

Esther, Mordecai and Christ

Our daily Bible readings (following the Bible Companion reading plan), have taken us through the book of Esther, where we find many wonderful examples, types and shadows given for our learning. In so many ways, we have represented in this period of Jewish history, principles that lead us to consider our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is this aspect that we shall consider for our exhortation today.

The book opens by describing a feast held by Ahasuerus, the king of Persia. He legislated that the participants could partake of the royal wine in abundance “according to every man’s pleasure”. During the festivities, he gave a commandment “to bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look upon” (Est. 1:11). In a similar way, the people of Israel (under the Old Covenant) were to be collectively a royal Bride, showing forth the glory of the Kingdom to the nations around them. But like Israel of old, Vashti refused to come with the royal crown, epitomizing the glory of the kingdom. The king sent to call her by the hand of his chamberlains, and was angered by her refusal to come. Even so, Israel were called by their husband: “Yahweh God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes and sending” (2 Chron. 36:15), yet they mocked the messengers, and despised his words.

This being so, arrangements were put in place to find a replacement bride and queen for the king. So his chamberlains advised: “If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, That Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate *unto another that is better than she*” (Est. 1:19). These sentiments are carried over into one of the parables of Messiah, namely the Parable of the wicked husbandmen. In this parable, servants were sent forth to receive the fruits of the householder’s vineyard from the husbandmen who were charged with looking after it, yet they were rejected - despised and murdered. The end result was stated that: “Therefore I say unto you, the kingdom of God *shall be taken from you, and given to a nation* bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Mat. 21:43).

So, the search for a “better” queen commenced in earnest. All the fair young virgins were sought for, and brought together into “the house of the women” to prepare them for entry into the king’s presence. Esther was one of those virgins, who was “brought unto the king’s house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women”, for a 12 month period of preparation. Even so, for those who would be brought favorably into the presence of the Great King, there is a period of preparation in the ecclesial house, where the virgins are gathered together. We, like Esther, must prepare ourselves in the way appointed, that our king will approve us when it turns to us to appear in his presence. Being a “chaste virgin” (2 Cor. 11:2), we must keep ourselves pure, and untainted by things that will bring disapproval when we become joined to our Lord.

Not requiring any other thing than those which were prescribed, Esther find favour in the sight of the king, who “set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti” (Est. 2:17). Even so, for those who purify themselves in their days of preparation, there is a crown laid up for them to possess. As Paul expressed his hope: “henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2Tim. 4:8).

MORDECAI

Another thread in the story of Esther is the character Mordecai, her uncle who brought her up as his own daughter. Whilst Esther was in the king's court, he attended the king's gate to seek after her welfare. Another man, Haman was viewed favorably by the king, and was promoted to being second only to Ahasuerus, and he was honored by the king's servants who bowed before him. However, Mordecai refused to bow before this man, who epitomized the principle of king Sin, as we shall consider shortly: "all the king's servants who were in the king's gate, bowed and revered Haman: for the king has so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence" (Est. 3:2). The word translated "reverence" in this place is used many times in the context of worshipping a Deity, whether it be Yahweh, or idols. It would appear then, that Haman was to be worshipped by his subjects, something that neither Mordecai could not do without compromising his service to Yahweh.

It is in a similar fashion that we read in Daniel chapter 3, that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego refused to worship the golden image that the king Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Though the penalty for disobedience was death, these men of faith stood tall whilst all around them were bowing before the god of this world, set up by mortal man. They refused to conform to the example of idol-worshippers all around them, and stood apart in holding fast to the principles of Yahweh. Though they were cast into the burning fiery furnace, the flames had no power to slay them, and they were delivered from death by the Angel of Yahweh's presence – as the king himself came to recognize: "he answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God" (Dan. 3:25).

The example of these three men of faith would doubtless encourage Mordecai in making his stand, trusting that whatever would happen to him, Yahweh would deliver him from the hand of the idol-worshippers who worshipped Haman - whose name means "magnificent", being expressive of the worldly glory he received.

Another key event in the story of Mordecai is how that he discovered that two of the king's chamberlains became traitors, and conspired to destroy king Ahasuerus. He relayed the news to Esther, who in turn told the king, who instead destroyed them by hanging upon a tree, something that is referred to later in the account.

HAMAN

Haman, being a man of the flesh, was a proud man, and could not tolerate the presence of one who refused to bow before him. But being the kind of man that he was, he sought the destruction not only of Mordecai, but all of Mordecai's people also. In a similar way, the persecutors of Christ not only sought to destroy him, but also his people, who followed him - a policy which has existed throughout the ages. Haman contrived a law to be issued that stipulated a day in which the Jews would be slain. Convincing the king that their presence posed a threat to the kingdom, and unchangeable law was passed, sealed with the king's own signet, that the Jews would be destroyed by their enemies on the day before Passover. Mordecai again relayed the news to Esther, and besought her to plead the cause of the Jews before the king, that

they might be spared – and interestingly, he saw the hand of providence in Esther’s life in being brought to the position of Queen: “...who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this ...” (Est. 4:14).

