

SEPTEMBER 2016

TODAY IN THE WORD™



*And who knows but that you have come to your royal position
for such a time as this?*

Esther 4:14

BOOK OF ESTHER: The Deliverance of God's People

A devotional from



MOODY
GLOBAL MINISTRIES

TODAY WITH DR. PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Global Ministries

There Is More to Our Story



During my years as a pastor, I was often called to sit with people at the lowest moments of their lives. Whether we were huddled under

the stark lights of a hospital emergency room or sitting on their living room sofa, sometimes there was little I could do but listen and pray. What do you say to parents when their child dies? How do you encourage a person who has lost a job or whose spouse has walked out the door? Despite our eternal hope, we don't always have answers in the here and now.

But, as someone who has studied Scripture from beginning to end, I am confident of this: there is more to our stories than may meet the eye. We read two stories throughout the Bible. First, we see the human narrative of sin and failure, of forgiveness and repentance. But we must not overlook the second story, God's story. Our God was present at the Creation and in the Resurrection, but His hand is also evident throughout Scripture in less obvious ways, orchestrating events, softening hearts, working miracles, toppling leaders, and saving the lost.

Radio broadcaster Paul Harvey used to like to tell us "the rest of the story." And too often we forget that God is working behind the scenes creating the rest of our story. No matter what we may face, He is present, and He is in control.

As you read the book of Esther, you will see two stories. The first is Esther's. She is a young woman, chosen by the king for her beauty. She is also Jewish. One of the king's top officials hates the Jews and makes it his mission to destroy God's people. Esther's story seems hopeless. Why would God allow such a wicked man to triumph?

But if you are patient and keep reading, you see Him at work in Esther's life. He has carefully orchestrated each moment in Esther's life so that she is in the perfect place at exactly the right moment: "for such a time as this" (4:14).

God works in miraculous ways through Esther's story to deliver His people. It is her story, but it is also God's. And so it is with us. When your life seems grim, and it appears that your story has taken a terrible turn, remember that God is still at work. There is more to our story. From the beginning to the end, our God reigns. ■

THEOLOGY MATTERS

by Dr. John Koessler

The God of Israel

One surprising feature of the book of Esther is that it never mentions God by name. On the surface, it appears to be a story about survival, prejudice, and politics. But for those who know the larger story of the Bible, God's hidden hand can be discerned in these events, working to protect and preserve Israel.

The story of Esther turns on a series of seeming coincidences. Mordecai happens to learn of a plot to assassinate the king and warns him through Esther (2:21–23). The king happens across the account of Mordecai's heroism just as Haman begins to make plans to have him executed (6:1–3). The king happens to prefer Esther, which becomes the means of protection for Mordecai and the Jewish people. None of these events were accidents. They reflect the sovereignty of God and the exercise of God's divine power by which He governs all of creation and causes all things to work toward His ultimate purposes.

The book of Esther illustrates Israel's unique place in God's plan. God's choice of Israel as His treasured possession guaranteed that Haman's intent to exterminate the Jewish people would fail (Deut. 14:2). They are a people for whom God has a

particular purpose and who have been given special promises. This status is irrevocable and continues to this day (Rom. 11:29). This does not mean that God has a different plan of salvation for the Jewish people. Everyone must place their faith in Jesus Christ in order to experience forgiveness and salvation. Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah and the hope of Israel (Acts 26:6; 28:20). He is the key that unlocks all the promises made to the Jewish people. His resurrection is the reason Jews and Gentiles alike can hope in eternal life.

From Hitler to white supremacists to Islamic extremists, many have attempted to follow in Haman's steps. But they are destined to fail in their ultimate objective just as Haman did. God will continue to preserve and protect the Jewish people. He will fulfill all the promises made to Israel. In the last days there will be a great turning of the Jewish people to embrace Jesus as their Savior. At that time "all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26). ■

FOR FURTHER STUDY

To learn more about the hope of Israel, read *The Messianic Hope* by Michael Rydelnik (B&H).

FROM THE EDITORS

by Bruce Everhart

Back to School

Millions of children have started back to school. Not that long ago, my wife and I would shop for school supplies with our children. Those folders, pens, and binders represented the work yet to come: papers, science experiments, and math problems.

I remember times as a student when I wondered, “When will I ever need to remember this?” And it’s true—we don’t need to retain everything we memorized so diligently for tests.

But the study of God’s Word is always a worthy investment of our time. On the stone archway leading in to Moody’s administrative building is carved this verse: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV). Through higher education, publishing, and radio, we want to provide resources that help you know God and His Word in a deeper, richer way.

As believers, we know that the Bible is more than just another important historical book. God’s Word is unique because it is inspired (God-breathed) and entirely without error. Through the pages of the Bible, God reveals Himself to us. The Greek word for “revelation” comes from *apokalupsis*, meaning “to

disclose or unveil.” Through the pages of Scripture, we can see things more clearly. We are able to know God in a deeper, richer way.

Here are just a few reasons why being a student of God’s Word is so valuable.

- **God’s Word helps us navigate our lives.** “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.” Psalm 119:105
- **God’s Word never goes out of date.** “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.” Isaiah 40:8
- **God’s Word sustains us.** “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Matthew 4:4
- **God’s Word is authoritative and true.** “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.” John 17:17

Thank you for joining us through *Today in the Word*. What a privilege it is that we have this communication that allows us to better understand God and know Him more fully. We pray that your time spent in Scripture will prove valuable, encouraging and strengthening you in your faith journey as you draw closer to Him!

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Devotionals: Jamie Janosz

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TODAY IN THE WORD™

Book of Esther: The Deliverance of God's People

Julius Hudacek is the world's most entertaining goaltender. Currently playing in the Swedish Ice Hockey League, he puts on quite a show on ice after the game to celebrate if his team wins. In one of his one-man performances, called #HudaShow on the Internet, he danced and then took a ride on an ice resurfacing machine. In another, he did four cartwheels. Four. In full goalie gear. One commentator remarked, "When he wins, we all win with his postgame celebrations."

In this month's study with *Today in the Word*, we'll learn about an exuberant celebration by the Jewish people during the days of Purim. But before those days of Purim in Esther 9, we'll read a fascinating story of cowardliness and courage, betrayal and loyalty, love and hatred. Through Esther's royal position, the devotion of Mordecai, and above all, God's sovereignty and care for His people, we'll see the miraculous deliverance of the Jewish nation. It's a wonderful cause for us to celebrate even today. The Jewish people won—therefore, we all won.

Thank you for joining us in our study of the book of Esther. We pray that as you read about God providence in seemingly impossible circumstances in the past, you'll see His work in your life today more clearly and will praise Him with exuberance. ■

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THURSDAY
SEPTEMBER

1

The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.

Psalms 103:19

A Wealthy King

The book of Esther may remind you of a classic, “once upon a time” children’s story with a wealthy king, his beautiful queen, and an evil villain. But while the characters might resemble a fairy tale, the book of Esther depicts actual events that shaped Jewish history and instituted the festival of Purim, a tradition that continues to this day. Esther’s brave actions saved the Jews from massacre and preserved the lineage of Christ.

The opening verses of Esther place these events in a historical timeline. King Xerxes (also known by his name in Hebrew, Ahasuerus) ruled over 127 provinces, from India to Ethiopia (v. 1). At the beginning of this story, King Xerxes was holding court in the city of Susa, during the third year of his reign. This ruler of the Persian Empire had incredible wealth. The text records the splendor of his court with its beautiful

wall hangings and an array of purple, the color of royalty (v. 6). Gold, silver, mother-of-pearl, and precious stones decorated the furniture. People drank wine in abundance from golden goblets (v. 7).

Xerxes wanted to paint a picture of a perfect kingdom with no problems. Certainly there was no lack of wealth. Every individual was given everything they desired (v. 8). And Xerxes was sure to get the credit for the glamor and abundance. But even the extraordinary power and wealth of the king had limitations. Note how the text highlights the number of days his “majesty” had been on display (v. 4). No matter how grand the court of King Xerxes was, his reign was limited and pales in contrast with the majesty of God. God’s kingdom will know no end. The temporal plans of individuals in this book lay subject to the will of our Almighty God.

APPLY THE WORD

As we begin the book of Esther, it is helpful to remember that no matter what evil plans people make, God still sits upon the throne. We can be assured that God is ultimately in control, and the final outcome is preserved by Him. It is easy to worry about life from our own human perspective, but we must never forget who is King.

PRAY WITH US

Today we invite you to pray for our trustees as they serve Moody with diligence, dedication, and joy. Please bring before the Lord all the decisions they make as a team and ask for His will to be done for the future of Moody Global Ministries.

*For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid,
but gives us power, love and self-discipline.*

2 Timothy 1:7

FRIDAY
SEPTEMBER

2

A Lovely Queen

After being imprisoned and threatened with execution in Iran, American journalist Roxana Saberi falsely confessed to being a spy. Later she recanted, even though she knew that telling the truth would jeopardize her freedom. And indeed, rather than release her as promised, her captors kept her in prison for months. She said about that harrowing time: “I would rather tell the truth and stay in prison instead of telling lies to be free.”

