

## Behind the scenes

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to live on death row? We have all seen the movies where the innocent person heads down the prison corridor to face a lethal injection or the electric chair, after eating their last meal, with the innocent hero's legal team frantically working behind the scenes to get a pardon from the State Governor and prove his innocence.

Will it come in time, as the clock slowly ticks down tick, tick, tick, tick,

This is where we find Ester and the Jewish race with the clock ticking, tick, tick, tick. They know the very day planned for their annihilation, a day in the 12 month the month of Adar. We have rightly focused over the last few weeks on the main characters of the story, but I wonder what the Jewish people out in the provinces would have been going through?

They would not have had a clue what God was up to, how he was working behind the scenes through Esther and Mordecai.

I wonder how we would have planned for those final days who would we visit? What would we do with our time? All the things collected in life would they really be of any value, when facing the last moments of our lives?

I wonder how many people today are unaware of Gods rescue plan for them through his son Jesus.

It struck in reading this passage that Jesus was in a similar place as Esther and her people. I believe he knew exactly when and how he was going to die, I am not sure at what point in his life he knew he was going to die but I believe he knew and yet he willingly laid down his life for all mankind, just as Esther was prepared to lay down her life for her people. She says if I perish I perish and Jesus said:

Mark 14:36 "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

The clock is ticking for each one of us here today and for all mankind whether we like it or not tick, tick, tick, either Jesus will return or we will be called to be with Jesus in heaven or will we?

In the meantime where is our focus going to be?

Is it on ourselves or is it trusting in God's plan for our lives as Esther did? Where things may seem impossible are we prepared to turn back to God in the mess and seek his face and direction?

The big difference for us is we don't know when we will die, but it will happen one day, we just need to be sure where we are going when it does.

Know you may think this is a bit of a morbid start, but when the main focus of the passage is on someone being hanged it's a little unavoidable. This is the joy of going through a whole book you can't pick and choose the bits you like you have to go with it as is.

So I want to unpack how God starts to work in an impossible situation and the consequences for Haman.

Esther 7 1-10

Haman at the beginning of this passage as he goes off to the second banquet is still unaware of his fate, although his friends have some inclination

6 v 13, His advisors and his wife Zeresh said to him "Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of a Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him you will surely come to ruin!"

They seem to have suddenly changed their tune from Chapter 5 v 14. His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him "Have a gallows built seventy five feet high".

At this point in the story I feel a little sorry for Haman, he had surrounded himself with yes men and women who all encouraged him to build the gallows and take action against Mordecai and the Jews. But when they see the tide turning, circumstances changing, they start to change their minds you should have known better that to take on the Jewish people.

It happens in business you get the leader who flatters or bullies their way to the top and no one challenges their work ethics until it's too late. People get caught up in their own agenda, self-importance and pride until it all goes wrong, such as all those involved in the Leveson enquiry on phone hacking all

those who appeared to be untouchable and in complete power, suddenly come crashing down to earth.

Haman is no different he has worked his way up to the top of the tree into one of the highest positions in the land, seeing himself as the next king of the greatest empire of its day. Then in the space of 48 hours he is hanging on gallows, which he himself had commissioned to be built.

Sometimes it's so easy to get caught up in the busyness of life and our priorities that we forget about God. God is still at work in our lives whether we recognise it or not behind the scenes. It's only when we look back in life that we realise how God has been working in the mess just like the foot prints in the sand poem and when we look back we can only thank him, that God knew the best plan for our lives.

But reality can be that people only truly turn to God when life gets messy, Esther had to step up to the plate and save her people and if she didn't God would have called call someone else and she would have perished.

In life we have the tough challenge of either drawing closer to God or further away from him when life gets tough.

What sets the main characters of Esther and Mordecai apart from Haman was that they trusted in God alone and Haman in himself alone.

So Haman is brought to the party by the Eunuchs (6v14), interestingly only criminals tended to be brought to meetings and guests would make their own way. But we can only surmise why Haman was brought to Queen Esther's party by the Eunuchs.

Haman must have had a few things going through his mind on the way to the party from being on top of the world chapter 5v9 "Haman went out happy that day and in high spirits" being the special guest at a VIP party. To parading his enemy around on a horseback 6 v 11 to the uneasy feeling things aren't going to plan in his life.

So at the beginning to chapter 7 we have the happy group are sipping wine together at the party, but the king is still intrigued as to why his Queen had

risked her life in approaching him and can't wait any longer, what is your petition what is your request? Up to half my kingdom v2 and it shall be yours.

Esther is still respectful in her approach to the King drops the bomb shell that would have shaken Haman to the core v 3

“If I have found favour with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king”

King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, “Who is he? Where is he—the man who has dared to do such a thing?”

Esther said, “The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman!”

Haman is terrified and has nowhere to turn, Gods sovereign plan starts to unfold. All that God has been doing behind the scenes in the apparent mess of the impending annihilation of his people can now begin.

Interestingly as we will find out later the original the death sentence still stands over the Jewish people for once a decree was issued it could not be rescinded, but God is revealing his rescue plan, the way out for his people.

As I said earlier we are all living under a death sentence it might sound a bit morbid but none of us are immortal we will not live for ever but we have the choice of eternal life to make.

In Haman's case he realised too late that he had messed up, he knew having worked with the King for so long what his fate would be. So he begs at the feet of Queen Esther for his life, only to make things worse when the king returns to find him apparently molesting his wife.

We have reached a key turning point in this story the true nature of Haman's actions have come to light and the king sees him as he truly is.

Numbers 32 v 23 “you may be sure your sins will find you out”

It's ironic that a key element of this whole story starts with Haman being angry with Mordecai that he would not bow down and honour him chapter 3 v 5 and now we find him at the feet of a Jewish queen, begging for his life.

In the space of 48 hours God has turned disaster into victory, tragedy to hope.

So what are the challenges for us from this passage?

God called Esther to be faithful to his plan revealed through Mordecai, but it was a plan brought about through seeking God's face and being obedient to what God revealed.

I have been challenged recently by a book called "Finding Sanctuary Monastic Steps for Everyday Life" and the need to find space to listen and respond to God.

You may say that's a bit indulgent, but I read this:

There were three men who were friends and became monks. One chose to live out the saying 'blessed are the peacemakers' and worked to reconcile enemies. The second chose to visit the sick. But the third stayed in solitude. Now the first worked among many contentious people and found that he could not appease them all. So eventually he was overcome with exhaustion. He sought out his friend who was caring for the sick, only to find that he too was worn out, depressed and unable to carry on. The two of them decided to visit their friend who lived in the desert and they told him all their troubles. When they asked him how he was, the monk was silent for a while and then poured some water in to a bowl. 'Look at the water' he said and they looked and they saw it was murky. After a while he said 'look again and see how clear the water has become' as they looked, the two monks saw their own faces as in a mirror. And the monk said to his friends 'Because of the turbulence of life, the one who lives in the midst of activity does not see his sins. But when he is quiet, especially in solitude, then he sees the real state of things'

In the messy and murky waters of life we need to take time out to be guided by God, just as Jesus took himself away to quiet places to pray to be with God we need to do the same and just as Mordecai may have done.

But as I said earlier the clock is ticking, tick, tick, tick. The challenge is not to be a Haman and realise too late we should have had a different agenda than our own in life. May be we need to seek Gods face again here this morning, take that step of faith that Esther took, she did not know how things would turn out but God worked it out along the way with her.

When we do meet with God one day we do not want to be like Haman begging for our lives and Jesus saying

Mathew 7 v 22.

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' .

But rather we should be looking forward to being welcomed our Abba Father as a loved child of God.