

WELCOME 14th August 2022 – 10 Pentecost '22 C

Esther 3 & 4

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! Today we continue exploring God's word to us through the book of Esther as a family of disciples...**Bible Study Qs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & so you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom** Bible Study Catch-ups on Friday @ 1p.m.

As we move into this week... "Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Most of us nod affirmingly...We've heard/said it before. We may have seen it somewhere in our lives. Given the reins of power...someone enjoys it too much. Unchecked (absolute) power in any form usually means bad things are coming.

Truth is...**power** reveals more than it refashions. Power reveals the corruption already in the heart. Power uncovers the burning desires that stop @ nothing to be satisfied. Power exposes the corrupt intentions & aspirations that step on & then over others to be achieved...power reveals more than it refashions...

Given the power of the Empire of Medes/Persians...Haman reveals he is a murderous narcissist...demonstrated he would stop @ nothing to avenge an ancient family feud...exposed his pride & his prejudice...made evident his capacity to lie in service to his own gain...revealed Haman's only true devotion was to himself

*There are six things the LORD hates — no, seven things he detests:
haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that kill the innocent,
a heart that plots evil, feet that race to do wrong,
a false witness who pours out lies,
and a person who sows discord in a family. (Prov 6:16-19)*

Haman's grasp of power also revealed the mightier power of God/Yahweh who is always at work to reclaim his rebellious people for himself revealing his redeeming purpose to all the world.

"If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance & relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you & your relatives will die.

Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?"

Against the backdrop of God's redeeming saving love...Esther challenges us...

In crisis the faithful can find their calling. In fear the faithful can find their faith.
all to stand & act in the power of God

We'll explore & experience that together...Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Father God, make the words we hear today a living word in the core of our being. Make our hearts trust no other power than the power of your saving love.

Make us the agents of your love & redeeming purpose, opening to all the entrance into the presence of your love & grace. Through Christ, empower us to live at peace with one another and to salt the earth with the good news of Christ risen & ruling...In Jesus' Name ...Amen.

Let's sing As The Deer...please stand

FAITH CHAT:

1. What do you think Mordecai meant when he suggested Esther was "made queen for just such a time as this"? Remember...no coincidences for the child of God
2. Share a time when you were "the right person at the right time."

10 PENTECOST '22 C – GOD'S SILENT SOVEREIGNTY: WHEN POWER CORRUPTS

Power struggles. Abuse of power. Power hungry. Power mad. Power has had a leading role in a poisonous, recurring storyline since the fall. It's been played out in palaces, governments, militaries, boardrooms & homes across the world & throughout time. Power...in all its forms, is front & centre in the book of Esther too. As we make our way through the narrative, we see how power, position & privilege make some feel they're entitled to more. Maybe you've seen that in your life too somewhere? Is it any wonder that power has a bad reputation, a malicious connotation & we begin to believe power corrupts? Let's challenge that a bit...

Power is not inherently evil. Rather it acts like an amplifier; magnifying (making louder) what already exists. It's reported US President Abraham Lincoln said: "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power."

Power reveals the motivations of the heart, whether for good or evil.

Lincoln understood, surrounded as he was by powerful people, power doesn't really change people as much as it highlights preexisting character traits. It's true, people in positions of power can do more harm & become more seriously corrupted than people w/o power. They simply have more opportunities. People w/ power also have more opportunity/ability to do more good. The choice good/evil, generous/selfish, benevolent/malicious is a function of a person's character; not the power they wield. "Power doesn't always corrupt. Power always reveals. When someone has enough power to do what they always wanted, then you see what that person always wanted to do." – Robert Caro Remember...power reveals more than it refashions.

Esther 3 & 4 are case in point. Esther 2 ended w/ Mordecai saving King Xerxes' life. We might expect Chap 3 to see a huge party honouring Mordechai, exalting his integrity, acknowledging Xerxes' indebtedness to him & rewarding him handsomely. Instead...Some time later King Xerxes promoted Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite over all the other nobles, making him the most powerful official in the empire. All the king's officials would bow down before Haman to show him respect whenever he passed by, for so the king had commanded. But Mordecai refused to bow down or show him respect. (honour)

How often have you seen that? Person A does something praiseworthy but Person B is praised. One person leap frogs over another. This person advances & you remain stuck. And to question that is natural. Jer 12:1 - You will be righteous, Lord, even if I bring a case against You. Yet, I wish to contend with You: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the treacherous live at ease? But b/t Haman & Mordecai there's a bigger issue & it dates back hundreds of years. Mordecai isn't just doing the sour grapes wounded pride hurt feelings thing by not bowing in deference to Haman.

What's the deal? Haman is an Agagite...descended from King Agag the Amalekite. So? The Amalekites attacked the Israelites during the Exodus near Mount Sinai, where they were defeated by Joshua. Moses said, "Because hands were lifted up against the throne of the LORD, the LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation." – Ex 17:16 Years later, King Saul (1 Sam 15) disobeyed God's command to completely wipe out the Amalekites & their King Agag. Saul captured Agag & took a bunch of cattle plunder. The prophet Samuel had to do the dirty work Saul would not. Now...face-2-face Mordecai knows he's looking at a mortal enemy. Haman knows it too. No one else may know their history...BUT THEY DO.

How easy would it have been for Mordecai to simply bow...duck & cover & hide himself from his enemy? How easy is it for Xns in 2022 to allow our faith to be maligned & misrepresented...to leave perverse attitudes & behaviours unquestioned ...to walk in step w/ a world that is not on our side...For Mordecai to bend his knee & honour Haman would be equal to Saul's disobedience which ultimately cost Saul his throne & his life. Sometimes you have to choose how you are willing to die... Mordecai chooses faith/obedience not disobedience/pretense.