Standing for what’s right takes courage. The book of Esther includes the stories of two women who challenged corrupt rulers. The first woman we meet is Queen Vashti. We know that she was an incredibly beautiful woman. Just as King Xerxes lavishly decorated his palace with only the best that money could buy, he also insisted that the women in his life be physically attractive. He demanded only the best.

While Xerxes was holding a lavish seven-day banquet, the queen presided over a separate banquet for women (v. 9). On the last day of the banquet, a very drunk king called for his queen (v. 11). He demanded that she come to him so that he could display her before the attendees of his banquet. Some commentators interpret Xerxes’s request as a vulgar attempt to force the beautiful Queen Vashti to appear naked in front of these drunken men. Certainly his demand was insulting and embarrassing to Vashti, and she refused (v. 12).

Xerxes was not used to anyone denying his request. He was furious with Vashti. Not only had she disobeyed the king’s direct request, she had defied him in front of his guests. She undermined his illusion of total power and control. Queen Vashti was admired for her physical beauty. But what makes her stand apart in this text was her willingness to stand up to a despot.

APPLY THE WORD

When is it worthwhile to stand up for what you believe? At what cost? While many of us take the road of least resistance when it comes to conflict, sometimes it is necessary to do what is right, no matter the cost. Ultimately, our allegiance is to God. He can give us courage to stand up for what we believe, even when we are pressured to do wrong.

PRAY WITH US

Dr. James Spencer, VP and dean of the Undergraduate School, oversees the Moody education branch on campuses in Chicago and Spokane, WA. He welcomes the prayers of the *Today in the Word* family today.

The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul.

Psalm 19:7

An Act of Defiance

The Supreme Court was first assembled in 1790 as the highest court in the United States of America and initially was composed of one chief justice and five associate justices. Members of the court are appointed by the president and approved by the Senate. In 1869, the number of justices increased to nine. Their purpose at the Supreme Court is to interpret legislation to see whether it is consistent with the U.S. Constitution.

How would King Xerxes handle the direct and very public defiance of his queen? He decided to convene his own so-called Supreme Court to help him determine the most appropriate punishment. He selected seven nobles of Persia who were given special access to the king and held in high esteem (vv. 13, 14).

Their judgment of the facts of the case was simple: Vashti had clearly broken the law. No matter how sympathetic we might be to her decision, she had

not obeyed the command of the king. Their judgment of the needed penalty was quick: The court of nobles agreed that her actions needed to be punished. If her act of public disobedience were left unchecked, it would undermine the king's authority (vv. 16, 17).

But notice how their own self-interest influenced their judgment of Vashti. She should have upheld a standard for other wives to follow, and therefore she should be punished not only to maintain the king's honor but also to keep their own wives from challenging them at home (v. 18). Their interpretation of the law was as much about preserving their own sphere of power as it was about adjudicating fairly.

The law was necessary to retain control and order, they said. King Xerxes had no choice, they said. He had to punish Vashti or else endure no end of "disrespect and discord" (v. 18).

APPLY THE WORD

Human laws are necessary for governance, but only the law of the Lord is perfect (Ps. 19:7). God's Word reveals our sins of pride and temptations to pursue power, and it also offers us freedom from sin though accepting the forgiveness available in Christ. Spend time in confession before God today, and thank Him for His perfect law that restores us.

PRAY WITH US

The next two days we'd like to focus our prayers on the Intercultural Studies department faculty in Chicago. Pray that the Lord would continue to use Stephen Clark, Samuel Naaman, and Mary Cloutier to impact students' lives.

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish . . . the saving of many lives.

Genesis 50:20

Vashti Is Punished

Some archaic laws are still on the books, specifically pertaining to women. For example, in Vermont, women must have permission from their husbands to wear false teeth. In Michigan, women cannot cut their hair without their husband's approval. And, in one California town, it is illegal to wear high heels unless you are carrying a permit.

Queen Vashti had defied Xerxes by refusing to appear before his guests. He was furious and realized that her public defiance must be punished. Now we see the pronouncement of judgment: the king's advisor recommended that he issue a royal decree preventing Vashti from ever entering his presence again. She was banished from her esteemed position and from the privilege and entitlement that came with it. She would no longer be queen (v. 19).

But the advisor suggested even more action. He said the king should make

an example out of Vashti, replace her with a new queen, and put in place a rule for all married couples. His recommendation pleased both the king and his court (v. 21). So the decree was carried out to the kingdom, announcing that every man should be considered a "ruler" in his own household (v. 22).

Vashti's act of public defiance had a life-altering consequence, which no doubt satisfied the anger of King Xerxes. But what the king did for personal reasons, God used for divine reasons. With Vashti deposed, the stage was now set for the arrival of a new queen, Esther, who would save her people from destruction. The story echoes Joseph's trial and unjust treatment described in the book of Genesis. Only later in his life did Joseph realize that God had redeemed his suffering for a divine purpose (Gen. 50:20). Certainly, God's plans surpass our own.

APPLY THE WORD

Sometimes our circumstances truly are not fair. Why would God allow injustice to happen? Why do wicked people seem to triumph? Scripture reveals how God's divine plan supersedes and even works beyond man's plans. What Xerxes intended for his own satisfaction, God used for the good of the nation. Ask God to work His perfect will in your life.

PRAY WITH US

Today we continue to support in prayer the Intercultural Studies faculty—Michael Rydelnik, Maria Mocuta, Timothy Sisk, and Clive Craigen. Pray that the Holy Spirit will touch the heart of every student through their lectures and seminars.

People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

1 Samuel 16:7

A Search Begins

In Montclair, Calif., Melissa Andrade dreamed of being crowned homecoming queen. But Andrade has cerebral palsy, and it seemed unlikely—even impossible. One member of the football team decided to step in and help. He invited Melissa to the dance and led a campaign to name her queen. Her classmates joined in, and, in a fairytale ending, Melissa was crowned homecoming queen and became, in her own words, “the happiest girl in the world.”

The court of King Xerxes needed a new queen, now that Queen Vashti had been deposed. How would the leader of the world’s most powerful empire find a suitable woman? His advisors suggested a thorough search to find the most beautiful young woman to be his bride (v. 2). They combed the empire to find a collection of beautiful women and then pampered them to maximize every attractive feature (v. 3).

But remember the story of David’s selection to be anointed king. The Lord instructed Samuel to appoint a new king and sent him to the family of Jesse in Bethlehem. Tall and strong and handsome, Jesse’s sons lined up for scrutiny. But rather than choose someone based on external appearance, God looked at the heart. “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him” (1 Sam. 16:7). God selected David, a young shepherd boy, whom no one considered a candidate for the throne.

In the same way, we see God’s hand at work in the selection of Xerxes’ queen. The king and his advisors were considering only physical beauty. They didn’t realize that God was at work to select a queen who would possess godly character and a beautiful commitment to her people.

APPLY THE WORD

When we choose anything—a college for our children, a new home, a car—we may focus on what we want and what would make us (or those we love) happy. But God knows what is best for us. Ask God today to help you make wise decisions, choices that will bring Him glory and will work His divine will in your life.

PRAY WITH US

Please join us as we lift up to God in prayer Moody students—undergraduate, graduate, and distance learning—on our three campuses. Pray for their walk with God and spiritual growth during this school year.

*A star will come out of Jacob;
a scepter will rise out of Israel.*

Numbers 24:17

TUESDAY
SEPTEMBER

6

Mordecai the Jew

The phrase “damsel in distress” describes many female characters in fairy tales. They need to be rescued, preferably by a handsome prince. But when Disney created their updated movie version of the story of Rapunzel, they wanted a different heroine. In *Tangled*, a tough, independent feminine character could take care of herself.

In today’s passage, we meet an unusual, brave, quick-thinking heroine named Esther, along with Mordecai, her cousin and adopted father. Mordecai and Esther lived in Susa when the decree came from the king’s palace to bring every beautiful, eligible young woman for consideration to be his next queen.

Mordecai was a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin, and he is depicted in Scripture as a man of courage. His family had been carried into exile by King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians (v. 6). In addition to his

beautiful cousin, Mordecai himself would play an important role in the rescue of God’s people.

Finally, we learn that our heroine had two names. Her name *Hadassah* comes from the Hebrew word for “myrtle tree,” known for its beautiful sweet smell. The prophet Isaiah uses the myrtle tree to describe life and abundance instead of drought and death, because the myrtle has deep roots that can find water (see Isa. 55:18). God chose Hadassah for her heart and inner beauty that would stand firm in the face of challenges.

Her second name, *Esther*, is derived from the Persian word for “star.” This radiant young woman was prized by King Xerxes and the Persian court for her physical beauty, but God had chosen her to shine a light in the darkness of that court in order to provide deliverance for His people.