One of the laws of the kingdom was that no-one could approach the king upon his throne unless they were invited to enter by him extending a golden sceptre to them first. Those who entered without such an invite would be put to death – hence Esther was reluctant to go into the king. However, after encouragement from Mordecai, she answered him: “Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, *which is not according to the Law*: and if I perish, I perish” (Est. 4:16).

There are a number of principles here, one of which is that the king’s favour (and therefore salvation to the Jews) would come not according to the law, but upon another principle: that of grace. This is reflected in our circumstance before our Lord: we have no legal entitlement to be in his presence, and receive his benefits: it is all of grace, that no flesh should glory in his presence (see 1 Cor. 1:29). Our salvation is all of grace, not of the system of legislation that comprised the Mosaic Law.

The record continues to describe how that Esther found favour in the king’s eyes, as he held out the golden scepter, which gave her permission to continue. He invited her to make a request of him, saying “it shall be given thee to half of the kingdom” (Est. 5:3). Esther made request that both the king, and Haman who he delighted in should attend a banquet she had prepared in their honour, to which the king readily agreed. At that feast, she made request that both the king, and Haman would attend a second banquet, at which she would made request of the king.

This arrangement particularly appealed to the pride of Haman, as he “went forth that day joyful and with a glad heart”, and boasted to his friends and family about how privileged he was in being able to be in the presence of the king and queen – the only one chosen for the occasion. However, he joy quickly turned to despair, as he saw Mordecai in the king’s gate refusing to pay homage to him. At the instigation of his wife and friends, he made a gallows to hang Mordecai upon, intending to speak to the king at the forthcoming feast.

When the feast came, before Haman had opportunity to put his case before the king Esther put her position before Ahasuerus, that both her and her people were sold to be destroyed. “Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so. And Esther said, the adversary and the enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen” (Est. 7:4-6).

It is evident that Haman did not know that Esther was part of the nation he sought to extirpate, and that therefore these words would come at a complete shock to him. With events turning from Haman destroying Mordecai, to Haman himself being destroyed, circumstances were reversed. The sentence was given that Haman would himself be hung upon the gallows prepared for the death of Mordecai.

It is written of our Lord Jesus Christ “that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the diabolos” (Heb. 2:14), and in the case of Haman,

we see an example of this. Haman, having the power of death was himself hung upon the gallows designed to inflict death upon Mordecai. Like Goliath being slain by his own sword, it was through the instruments of death that the adversary was condemned, and salvation was brought about to the people. And similarly, in the sacrifice of Christ, see sin condemned in the flesh (Rom. 8:3), in order to bring salvation to us, who were previously under condemnation of the diabolos.

But there was a problem remaining. Although Haman, as King Sin, had been removed, the law which gave the Jew's adversaries opportunity to destroy them remained – and that law, like the other laws of the kingdom could not be repealed. How then, could salvation be obtained? There is a similarity with our situation: we are under an unchangeable law of sin and death. Sin AKA the Diabolos was destroyed by Christ in his death, but we are still under an unchangeable law which condemns us to the grave. The principle of sin remains active within us, within our very nature, to bring forth death. Until our bodies are changed to become like unto his glorious body (Phil. 3:21), we are under a physical sentence of death, as a fundamental law of our being. How then, can we be saved?

The answer is seen in the circumstances of Mordecai and Esther. The death of Haman provided a basis upon which a new law could be given, which negated the power of the first. His death demonstrated how that his intentions were wicked, and worthy of condemnation. Salvation to the people whom he sought to curse had a two-fold aspect: first, he must be destroyed as the embodiment of sin and human rebellion; secondly, as a consequence of the first, the unchangeable Law which he established must have its effect nullified.

The record continues in Chapter 8, to describe how the king's signet ring was given to Mordecai to ratify a new decree that on a certain date, the Jews themselves were to slay their enemies, with support from the state officials. "all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants and the deputies and officers of the king, helped the Jews: because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them" (Est. 9:3). So it was that the first law had its power taken away. This first law was that the Jew's enemies could slay the Jews, but the second law provided for the Jews slaying their enemies first – meaning that there would be no enemies left to carry out Haman's decree. Even so, through the work of Messiah, the enemy has been destroyed first, so that though the law of sin and death is permitted to run its full course, its power is taken away. We seek to war against the flesh, and the sinful impulses of our nature, just as the Jews warred against their adversaries. And the victory will be ours, for it is Christ that overcame, and he has promised the gift of grace, as distinct from the law that condemns.

Finally, the book ends with Mordecai being given an exalted position in the kingdom, second only to the king: "Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren" (Est. 10:3). In this, we have foreshadowed the position of Messiah, the anointed One of Yahweh. Next only to his Father, he will rule over the entire globe, granting blessings and salvation to those who trust in his Name to save. And in that day, those who refuse to bow before King Sin shall live and reign with Him throughout the ages to come.

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