NB: Mordecai, by his very action, displays a faithfulness w/o words. He neither confronts Haman nor challenges the king, but his posture says everything & everyone around him knows it. He will not give honour to that which God says is dishonourable. He will not encourage/support that which God does not. He will not offer devotion to any but Yahweh. The word of the king is no match for the word of God. He will not kneel b/4 someone God has marked for destruction. Ps 92:6-8, 12 - Only a simpleton would not know, & only a fool would not understand: Though the wicked sprout like weeds & evildoers flourish, they will be destroyed forever. But you, O Lord, will be exalted forever...the godly will flourish like palm trees & grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon. Mordecai knows God will not allow Haman to flourish forever neither will he allow his faithful people to languish w/o relief. Mordecai trusts help is on the way...He doesn't know how or when or from where...he just knows.

2 THINGS

In crisis the faithful can find their calling. In fear the faithful can find their faith. Haman knows what happened to his ancestors & determines to return the favour by wiping out all the Jews in the Medes/Persian Empire. It's more than just personal: Haman vs Mordecai...it's genocidal: Haman vs the Jews. His power has just revealed his brutality ruthlessness inhumaneness On the other hand...

Mordecai knows God has already determined Haman's destiny: destruction. From Mt Sinai to Susa God has only one word for the Amalekites who attacked God's beloved: death. God's power has his beloved shielded & their enemies surrounded no matter what the circumstances situations or appearances. Mordecai knows his

calling is to stand & act in the power of God because in crisis the faithful can find their calling. Mordecai is outnumbered & out-gunned, but there is courage in your calling. His faith & courage in his calling are like an earthquake: *Then the palace officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why are you disobeying the king's command?" They spoke to him day after day, but still he refused to comply with the order. So they spoke to Haman about this to see if he would tolerate Mordecai's conduct, since Mordecai had told them he was a Jew. The other palace officials 1st try to defuse the tense situation... then they either try to make it worse or perhaps wonder if they can follow suit.*

But Mordecai's calling is unfulfilled until he recruits Esther to make the case for God's people ^{b/4} the king. Mordecai's calling included reminding Esther of hers: *Mordecai gave Hathach a copy of the decree issued in Susa that called for the death of all Jews. He asked Hathach to show it to Esther & explain the situation to her. He also asked Hathach to direct her to go to the king to beg for mercy & plead for her people* No one has the opportunity Esther has. No one who has everything to lose has the king's ear. No one who actually shares the king's bed has Esther's calling...to be an advocate for those about to be crushed by injustice & slaughtered by evil. In crisis the faithful can find their calling.

My call...is to remind you of yours...to encourage you & equip you to live yours. In whatever crisis...the only power available to us is God's, but no one has your opportunities. your capacities, your connections, but you. My call...is to remind you of yours...so that in living out your calling you stand & act in the power of God & find faith & courage in your calling.

I don't believe any call from God is ever "safe." Esther's sure isn't & neither is yours. If your faith obedience to making disciples who make more disciples – living as near to Christ as the Spirit can make you – living out the hopes values attitudes beliefs aspirations of the Kingdom of God...hasn't cost you a relationship a job a business deal or a stack of \$\$\$ or at least some funny looks...you're probably not living your calling fully boldly enough. Everybody knows you can't just waltz up to the king & start jibber jabbering about any old thing on your mind. Do that & die. But not to act is also deadly when you're the one who's called by God, empowered by God & working on behalf of God's plans & purposes.

Mordecai sent this reply to Esther: "Don't think for a moment that because you're in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed. If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance & relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you & your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?"

Does God **NEED** Esther to save his people? Absolutely not. Mordecai says so. When you pray "your kingdom come your will be done" do you think those are not going to

happen unless you pray? No...but we ask in this prayer that the kingdom would come through us & God's will be done & accomplished in us...In crisis the faithful can find their calling. In fear the faithful can find their faith as they stand/act in the power of God. *Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: "Go & gather together all the Jews of Susa & fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids & I will do the same. Then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die."*

Esther has made her decision & knows she ultimately waits for God to act. She will do what she can...fast, which simply means allow God to prepare her heart free from distractions for the essential work of her calling...& go ^{b/4} Xerxes as an advocate for those about to be crushed by injustice & slaughtered by evil. In crisis the faithful can find their calling. In fear the faithful can find their faith as they stand & act in the power of God.

Haman's grasp of power revealed his own corrupt heart, but also the mightier power of God who is always at work to reclaim his rebellious people for himself revealing his redeeming purpose to all the world. Ultimately it is the cross where God's power is revealed most clearly as the powers of sin death & evil lash out in a final futile attempt to hold God's beloved captive for all eternity...but the power of the resurrection declares: *You have died with Christ, & he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world... Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.* – Col 2:20/Eph 3:20

Who knows if perhaps God put you right where you are right alongside the people you are near with just the gifts you have for just such a time as this?

TAKE IT HOME –

Whether you believe it or not, you have power & influence from God at work through you. What might God be calling you to do in the very community/workplace/groups in which he has placed you?

Especially...as a faithful minority in an increasingly pagan world...

Let's pray...Eternal God, your word speaks so strongly to our world...a world that continues in its brokenness to flee from your healing. We know there is still intrigue in high places. We know unholy alliances persist. We know the fearful yet powerful try to silence or do away with, perceived enemies or threats to their power position & influence. Evil hides in the guise of good & deceit is used for selfish ends. We pray for justice like a mighty river & righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Let it flow first from us. By your Spirit bring forth from us not more religious observance, but more humble obedience, more steadfast faith, more bold love, and more courageous witness...through Jesus Christ...Amen