APPLY THE WORD

Esther, the star, points ahead to Jesus Christ, the “star who will come out of Jacob; the scepter will rise out of Israel” (Num. 24:17) in order to deliver His people forever from the darkness of sin. Her faithfulness foreshadowed His perfect obedience. We can shine the light of the gospel in the darkness around us when we tell others about Jesus.

PRAY WITH US

Today, as we continue to pray for Moody’s education branch, please include in your time with God the ministry of Dr. Junias Venugopal, provost and dean of Education. Thank you for supporting Moody education’s mission and vision!

*The unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit,
which is of great worth in God's sight.*

1 Peter 3:4

The Royal Beauty Treatment

Elizabeth Arden opened the first modern beauty salon in America in 1910. In 2016, the cosmetic industry in the United States is expected to earn an estimated \$62.4 billion. Today, Americans spend more on beauty each year than they do on education.

Today's passage is all about beauty. Esther was brought to the palace in Susa, one of many who were selected to compete for a desirable position: becoming the next queen (v. 8). But the road to royalty was not easy. Even though it was clear that Esther was naturally beautiful and had won the favor of Hegai, supervisor of the harem, she still had to undergo twelve months of beauty treatments (v. 12).

The verses describe what sounds like a modern-day exclusive spa. Esther was given treatments with oil, myrrh, perfumes, cosmetics, a special diet, and seven female attendants. Due to

Hegai's favor, she was moved into the best place in the king's harem.

But while everyone fussed over what appeared on the surface of this young woman, there was one thing they did not realize. Esther was a Jew. She had been told by Mordecai to keep her nationality a secret (v. 10). Mordecai continued to demonstrate his love and care for Esther, making sure she was being treated well (v. 11). He alone knew the truth about who she was.

Imagine twelve months of being judged solely on your external appearance, twelve months of rooming with other beautiful women who want to displace you in the king's favor. Certainly Esther was getting the royal beauty treatment, but she was also enduring scrutiny and judgment and competition, with life-changing stakes. The road ahead would not be easy.

APPLY THE WORD

Many of us get discouraged when we look in the mirror. The cosmetics industry thrives on these insecurities. But in Scripture, we read again and again that our God looks beyond the physical. What pleases God is a beautiful heart. Ask God today to create a gentle spirit within you, one that He can use to do His will.

PRAY WITH US

Would you pray for Troy Fichter and Josie Scott, as well as their part-time student staff? They operate the Solheim Center, Moody's athletic facility in Chicago, for the benefit of our students, staff, and the surrounding community.

Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her.

Esther 2:15

Winning the King's Favor

The word *favorite* was used in the late 1500s to refer to a person who gained influence over a superior. Traditionally, the word is an adjective indicating that the object is preferred before all others. As a noun, the word refers to a person or thing that is particularly well liked.

Today, we discover that Esther has won the king's favor. She is his favorite. After twelve long months of preparation, it was Esther's turn to meet King Xerxes. We can only imagine her nervousness. In previous verses we have learned that Esther was orphaned and quite beautiful, in today's passage we learn a few things about her character.

Esther was not demanding—this was no diva in training. Esther could take anything she wanted “from the harem to the king's palace,” but she asked for “nothing other than what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested” (vv. 13–15). She

kept her requests modest and followed advice. She was not filled with her own importance, issuing outrageous demands.

We also learn that Esther was congenial. She “won the favor” of everyone she met (v. 15). More than simply being popular, Esther was someone whom other people felt comfortable around. The king felt the same way. His attraction to her surpassed how he felt about any other woman he had met.

In verse 17, King Xerxes made Esther his queen. She was given the royal crown and replaced Vashti in the palace. The event was so joyous that the king declared a holiday and gave a banquet in her honor. Esther had found the king's favor. She had already been favored by God, and now was in a special, honored position—exactly where God wanted her to be.

APPLY THE WORD

Do you “win the favor” of those who know you? While we are not required to win a popularity contest, we are called to reflect the heart and mind of our Savior. Are you a unifier? Do you speak graciously to others? Do you reach out to those around you with kindness? Consider how you can show God's love today to those around you.

PRAY WITH US

Dr. John Jelinek, vice president and dean of Moody Theological Seminary, invites you to pray for MTS's open house, Next Step, on Moody's Chicago campus. Ask the Father to bless the participants and to show them His will for their ministry.

*Honor your father and your mother,
so that you may live long in the land the LORD
your God is giving you.*

Exodus 20:12

Honoring Mordecai

There have been more than twenty attempts to assassinate sitting and former United States presidents. Four presidents have been killed in office: Abraham Lincoln, James A. Garfield, William McKinley, and John F. Kennedy. In today's passage, King Xerxes is the target of an assassination plot, and the hero of the story is Mordecai.

Esther and Mordecai continued to have a close relationship even after she became queen. She obeyed his instructions to keep her nationality and family background a secret; knowing what his own family had suffered in the past, Mordecai had good reason to be concerned for Esther. He knew that she could easily become a target of jealous rivals in the court, and the popularity she now enjoyed could quickly turn into persecution.

Esther respected Mordecai. Even though she was married to a king, she honored

him as a father and turned to him for advice. As a Jewish girl, Esther was no doubt familiar with the commandment in Exodus 20:12. The Hebrew word for honor suggests a significant, lifelong responsibility. It means to give high regard, respect, and esteem to someone. Certainly Esther gave that honor and respect to Mordecai and valued his wisdom and perspective.

As he sat at the gates of the palace, Mordecai made a surprising discovery (v. 21). He overheard a discussion between two of the king's officers who were plotting to execute the king. Mordecai confided in Esther, who immediately warned the king. And she went further: she made sure to give the credit to Mordecai, so that his wisdom would be captured in the official record. Her decision to honor Mordecai in this way meant that he was noted for posterity as a hero—the man who saved the king.

APPLY THE WORD

We should pay honor to the men and women who have shaped our lives, whether they are our biological parents, teachers, pastors, neighbors, or friends. Take a moment to thank God for those who have played a part in your life. Share their story with your children and grandchildren as a way to honor them and preserve a record of their lives in the next generations.

PRAY WITH US

Paul Santhouse, VP of Publications, would appreciate your prayer support today for the ministry of Moody Publishers. We thank the Lord for the faithful service of the Moody Publishers staff as they provide Christians with high-quality materials.

If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it.

Daniel 3:17

SATURDAY
SEPTEMBER

10

Honoring God Alone

King Nebuchadnezzar constructed a golden statue and ordered everyone to worship it. Three young Jewish men in the king's court refused to bow, and they were punished for their defiance by being thrown into a furnace. To the king's amazement, the fire did not destroy them. Instead, God protected them, and their obedience to God became an example to the king, his court, and the Jewish people. Nebuchadnezzar praised the God of Israel: "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants" (Dan. 3:28).

Years later, Mordecai was in a similar predicament. Some time had passed since Esther became queen. Things had been going well for both Esther and Mordecai, who were now situated in their positions in the king's court.

But we meet a new person in today's passage: Haman the Agagite. He was

promoted to an elevated position in the court by King Xerxes, "higher than that of all the other nobles" (v. 1). To reinforce Haman's status, the king ordered that everyone must kneel and pay honor to Haman.

Mordecai refused to obey. His repeated act of civil disobedience was soon noticed by others. From verse 4, we can assume that Mordecai chose to reveal his Jewish heritage as a way to explain his refusal to pay homage to Haman. People urged him to go along with the new order, to just bow down. When Mordecai resisted their peer pressure to kneel before Haman, they reported his insubordination.

Right away we see Haman's character revealed. He could not tolerate one man who refused to bow before him. He decided to target not only Mordecai but also all his people—a vendetta that would destroy the Jews.

APPLY THE WORD

Mordecai's action reminds us that we serve first and foremost our heavenly King. His commands guide our actions and give us courage to stand up for our beliefs, no matter how unpopular they may be. Ask God to give you a heart that is open and obedient to His leading and willing to bear witness to Him no matter how uncomfortable the situation.

PRAY WITH US

Please include in your prayers today Moody's Publishing Channels team headed by Adam Dalton. Our prayer is that they will follow God's guidance in developing strategy and new ways of reaching our audience.

SUNDAY
SEPTEMBER

11

*The one who is in you is greater than
the one who is in the world.*

1 John 4:4

When Evil Threatens

Muhammad Ali was known for being a winning boxer with tremendous self-confidence. Before a fight, he would boast about his skill, declaring, “I am the greatest.” But eventually the greatest was humbled. In 1970, Ali met his match in Joe Frazier during the “Fight of the Century,” suffering his first loss after 31 consecutive wins.

