day.*

We are now in the third month, the month of Sivan. So about two months have passed in between Esther 8:2-3. Here is what must have happened. Haman is killed at the end of chapter 7. Mordecai is honoured in 8:2, and everyone goes home happy thinking that the king has enough common sense to think up a way to save the Jews from annihilation.

Two months passed, and nothing is heard by way of royal edict. Esther, Mordecai and the Jews begin to worry. So finally, Esther decides to go before the king again. She apparently

goes before him un-summoned in verse 3, and verse 4 tells us that he again extends his scepter to her. He again spares her life, and in so doing, allows her to make her request.

So back to what Esther says in Esther 8:5, *If it pleases the king,” she said, “and if he regards me with favour and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, devised and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king’s provinces.*

She knows that the law cannot be reversed, so what she proposes is another law that overrules the first law. Esther 8:6-8. *For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?”* ⁷*King Xerxes replied to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, “Because Haman attacked the Jews, I have given his estate to Esther, and they have impaled him on the pole he set up.* ⁸ *Now write another decree in the king’s name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the king’s signet ring—for no document written in the king’s name and sealed with his ring can be revoked.”*

Similarly, there is an edict written against all sinners “Ezekiel 18:20 “The one who sins is the one who will die.” All humanity has been concluded under sin and subject to God’s wrath. But God is both a God of justice and love. The big question is: How can this be done? How can God simultaneously remain a God of justice and a God of forgiveness? God has not repealed the law; he only chose a way out. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6). Jesus became our substitute as God’s just edict on sin is carried out. The death of Christ attests to this. So if you place your trust and life in Jesus’s hands, you will escape the wrath to come.

The king basically says, “What did you come to me for? You’re asking me why I have done nothing for two months. I was wondering the same thing about you and Mordecai. Mordecai is second in command. He has my signet ring. It’s a blank check. It’s my personal credit card. Write up a law — whatever you want — sign it with my signet ring, and proceed as you wish.”

So this is what Esther and Mordecai do; and Esther 8:9-14 are an account of what they wrote.

Esther 8:9. At once the royal secretaries were summoned—on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan. They wrote out all Mordecai’s orders to the Jews, and to the satraps, governors and nobles of the 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush. These orders were written in the script of each province and the language of each people and also to the Jews in their own script and language. ¹⁰ *Mordecai wrote in the name of King Xerxes, sealed the dispatches with the king’s signet ring, and sent them by mounted couriers, who rode fast horses especially bred for the king.*

¹¹ *The king’s edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and annihilate the armed men of any nationality or province who might attack them and their women and children, and to plunder the property of their enemies.* ¹² *The day appointed for the Jews to do this in all the provinces of King Xerxes was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar.* ¹³ *A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.*

¹⁴ *The couriers, riding the royal horses, went out, spurred on by the king’s command, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa.*

Mordecai, as we see from verse 11, wrote a law that simply gave the Jews the right to defend themselves if they were attacked. They could not provoke, nor could they go on the offensive

to kill their enemies. The Law created here by Mordecai is very different from the law Haman created. Mordecai is not behaving like Haman.

Esther 8:15. When Mordecai left the king's presence, he was wearing royal garments of blue and white, a large crown of gold and a purple robe of fine linen. And the city of Susa held a joyous celebration.

We have two sets of contrasts here. Previously, after Haman's edict, Mordecai was in sackcloth and ashes, now he is dressed like a king. He has gone from rags to riches. That is the first contrast.

The second contrast is the city of Susa. When the first edict went out under Haman, do you remember? The city was bewildered (3:15) But now, they held a joyous celebration. Before, they were shocked that Haman would make a law allowing the wholesale slaughter of tens of thousands of people. Now they are rejoicing that Mordecai has found a way to protect these people from such slaughter.

They are also rejoicing that Mordecai rules them instead of Haman. We can be sure, because of Haman's pride and arrogance that he was not a just and fair ruler. He most assuredly abused his power and position frequently. His public opinion was probably not very high. Likely, the city also knew of Mordecai's honesty and fairness, and were glad that someone of his stature was second in command instead of Haman.

By justice and fairness, Mordecai had secured his position, not by bribery and blackmail, as Haman had. And so the city was happy to have him as ruler.

Esther 8:16-17. In every province and in every city to which the edict of the king came, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them.

You know, when people of God live as they should, and as a result, according to the promises of God, God works mightily among them, two things happen. First, people are afraid, and second, many people join in following God, because they see that what is going on is not just circumstances; it is the hand of God at work among his people. Do you remember what happened after the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost? *Acts 2:41* says that about 3000 were added to their numbers. Just like here in Esther.

God honours those who honour him, and he blesses those who obey him, and when God works like this on our behalf, the world sits up and takes notice. And many will come to Christ as a result.

Don't we all want to see this happen? Don't we want God to bless us? You bet we do! So let us get into His Word and obey Him! Don't we want Him to honour and bless us? YES! So let us honour Him.

And when we obey Him — like Joshua, like Esther, like the early church — not only will we be blessed and honoured, but another thing will happen that we all long for: men and women will come to Christ. When they see what God does in us, through us, and for us, they will rejoice with us, and will want to be one of us.

So like Esther, step out and do the impossible thing that God wants you to do. Obey Him and let Him bless you.