Haman’s self-regard moved past confidence into full-fledged vanity. He enjoyed lording his elevated position over everyone, requiring people to bow down before him and kiss his ring. Haman was also cruel and fueled by hatred for God’s people. Haman’s rage against Mordecai escalated when he learned that Mordecai was Jewish (v. 6). Rather than focusing on destroying one man, Haman became bent on eliminating all of God’s people.

Haman asked the king’s fortunetellers to pick a lucky time for him to carry out

his evil act (v. 7). Next, he had to figure out how to manipulate the king in order to get approval for his plot. Notice how Scripture subtly reveals where the real power and authority lie—not with Xerxes, who, although he is supposed to be the most powerful person on earth, is manipulated by others throughout this story.

Haman gained Xerxes’ approval for his plan by exaggerating the perceived threat. He said that the Jews dispersed throughout the empire, and their customs and manners were different from the rest (v. 8). Haman preyed on Xerxes’ fear of instability to convince him to authorize the massacre.

Haman’s trickery and flattery were so successful that Xerxes agreed to fund the plot to destroy the Jews. The king would not stop this evil man. Would evil finally triumph over good? Would God’s people be destroyed?

APPLY THE WORD

Are you facing opposition because you have taken a stand for God? Perhaps you’ve resisted joining in the neighborhood gossip, or you won’t cut corners at the office. Trusting God doesn’t free us from opposition, but it does remind us who has the true power and who will be victorious. Ask the Lord to give you courage and grace to stand firm.

PRAY WITH US

We ask that you uphold in prayer the president of Moody Global Ministries, Dr. Paul Nyquist, who marks his seventh anniversary of serving at Moody this year. Join us as we thank God for blessing Moody with godly leadership.

The evil deeds of the wicked ensnare them; the cords of their sins hold them fast.

Proverbs 5:22

An Evil Order

In William Shakespeare's *Othello*, the character of Iago epitomizes evil. He will do anything to gain power, no matter whom he must destroy. He pretends to be sincere while manipulating others into committing terrible crimes. Iago deceives Othello into believing that his wife, Desdemona, has been unfaithful, a lie that results in their tragic deaths. No matter how destructive his actions, Iago shows no remorse.

Today's passage reads like a terrible nightmare. Haman, the vain and evil palace advisor, had secured the king's permission to eliminate the Jewish people. The decree, signed and sealed during the first month, was to be carried out on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month. The Jewish people had eleven months to live.

Within the timespan of a single day, they would be decimated. Note the viciousness of this plan: "destroy,

kill and annihilate" (v. 13). The order did not just apply to the leaders of the Jewish people but to everyone: young and old, women and children. And, just as Haman had desired, they would "plunder" the belongings of the Israelites.

The decree was written in every language, delivered to every location, and distributed to every leader. It was sealed by the signet ring that King Xerxes had given to Haman. As the proclamation was delivered to the furthest locations and read in every tongue, shock and fear prevailed.

Meanwhile, Haman had no remorse. Instead, he celebrated: "The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered" (v. 15). He was willing to pay any price to soothe his own vanity. In eleven months, the Jewish people would be destroyed.

APPLY THE WORD

Many of us have received devastating news—a job layoff, a terrible medical diagnosis, or a betrayal by a friend. Just like Haman's pronouncement, these are truly horrible events, and God does not ask us to pretend otherwise. But thankfully we can know that devastating news never catches Him off guard. He is still present and still cares for us.

PRAY WITH US

Today we have the privilege to pray for the staff of Practical Christian Ministry who guide our students' ministry program in Chicagoland and overseas: Catherine Christopher, Don Martindell, Nathan Strand, Roberto Rivera, and Unity Ostercamp.

TUESDAY
SEPTEMBER

13

*You will weep and mourn while the world rejoices.
You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.*

John 16:20

A Time to Mourn

The custom of wearing black garments to a funeral dates to the Roman Empire, when togas made of dark-colored wool were worn during times of mourning. Women would often cover their heads with black caps or veils. The immediate family of the deceased would wear black for an extended period of time—widows for as long as two years.

The effects of Haman’s evil act were immediately felt by the Jewish people. There was “great mourning” in every province of the country (v. 3). Mordecai visibly displayed his grief by putting on sackcloth and ashes.

Sackcloth, similar to today’s burlap, was a material made of coarse, black goat’s hair. It was traditionally worn as either a sign of mourning or of repentance. When Jacob thought his son was dead, he mourned and put on sackcloth (Gen. 37:34). Ashes were applied to the head, or sometimes the mourner would sit

amidst them to signify humility or being downcast and afflicted.

While people throughout the empire wept and fasted at the news of their terrible impending fate, Xerxes and his nobility wanted no part of it. They ruled that anyone showing visible signs of mourning would not be allowed within the palace gates. They wanted to create an artificial bubble in which everyone was happy and successful and safe.

Because of this ruling, Esther was initially unaware of Haman’s edict and its effect on her people. Esther’s attendants, knowing of her close relationship with Mordecai, brought her the news of his distress. Unlike others in the palace, Esther wanted to know why Mordecai and others were in mourning. She was willing to experience their sorrow and grief.

APPLY THE WORD

When others are in mourning, we might want to insist that their sorrow not penetrate our walls of happiness and comfort. Esther reminds us to extend acts of kindness and love during difficult days. Practical examples such as providing a meal or sending encouraging notes can help us obey the command to bear the burdens of others (Gal. 6:2).

PRAY WITH US

Would you uphold in prayer the service of Steven Mogck, executive VP and chief operating officer? May the Lord give him strength for his many leadership responsibilities at Moody, and may the Operations teams continue to work well together.

Be strong and courageous . . . for the LORD your God goes with you.

Deuteronomy 31:6

WEDNESDAY
SEPTEMBER

14

A Risky Message

During the Revolutionary War, the British and American armies used invisible ink to deliver confidential messages. They would mix ferrous sulfate and water to place secret messages in between the lines of a seemingly innocent letter. When the letter was placed over the flame of a candle, its hidden message was revealed.

Today's passage involves a secret message that needed to be delivered to the queen. At Esther's request, Hathak, one of the eunuchs appointed to her service, left the palace and met Mordecai in the open square of the city (v. 6). Mordecai was unable to pass through the king's gate while he was in mourning. Esther, likewise, could not go to Mordecai directly.

Not wasting any time, Mordecai laid out all of the details of Haman's plot to destroy the Jewish people, a plot that threatened both himself and Esther. He

provided specific evidence to prove his case, the exact amount of money Haman had promised, and a copy of the edict. He could not risk this message being dismissed as an empty rumor or fear-mongering.

Mordecai realized that Esther alone was in a prime position of influence. She was the one person who might be able to prevent the destruction of God's people. He would ask Esther, this woman whom he had raised as a daughter, to risk her life on her people's behalf (v. 8).

This conversation held risk for everyone involved. If Haman or Xerxes were to find out about this collusion, they would not wait eleven months to punish them. Esther, Mordecai, and Hathak had to trust each other to keep the information confidential and prioritize the safety of the Jewish people over their own immediate security.

APPLY THE WORD

Believers around the world today must take great risks in order to worship together, to share the gospel, or even to read the Bible. Let us support our brothers and sisters in Christ in our prayers, and may their testimonies inspire us to live boldly for God. For more information about how you can pray for persecuted Christians, see persecution.com.

PRAY WITH US

Today your prayers will be an encouragement for Mollie Bond and Amyra Rodriguez from Foundations and Corporate Relations on Moody's Chicago campus. Ask the Lord to give them grace, good communication, and favor with the organizations they reach.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

by Dr. Winfred O. Neely, Professor of Preaching and Pastoral Studies

Q **Since the Lord never tempts His people, why does Jesus instruct us in the model prayer to pray, “Lead us not into temptation” (Matt. 6:13)?**

A God’s holy character is at the heart of this question. In His goodness and wisdom, God tests us to bring out the best in us or to reveal to us His character and provision in our lives (see Genesis 22 and the book of Job). But He never tempts us to do evil (James 1:13–15). Satan and our sinful natures are the sources of our temptations (see Matt. 4:1–11; 1 Thess. 3:5).

In the Lord’s Prayer, described by some as the model prayer, after we have asked for forgiveness, we ask our heavenly Father not to lead us into those things that cause us to yield to temptation in the first place. We ask our heavenly Father to keep us from anything that will bring us into sin, any temptation that will result in us yielding to sin. We are not asking for exemption from all temptation. We want God’s protection from temptations that we cannot handle.

Jesus further connects prayers and deliverance from temptation in Mark 14:38: “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” When our hearts are filled with holy desire

to honor the Lord in our lives, we seek to avoid falling into sin. We follow the instruction of Jesus to pray for the Father’s guidance and the Spirit’s power to deliver us from temptations that would overcome us.

This request should be on our lips every day! And according to 1 Corinthians 10:13, our faithful God will always provide a way for us to escape any temptation that we cannot handle. He delights to answer this prayer. When we yield to temptation we have no one to blame but ourselves.

Q **I am a new Christian. I was told that adultery is more than merely a physical act of marital unfaithfulness. Is this true?**

A According to our Lord’s own words, adultery is not only a physical act, it is also a willful act engaged in at the level of the heart and the imagination. Read and study Matthew 5:27–30.

Q **In my view, the Lord’s solution to the problem of heart adultery in Matthew 5:27–30 is extreme. How am I to understand our Lord’s words? Is He saying that we are literally to gouge out our eyes and cut off our right hand in order to deal with the problem of the sinful desires of our hearts?**

Given the brevity of our lives, we are arrogant and unwise when we plan our futures without God's will being the center and circumference of our plans.

A Our Lord's language of gouging out the right eye and cutting off the right hand is shocking. In fact, New Testament scholar D. A. Carson suggests that right hand may be a euphemism for the male sex organ, making the language even more graphic. Some have taken His words to mean just that. For example, centuries ago, Origen, a leader in the ancient church, was so disturbed by his own inner lusts that he had himself castrated.

But literally gouging out an eye or cutting off a hand cannot solve the lust problems of the heart (see Col. 2:20–23). In this passage Jesus is using a figure of speech called *hyperbole*, a deliberate overstatement of the truth, to emphasize to us how serious the issue is. The sense of desperation, visceral physical reactions, and horror we feel and experience in imagining the literal maiming in response to lust is exactly how we ought to feel and think about our impure imaginations. We should have a holy, godly, and Spirit-empowered sense of desperation about getting sin out our lives, a complete conviction about maintaining the sanctification and purity of our hearts and our imaginations. Jesus uses overstatement to emphasize the importance of the exclusive devotion between a husband and wife in action, heart, mind, and the deepest recesses of imagination.

Q Why does James use the image of mist to describe human life (James 4:14)?

A This image occurs in the book of James in the context of correcting Christians who plan their futures without taking the Lord's will into consideration (see James 4:13–17). In addressing this problem, James confronts us with a question: *What is your life?* Many people live without reflection on this question. Some have reflected on it, and even devoted vast amounts of time and energy to seeking an answer. This question drove Henry David Thoreau to live alone in the woods on the shores of Walden Pond in search of an answer. Others have tried to capture the answer to the question with images and metaphors. Life is a circus. Life is a dance. Life is a jigsaw puzzle. Life is a journey. Life is a minefield. Life is a symphony.

James uses "mist" as a metaphor for life. This image underscores the brevity of life. Life is short. We may or may not be here tomorrow. Given the brevity of our lives, we are arrogant and unwise when we plan our futures without God's will being the center and circumference of our plans. We can be tempted to think that our opinions are the solid ground for our lives, when in reality we should trust the everlasting, unchanging nature of God, who alone is perfectly true and perfectly reliable.

THURSDAY
SEPTEMBER

15

And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?

Esther 4:14

A Brave Queen

In 1982, Angela Cavallo was watching her son Tony while he worked on his 1964 Chevy Impala. Suddenly, the car came off the jacks and collapsed on top of him. In an unbelievable act of strength and courage, Angela lifted the car up four inches while neighbors pulled her son to safety. She credits her unexpected surge of strength to prayer.

Today's passage describes an act of courage that could be fueled only by prayer. When Esther heard Mordecai's request, she was troubled. She sent back word, explaining the penalty that might come to her if she bothered the king with an unwanted request (v. 11). She was required to wait until being summoned by the king. It was highly unusual, even forbidden, that she—or anyone else for that matter—should enter the king's presence unbidden.

While Esther had been the king's favorite, there was no guarantee that he

would extend the golden scepter to her and spare her life. Mordecai reminded Esther that, whether she went to the king or not, she would be at risk. As a Jewish woman, she too would be killed. Then Mordecai reminded her of the miraculous circumstances of her life, challenging her to answer: "Who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (v. 14).

Esther took seriously the gravity of the situation. A woman of faith, she asked that the Jews in Susa fast for her. For three nights and three days, Esther, her attendants, and the Jews in Susa would fast. Then, she would enter the king's presence and make her risky request.

Esther's final words reveal the status of her heart: "And if I perish, I perish" (v. 16). She would pray, take action, and trust the consequences to God.

APPLY THE WORD

Today's passage is a portrait of courage, and it also highlights the importance of prayer. Before taking action, Esther and the community spent time in prayer and fasting. Before our bold moves should come our bold prayers (see Heb. 4:16). What do you need to bring before God in prayer today? Pray for the requests on your heart.

PRAY WITH US

Ken Heullitt, chief financial officer, and his staff appreciate your prayer support and thank you for your financial contribution to Moody's ministries. Please pray that our partnership with Moody's friends and donors increases for God's glory.

*Let us then approach God's throne
of grace with confidence.*

Hebrews 4:16

FRIDAY
SEPTEMBER

16

Approaching the Throne

In September 2016, a group of middle-school students in St. Augustine, Fla., were chosen to meet with royalty. Their artwork was presented as a gift to the king and queen of Spain, who included the historic American city on their royal tour. The children wore their nicest clothes and were visibly awestruck by the experience. Said Caitlyn, one of the student artists, “I was really excited, and I didn’t know what to think or expect.”

An invitation to meet royalty is not to be taken lightly. Even though she was queen, Esther waited three days before approaching the king (v. 1). She adorned her royal robes but did not approach the king directly. Instead, she stood nearby where he would be able to see her (v. 2). The tension builds in the text: we know that Xerxes thought highly of Esther, but we still breathe a sigh of relief when he extended his scepter, a sign that she was welcome to approach the throne.

We learn a few things about Esther from this passage. First, we see that she was respectful. She took care in approaching his throne, wearing appropriate outfits and waiting until he addressed her first. Second, she was patient. She did not rush to give the king her request, even though the urgency was weighing on her mind. Instead, she asked that Haman and the king join her for a banquet (v. 4).

At the banquet, the king once again extended a generous offer, “up to half the kingdom” (v. 6). Instead of bursting forth with a plea, Esther exhibited grace and patience. She asked the king and Haman to attend yet another banquet the following day. Esther was beautiful and smart, and also gracious, respectful, and patient. She proceeded thoughtfully, knowing many lives depended on her success.

APPLY THE WORD

How wonderful that we can approach the throne of grace without intimidation or fear. We should never take it for granted that we have been invited to talk one-on-one with God, the all-powerful King of the universe, at any time. We have an all-access pass to the throne room of the King. Thank Him today and bring Him your concerns.

PRAY WITH US

Your prayer will be an encouragement for Camille Ward, Dan Hassler, and Kayla Hembree in the Office of Institutional Effectiveness on our Chicago campus, as they help with accreditations, institutional research, and surveys.

SATURDAY
SEPTEMBER

17

*All who rage against you will surely be
ashamed and disgraced.*

Isaiah 41:11

Hatred Revealed

Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” Hate is a powerful and destructive emotion, but God’s love vanquishes man’s hatred.

Haman began the day “happy and in high spirits” (v. 5). He was unaware of Esther’s intention in selecting him for this special banquet. Instead, he bragged to his friends and family about his high position in the king’s court. His good mood at being selected for a banquet with the king and queen temporarily offset his hatred of Mordecai. But his rage was never far from his mind. Even his boasting about his position and wealth gave him “no satisfaction” (v. 13), as long as Mordecai was allowed to exist. Even though Haman knew Mordecai would be killed within the year, it was no longer enough. He craved immediate results. His hatred was boundless.

Haman’s wife and friends had a suggestion. He should set in motion a gruesome plan for Mordecai’s death. That way the execution would happen promptly, and Haman could enjoy his exclusive invitation. Haman was “delighted” by their suggestion (v. 14), and immediately put the plan in action.

Death by impalement was a particularly gruesome choice, intended to make a spectacle and example of the one being punished. Verse 14 describes the pole as being 50 cubits high, approximately 75 feet. Haman’s rage was clearly out of control.

God’s people have often been the targets of anger. In Isaiah, God assures that He alone will vindicate such rage. “All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced” (Isa. 41:11). Mordecai’s fate would not be determined by Haman. He was safe in the protection of the Almighty God.

APPLY THE WORD

Haman reminds us that when we allow our hatred to fester, it will lead us to monstrous places. Unfettered hate will drive out our ability to enjoy God’s good gifts. If you struggle with hatred or bitterness today, confess it before the Lord and ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with the fruit of the Spirit instead (see Gal. 5:22–23).

PRAY WITH US

Janet Stiven, vice president and general counsel, guides the legal matters at Moody by following the biblical principles of faith and integrity with her legal expertise. She will appreciate your prayers for her ministry at Moody.

The LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.

Psalm 147:11

SUNDAY
SEPTEMBER

18

A Sleepless Night

People will try counting sheep, drinking warm milk, taking deep breaths, and moving the television out of the room in order to get some shut-eye. In today's passage, God uses a sleepless night to change the course of history.

The beginning of Esther 6 contains an ironic turn of events. Haman was preparing to destroy Mordecai. But now there would be a great reversal: he would be asked to construct an elaborate plan to honor him.

Notice how God intervened in the plot line of the tragic story. Even before Xerxes heard Esther's request, Mordecai's act of bravery was brought to his attention. The king could not sleep. We know that throughout Scripture, God often spoke to men and women in dreams and visions, and we can reasonably conclude that He was responsible for this restless, sleepless night in the palace. God engineered

events to bring something to King Xerxes' attention.

The king asked for the book that chronicled the historical records of his kingdom. Certainly the lengthy, detailed manuscript would be enough to induce drowsiness! But the book had the opposite effect. The king was reminded of Mordecai's act of heroism when Mordecai prevented his assassination (2:21–23). Although the guilty officials had been put to death for the attempt, Mordecai had never been rewarded.

In a wonderful ironic twist, Haman was asked to suggest a reward for the hero. In his self-centered way, Haman assumed the recipient of the king's gratitude would be himself (v. 6). He certainly never expected that the recipient would be Mordecai. While honoring Mordecai would delight the king, it was devastating and humiliating for the man who wanted to destroy him.

APPLY THE WORD

Do you realize that your acts of loyalty and love can delight *your* King? Psalm 147:11 says that God delights in those who fear Him and put their hope in Him. It is wonderful to know that we can bring joy and honor to our God. Ask Him today to guide your steps and to make each word and action one that will bring Him delight.

PRAY WITH US

Please include in your prayers the staff of the Legal department on Moody's Chicago campus: Amber Adames, Cassandra Blakely, Emmy Koh, and Ryan June. May they follow God's guidance as they work together and assist Moody's general counsel.

The eyes of the arrogant will be humbled and human pride brought low; the LORD alone will be exalted.

Isaiah 2:11

A Hero Is Honored

An Aesop’s fable involves two roosters who each want to be king of the farmyard. Finally, one won the title. The losing rooster hid in a corner while the winner squawked and ran about the yard, boasting with pleasure. Suddenly, an eagle flew by, swooped down, and snatched the winning rooster in his talons. The losing rooster, still sitting by the wayside, became the new reigning king. Pride, said Aesop, goes before a great fall.

In an act of supreme humiliation, Haman was forced to honor Mordecai as a hero. He helped him put on the king’s royal robe and led him through the streets on the horse announcing that the king was pleased with Mordecai (v. 11). How devastating this must have been to Haman who had assumed he would be the intended recipient.

Notice the contrasting actions of the two men in today’s passage. After being

honored, Mordecai returned “to the king’s gate” (v. 12). Despite having just received great honor from the highest in command, he did not strut about but immediately resumed his duty.

Haman, on the other hand, was self-centered, consumed by grief at his own loss. He immediately shared his displeasure with those closest to him. They advised Haman not to continue his pursuit of Mordecai and the Jewish people: “you will surely come to ruin” (v. 13). The text does not tell us Haman’s response. But knowing his deep hatred for Mordecai and how insulted he felt, it would be safe to assume their caution had little effect on him.

Regardless, Haman had little time to reflect on his choices as he was expected at the king’s table for the banquet given by Esther (v. 14). Haman was still motivated by personal pride, and God was not finished with his story.

APPLY THE WORD

Today’s tale cautions against our pride. We are not to be puffed up or worried about our own honor or reward. Instead, we should let God honor us in His own way and timing. Lay your personal concerns and vanity at His feet, and let Him reward you. Even more, do not be concerned with eliminating your competition. Pride leads to destruction.

PRAY WITH US

Please uphold in prayer Dr. Timothy Arens, VP and dean of Student Life, and his team on Moody’s Chicago campus. Ask the Lord to give them renewed vision for the students and a desire to seek Christ continually in all their decisions about campus life.

*Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.*

Psalm 80:3

The Queen's Request

Each U.S. president holds the power to overturn a judicial ruling and pardon someone who has been found guilty under a federal law, and the decision is not subject to congressional review. With a presidential pardon, a guilty person can be saved.

In today's passage, Queen Esther was given the opportunity to ask for a pardon of sorts for herself and for her people. At the banquet, in Haman's presence, King Xerxes repeated his promise to Esther for a third time. Not once, but three times, the king said he would grant her request, "up to half the kingdom" (v. 2).

Finally, Esther broke her silence and asked for her life to be spared. She also asked that the king spare the lives of her people. Remember that until this moment, Esther had not revealed her ethnicity to the king. She was taking a tremendous risk in making this request.

But her plea to the king also exposed the evil intent of Haman, who was seated with them at the table. Haman was not satisfied to take the Jewish people into slavery, as they had experienced in the past. If they had been made slaves, they would have had hope of recovering their freedom one day. Instead, Haman wanted to eliminate them altogether, taking their lives and plundering their possessions. Esther used the word *sold* to further reveal his evil intent (v. 4). Haman had not pursued this without an eye on profit. He would make money from his evil act.

Esther begged for her life before a human king. He had the power to change the law and save her life. We too stand condemned under the law. And our King has the power to remove the penalty and redeem us.

APPLY THE WORD

We have been offered a pardon. Scripture says that according to God's Law, we are guilty, but while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Because of Him, the penalty of sin has been removed. Through Christ, we are redeemed. If you do not have an assurance of salvation, read Romans 3-6, and accept God's pardon today.

PRAY WITH US

Scott Pinnow in Records Management will be grateful for the prayers of the *Today in the Word* family as he manages hundreds of electronic files of students' records. Pray for attention for detail and strength for his day-to-day tasks.

WEDNESDAY
SEPTEMBER

21

Grant me my life—this is my petition.

Esther 7:3

An Enemy Exposed

One of the classic Looney Tunes cartoons involved a road runner and the coyote who wanted to catch him. Wile E. Coyote ordered ammunition and trapping devices from the Acme Corporation, certain that he could explode, capture, or otherwise destroy the Road Runner. But, in every episode, the Coyote *always* failed and ended up being the one who was injured.

Haman, who wanted nothing more than to destroy Mordecai and the Jewish people, soon found himself the victim of his own plot. The banquet did not go as Haman expected. Rather than being honored as a special guest of the king and queen, he was accused by Esther of an evil plan to eliminate the Jewish people that would also take her life.

On hearing the news, the king “got up in a rage” (v. 7). Had he forgotten that he himself had approved the edict to destroy the Jewish people, an order that

would now harm his queen? Perhaps he was embarrassed and angry that he had been so fully deceived by Haman.

Haman was “terrified” (v. 6). Realizing his life was hanging in the balance, he turned his attention to Esther. The king, returning from his walk in the palace garden, saw Haman begging Esther for mercy, but it appeared that he was attempting to assault her. For the king, this violation of his trust was the final straw: he ordered Haman’s execution.

The violent means of punishment Haman had previously arranged for Mordecai would now be used for his own execution. Often in Scripture God speaks about the wicked meeting doom: “The violence comes down on their own heads” (Ps. 7:16). Certainly God had not overlooked the evil intent of Haman. He had not only rescued His people, but He also saw that Haman received his just reward.

APPLY THE WORD

Today’s reading teaches a cautionary lesson. We are not to be caught up in arranging the fate of our enemies. God said that vengeance will be His, and we are to leave their fate in God’s hands (Rom. 12:19). It is not our prerogative to obsess over the punishment of the evil ones. They will meet their fate and receive the punishment they deserve.

PRAY WITH US

The relationships with our donors have always been key to Moody’s ministries. We value the service of our Stewardship department staff, headed by Jim Elliott, who forge and expand these connections. Would you pray for them today?

I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

Exodus 33:19

THURSDAY
SEPTEMBER

22

A Heartfelt Plea

Thomas Cromwell was executed for treason on July 28, 1540. Before he met his fate, under the monarchy of Henry VIII, he wrote a letter to the king begging for mercy. Sent from his cell in the Tower of London, Cromwell pled: “Most gracious Prince, I cry for mercy, mercy, mercy!”

After reading of Haman’s punishment in Esther 7, we might assume that the edict targeting the Jewish people would be null and void. Certainly Esther and Mordecai were rejoicing! But in chapter 8, we again find Esther begging for mercy, asking the king to spare her life and the life of her people.

Before he responded, the king honored Mordecai by giving him the signet ring originally given to Haman. The ring bore the symbol of the king and was a representation of his power. Signet rings were pressed into clay to leave an impression and to authorize documents.

Giving the ring to Mordecai was another significant sign of recognition and respect. Echoing that action, Esther then appointed Mordecai over all of Haman’s estate. Clearly, his position in the kingdom had increased.

But Esther had a more consuming concern. Despite the punishment of Haman, the law which she protested was still in place. An edict, once signed and sealed by the king, would be considered final. The severity of the situation is clear from Esther’s actions: she wept and fell prostrate at the king’s feet. Her life and the lives of her people were hanging in the balance.

She asked the king to write another law which would save her people. “For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people?” (v. 6). Would God work through this earthly king to deliver His people?

APPLY THE WORD

When subjects approached the king, they could never be certain of the response. No wonder Esther was nervous. We serve a merciful God, who invites us to bring our requests before Him. We can confess our sins, give Him praise, and share our needs with the Lord, knowing that He is loving and gracious to His people.

PRAY WITH US

Today, we focus our prayers on Moody Bible Institute in Spokane, WA. Please ask for the Holy Spirit’s guidance in caring for the students by the Student Services department: Brian Jaworski, Kathleen Hills, Thomas Anderson, and Tina Armagost.

FRIDAY
SEPTEMBER

23

Like cold water to a weary soul is good news from a distant land.

Proverbs 25:25

The King's New Decree

Long before smartphones and email, the telegram was used from the mid 1800s to late 1900s to quickly deliver urgent messages across a long distance. The sender would go to a local post office and hand over a telegram form containing the intended message. Since a sum was charged for each word, brevity was of high importance. In addition to delivering personal messages, telegrams shared reactions to world events and informed people of breaking news.

The king's decision to allow Mordecai and Esther to write another decree set in motion the wheels of this new law (v. 8). Mordecai had been given the king's signet ring, so he had the power not only to enact the new law but also to expedite the process.

Notice the urgency in today's passage. Verse 9 starts with the words "At once." This law would be written, approved,

and enacted without delay. The royal secretaries were quickly brought in to pen the law. Only two months and ten days had passed since Haman issued the original edict (see 3:12), but there was no time to waste: the new edict was ready to be delivered, sent by couriers riding "fast horses" (v. 10).

The new edict affected the Jewish people who were scattered throughout the kingdom. Remember that the mourning in response to Haman's decree had been widespread: "In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing" (4:3). People living in terror now needed to hear word of the new law, in all 127 provinces from India to Cush (8:9). The edict was translated into the people's own script and language. With an impressive measure of speed, the good news was spread throughout the land.

APPLY THE WORD

Like Esther and Mordecai, we are the bearers of good news. We have news of salvation from the King! How often do we communicate this good news with the urgency it deserves? Consider today how you might tell someone about the life-changing message of the gospel. Ask God to bring one person to mind who needs to hear this truth.

PRAY WITH US

Greg Thornton, senior vice president of Media, oversees the ministries of Moody Radio and Moody Publishers. He welcomes your prayers for these two crucial areas of the outreach of Moody Global Ministries and for the teams who serve there.

*It was a time of happiness and joy,
gladness and honor.*

Esther 8:16

SATURDAY
SEPTEMBER

24

God's People Are Saved

At the end of World War II, *The Washington Times* stated, “WAR IS OVER.” *The Chicago Daily Tribune* declared, “GREAT WAR ENDS.” With capital letters and bold type, newspapers ushered in rejoicing across the nation that the war was finally over.

The new edict written by Mordecai and sealed by the king's ring (v. 10) brought about rejoicing throughout the land. The new law undermined the original one written by Haman. Rather than sanctioning the murder of the Jews, the new edict returned power to God's people (vv. 10–11). The edict said that on the day set for their destruction, the Jewish people could defend themselves. Notice the action verbs in verse 11. They were given the authority to “destroy, kill and annihilate” anyone who dared to try to attack them.

The date of the edict is also significant. Mordecai gave this permission to his

people on the very day that Haman's edict was set to be carried out, on the “thirteenth day of the twelfth month” (v. 12). While the original harmful law was not erased, the new law ensured their protection.

The old had become new. The effect of this new edict was immediate and widespread. No longer was Mordecai a man in mourning, dressed in sackcloth and ashes. He was now arrayed in gold and purple. The city of Susa, once filled with grieving people, is now described as “joyous” (v. 15). For God's people this was a time of great joy and happiness. They had been vindicated. Their lives had been spared.

God had triumphed over their enemies. As a result of this victory, many people of other nationalities became Jews. Rather than oppose God's people, they wanted to be part of a people who experienced such mighty deliverance.

APPLY THE WORD

Jesus places us under a new covenant, where His burden is easy and His yoke is light (Matt. 11:30). Though we still struggle with temptation, we have the power of the Holy Spirit to resist being controlled by sin (1 Cor. 10:13). We have the armor of God, spiritual weapons that the Lord has given us as part of our victory over evil (Eph. 6:10–18).

PRAY WITH US

We invite you to pray for the ministry of WMBW, Moody Radio Southeast, and the work of its staff, Paul Martin, Meredith Sexton, Jason McKay, David Morais, and Brent Manion. May their programs bless listeners and bring them closer to Christ!

SUNDAY
SEPTEMBER

25

All the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful.

Joshua 4:24

Mordecai Increases in Power

In one miracle to bring His people into the Promised Land, God dried up the Jordan River, allowing the Israelites to cross safely to the opposite side. The Lord instructed the people to erect a memorial of twelve stones that would serve as a continual reminder to them of His mighty salvation. “All the peoples of the earth” would bear witness to His power (Josh. 4:24).

In today’s passage, we also see God’s power on display, bearing witness to people from every nation. The thirteenth day of the twelfth month had finally arrived. Originally, Haman had declared that the Jewish people would be killed on this date. Now, “the tables were turned” (v. 1). With the new edict, the Jews had the power to overtake their enemies and destroy them. So great was their force that Scripture tells us that “no one could stand against them” (v. 2). The people had organized and gathered not only to defend

themselves and their possessions but also to go on the attack.

Word spread about the new edict and the newfound power of the Jewish people. So great was their influence that “the people of all the other nationalities were afraid of them” (v. 2). God had not only rescued them but also strengthened them. Mordecai, who once sat outside the gate in sackcloth and ashes, now had a prominent role in the government. “His reputation spread throughout the province, and he became more and more powerful” (v. 4). By increasing Mordecai’s power, God brought glory to Himself.

God’s hand had moved decisively throughout the kingdom. Haman was destroyed. The Jewish people were redeemed. Esther was saved. Mordecai was honored. God had not only delivered His people, He had gone beyond all expectations.

APPLY THE WORD

God can go beyond your expectations, too. Sometimes we go to God and ask hesitantly for small things. But we serve an all-powerful God. He can do far more than we would ever dream. Do not hesitate to bring big requests to God. Just as He redeemed the Jewish people in extraordinary ways, He can provide for you today.

PRAY WITH US

Please join us in prayer today and tomorrow for our computer specialists in Enterprise Infrastructure Services. We thank God today for the faithful service of Joseph Kessinger, Michael Paniak, and Kyle Sparrow.

*For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.*

Psalms 1:6

MONDAY
SEPTEMBER

26

Evil Is Thwarted

War inevitably results in casualties. The American Revolutionary War left an estimated 25,000 Americans dead and another 25,000 wounded. World War II claimed 405,000 U.S. lives, with an additional 670,000 wounded. Whether winners or losers, war can be costly.

In today's passage, the Jews dispatched their enemies who had threatened them. In the city of Susa alone, 500 men were killed (vv. 6, 12). With the sanction of Xerxes, the Jews were permitted to eliminate the people who had plotted against them and to ensure their long-term safety. God had ordained and directed the vindication of His people.

Notice a miraculous element in this passage that points to the hand of God. Whereas the Jewish people once feared for their lives, now they were enabled by God to kill their enemies quickly and ferociously. After the battle, they meted out judgment against the

ten sons of Haman, described here as “an enemy of the Jews” (v. 10). During the festival of Purim today, celebrants often read through the book of Esther aloud. Tradition calls for the names of Haman's sons to be read together, in one breath, without pause. This reflects the way in which they were killed, quickly and together.

What was *not* done during battle is also notable. The Jews chose not to “lay their hands on the plunder” (v. 10). In contrast to the evil plans of Haman, they did not wish to gain material goods, only to defend themselves and ensure the safety of God's people. They did not use the battle as an excuse to enrich their own coffers; rather, they focused on what was more important: bringing justice to the enemies of God. The king continued to honor Esther's request. He extended his permission to Esther, Mordecai, and God's people, to right what had been wronged.

APPLY THE WORD

Like the psalmist, we may cry out for God to act and punish those who do wrong. This passage reminds us that God is faithful, even when we don't know His timetable. He is all-powerful and all-knowing God, and He has the final victory. Praise Him that when all is said and done, our God will triumph over evil.

PRAY WITH US

Today we continue to encourage the Enterprise Infrastructure Services staff—Paul Walker, James Hickman, and Deryn O'Brien—as they maintain all computers in good working order. Thank you for partnering with us in prayer for them!

TUESDAY
SEPTEMBER

27

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Celebration in the Kingdom

The book of Ecclesiastes declares that for everything there is a season: “a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance” (3:4). In the city of Susa and throughout the Persian kingdom, the Jewish people had reason to celebrate. They had been vindicated; the enemy had been vanquished.

Verses 16 through 18 summarize what took place on these two days of the month of Adar. When thousands of people attempted to attack the Jews in the provinces, they were killed—some 75,000 (v. 16). The Jews in Susa took two days to complete their triumph over their enemies. Notice that their deliverance required their participation—God had made a way of salvation, but they still had to take up arms to seize the victory.

At last, they had been given “relief from their enemies” (v. 16). Considering all the prior months filled with terror,

weeping, and grief, this victory in battle brought long-anticipated calm and then an overwhelming spirit of joy.

This was a time to celebrate. Evil had been thwarted. God was in control. Two different days were named times for “joy and feasting.” In both cases, they observed the day by giving presents to one another. They had lived through a significant period of hardship, but they had also witnessed God’s provision in a miraculous way. He had been generous to them, so they now would be generous with one another (v. 19).

God created His people for times of work, times of rest, and times of celebration. In Exodus 10:9, Moses instructed the Israelites to “celebrate a festival to the Lord.” In Exodus 12:17, they celebrated the Festival of Unleavened Bread. God’s provision for His people deserves to be honored and remembered. It is a time for great joy.

APPLY THE WORD

God wants us to have time for work and time for rest and rejoicing. Be sure you observe a day of celebration in your regular routine. Whether a special meal or another meaningful observance, thank God for His provision and remember how He has worked in your life. We should rejoice, for we serve a good and generous God.

PRAY WITH US

Please pray for Ann Meyer and Kristina Blakely in Health Services on Moody’s Chicago campus. Ask the Lord to protect their health as they help our students and staff to stay healthy.

Their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration.

Esther 9:22

WEDNESDAY
SEPTEMBER

28

A Time of Feasting

Jewish people still celebrate the Feast of Purim each year, usually during the month of March. They set aside a day to celebrate God’s deliverance of their people as recorded in the book of Esther. They exchange gifts, make charitable donations, prepare special dishes like pastries nicknamed “Haman’s Hat,” and participate in the public reading of Esther. A special prayer, *Al ha-Nissim*, which is translated “For the Miracles,” is said at morning, noon, and night. They take time to celebrate and remember what God has done.

Indeed, the Jewish people had a miracle to celebrate. God had delivered them from death. Today’s passage records the very first Purim celebration. Mordecai made the day official (v. 21). They were to do three things: observe a day of feasting, give presents to one another, and give to the poor (v. 22). Certainly this would have been a welcome announcement after months of fear and

days of intense battle. God had been good to His people and delivered them from Haman’s wicked plot.

This passage re-tells the story and explains the meaning of the word *Purim*, which comes from the word *pur*, the lots that are cast in divination (v. 24). Haman had decided the fate of the Jewish people by consulting fortunetellers who had cast lots, but God prevented Haman from carrying out his wicked plan.

Notice the word *every* used repeatedly in verse 28. This celebration would be carried out by “every family, and in every province and in every city” (v. 28). The happiness should be pervasive. This event had decided their fate and changed the course of history. They were never to forget what God had done. Purim would help them remember, so “the memory of these days” would not die out for future generations (v. 28).

APPLY THE WORD

We often come to God with requests, and He has invited us to do so. But sometimes we need to set aside time to thank Him for what He has done. We must tell the stories of God’s blessings to our children and our children’s children. Take time today to thank God, to remember what He has done, and to celebrate His work in your life.

PRAY WITH US

Moody Aviation in Spokane, WA, is in our prayers today and tomorrow. Praise God for the fruitful ministry of the Airframe and Powerplant staff: Brian Writebol, Gregory Heller, Jodi Appleby, Mark McIntire, and Steven Thimsen.

THURSDAY
SEPTEMBER

29

Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past.

Deuteronomy 32:7

Letters from the Queen

The Library of Congress has more than 20,000 documents from President Abraham Lincoln’s life and political career. Among the collection are letters, speeches, and personal notes. One particularly treasured artifact is a draft of the Emancipation Proclamation dated July 22, 1862. Great effort is taken to preserve these records of our history.

As we close the book of Esther, we see that the events which have transpired will not be forgotten. Queen Esther and Mordecai wrote a second letter of confirmation to establish the days of Purim. They had “full authority” given to them by the king (v. 29). Notice the level of documentation that confirmed their decision. In addition to the writing of the official edict, letters were sent to each of the 127 provinces. The letters brought good news, words of “goodwill and assurance” (v. 30), and established the tradition of celebrating Purim. They did more than simply inform the Jewish

people who were alive at the time of Esther and Mordecai. This information was intended to be recorded and handed down for generations to come.

Throughout Scripture, there is an emphasis on recording the words of God and memorializing the significant moments between God and His people. In Exodus, the Ten Commandments were written on tablets of stone to record the Law of God for His people. Throughout the Old Testament, genealogies were carefully recorded, temple ceremonies paid close attention to detail, and parents passed along the stories of God to their children.

Each word, every letter, was recorded so they would “remember the days of old” (Deut. 32:7)—not just to remember the event or to celebrate a fun holiday, but to remember how God had moved to deliver and vindicate His people and to celebrate His mercy and power.

APPLY THE WORD

Have you written down your personal testimony? Some genealogists find important dates penned in the family Bible. Write a simple record of how God has worked in your life. Tuck it in your Bible or share it with your family. Show how God has been important to you and let future generations see how His hand has been at work in your life.

PRAY WITH US

While praying for Moody in Spokane, please bring Moody Aviation administration to the top of your prayer list. Pray that God would bless the leadership of Jim Conrad, program manager, and the service of his administrative assistant, Jan Seiersen.

No one is like you, LORD; you are great, and your name is mighty in power.

Jeremiah 10:6

FRIDAY
SEPTEMBER

30

For the Good of God's People

What makes a man great? What distinguishes him from the ordinary? Ralph Waldo Emerson connected greatness to humility: "A great man is always willing to be little." Winston Churchill observed, "Good and great are seldom in the same man."

Mordecai, was a man who was not only great but also good. What factors contributed to Mordecai's success? First, Mordecai was devoted. He took care of his cousin, Esther. He raised her and loved her as his own daughter (2:7). Even when she was grown and entered the king's palace, he would visit every day to see how she was doing (2:11). He demonstrated his love toward Esther with consistent, unselfish actions.

Second, Mordecai was brave and a person of decisive and courageous action. He uncovered the conspiracy against the king and saved his life (2:23). He learned of Haman's plot

to execute the Jewish people and devised a plan to save them. Third, Mordecai was a person of integrity and humility. Even though he knew the consequences, he refused to bow down to Haman (3:2). When he learned of the fate of his people, he did not sulk privately but put on sackcloth and ashes and mourned at the king's gate (4:2).

Mordecai earned the respect of the Jewish people and the king because he was caring, decisive, humble, and consistent. He was a man of honor. Esther 10 says King Xerxes left behind a tremendous legacy that included "his acts of power and might." But those records also featured the "greatness of Mordecai" (v. 2).

God worked through the good lives of Mordecai and Esther for the good of His people. They would not be forgotten.

APPLY THE WORD

How is God working through your life? As we conclude the study of Esther, ask God to use you, as He did Esther and Mordecai, as His faithful servant. Ask Him to humble you, challenge you, and stretch you as you follow Him through the twists and turns of your own life story. Ask Him for the courage to be a great man or woman of God.

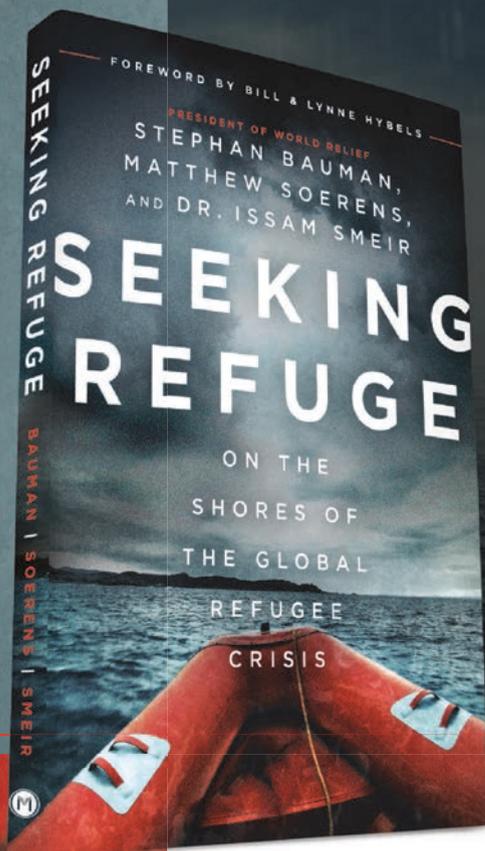
PRAY WITH US

Considering this month's topic, we praise God for being a mighty Deliverer for His people throughout history and today. We also thank Him for the opportunity to study His Word together with thousands of people with the help of *Today in the Word*.

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