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Haman's Death and Ours

Esther 5:2-8

Prayer: *Father, we just once again want to come before you to thank you that you are King of kings and Lord of lords. We praise you for who you are, we praise you for your great gift in your Son and also for the gift of your word, Lord. This is the time when we open up your book, we thank you for the gift and we also thank you for your Holy Spirit who accompanies that gift, who makes it make sense to us. And Lord, as we open up your word this morning, we pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you would accompany us and make this of permanent value, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we've been almost two months looking into the book of Esther and now we are approaching the climax. For those of you who are not familiar with the story, Esther and Mordecai are two Jews who have been kidnapped and re-settled in Persia. For a period of time they were able to assimilate in this new culture, essentially hiding their Jewish identity and they basically managed to eke out successful lives. In fact, Esther reaches the pinnacle of power,

she becomes the queen, having been selected by a brutal and unstable king to replace his former queen who had rebelled against him. Mordecai also gains a measure of personal power, he becomes part of the political machine in Persia. In fact, he manages to gain a seat in the king's gates where by chance one day, he overhears a plot among two of the king's eunuchs to assassinate the king. Well, Mordecai passes the information along to Esther, the plot is uncovered, the eunuchs are discovered and hung and the incident is largely forgotten. Mordecai then has a chance encounter with a man named Haman who is the arch villain in this story. He also ascended politically to the place where he's at the right hand of the king himself, and he's a petty, ego-driven man, he demands that everybody bow down in his presence. And everyone does bow down in his presence with the exception of one person, and that would be Mordecai. Well this starts a conflict and the conflict comes to a climax in this chapter. It has to do with Haman, who was so enraged by Mordecai's refusal to bow, that he convinces the king that not just Mordecai but every one of the Jews in Persia are a threat, a threat that needs to be dealt with. And so he convinces the king to sign an edict declaring that on one given day one year hence, all the citizens of Persia are to -- quote -- "kill, annihilate, and destroy" their Jewish friends, neighbors and associates. Mordecai desperately appeals to his cousin Esther and she says she can't approach the king because to

do so without an invitation is literally a capital offense, and she has not heard from the king in a month. Mordecai tells her if she doesn't respond to this crisis, then God will simply raise up help from another source and that she needs to consider that for such a time as this she's been put in this position. So she decides to approach the king, risking all, and she wants to tell him that she's going to have a banquet and invite Haman.

We pick up on the story in *Esther 5:2*: *And when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won favor in his sight, and he held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter. And the king said to her, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom." And Esther said, "If it please the king, let the king and Haman come today to a feast that I have prepared for the king." Then the king said, "Bring Haman quickly, so that we may do as Esther has asked." So the king and Haman came to the feast that Esther had prepared. And as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king said to Esther, "What is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." Then Esther answered, "My wish and my request is: If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my wish and fulfill my request, let the king and*

Haman come to a feast that I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said."

Now here's where the plot starts to really thicken. It says: *And Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai. Haman becomes consumed with rage over Mordecai's intransigence, and so he goes home to his family and he starts recounting all of his political promotions, all of his wealth and all of his splendor and he tells his family even the queen has invited me exclusively to a banquet with the king, but then he says: "Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows fifty cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged upon it. Then go joyfully with the king to the feast." This idea pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made. Well, the plot thickens even further that very night. The king has bout of insomnia, and so he asks his clerk to read from a book of memorial deeds, and the clerk just happens to read about Mordecai's uncovering this old assassination plot against the king. And the king says: "What honor or distinction has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" The king's young men who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him." Well, at this*

point this starts to read more like a Shakespearean play, it's got twists and turns that only a genius could imagine except this isn't the product of anyone's imagination, this is the sovereign will of God being played out in real time.

We pick you were at verse 4: *And the king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to speak to the king about having Mordecai hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for him. And the king's young men told him, "Haman is there, standing in the court." And the king said, "Let him come in." So Haman came in, and the king said to him, "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?" And Haman said to himself, "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?" And Haman said to the king, "For the man whom the king delights to honor, let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and the horse that the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown is set. And let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials. Let them dress the man whom the king delights to honor, and let them lead him on the horse through the square of the city, proclaiming before him: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.'*"

Now you can just picture Haman's self-congratulatory grin as he's

thinking how brilliant he was, I mean, he's going to design the very honors this king is going to bestow on him. So he tells the king exactly what would please his own inflated ego only to hear: *Then the king said to Haman, "Hurry; take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Leave out nothing that you have mentioned." So Haman took the robes and the horse, and he dressed Mordecai and led him through the square of the city, proclaiming before him, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor."*

What I wouldn't give to be able to hear just precisely how Haman delivered that proclamation. Was he enthusiastic? Was he terrified? Was he mystified? I mean he's probably thinking things couldn't possibly get worse than this. He has no idea. *Then Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered. And Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him."*

Translation: Haman, you're toast. *While they were yet talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried to bring Haman to the feast that Esther had prepared.*

Now I can't do the text any more justice than simply by reading, so I'll read. So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. And on the second day, as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king again said to Esther, "What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request. For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have been silent, for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king." Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?" And Esther said, "A foe and an enemy! This wicked Haman!" Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen. And the king arose in his wrath from the wine-drinking and went into the palace garden, but Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that harm was determined against him by the king. And the king returned from the palace garden to the place where they were drinking wine, as Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. And the king said, "Will he even assault the queen in my presence in my own house?" As the word left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face. Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on

the king, said, "Moreover, the gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, is standing at Haman's house, fifty cubits high." And the king said, "Hang him on that." So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the wrath of the king abated.

Well, in terms of a plot, in terms of a storyline, it doesn't get more satisfying than this. But this isn't a story. This is history. There really was a King Ahasuerus and he really did hang Haman on the gallows that were intended for Mordecai. This is an astounding story of God's sovereign control over what seems to be circumstances that are completely out of control. It's one of those feel good stories that reads more like a fairy tale than most. I mean, the bad guys lose and the good guys win. And yet even a cursory glance into Israel's history proves that Mordecai and Esther's story is by far the exception and not the rule. We celebrate the fact that God worked out Mordecai and Esther's circumstances for their good and his glory, but then we look at God's history with his people and with his church and we come away bewildered that these kind of circumstances where the good guys win and the bad guys lose, that almost never happens in history. And we look only a week back, we see 321 Christians murdered while celebrating Easter, over 500 wounded. That's 800 families whose lives have been forever altered, and we wondered, as wonderful as

God's sovereign control over events was in Mordecai and Esther's situation, where is that same divine sovereignty being exercised in God's church today? Our history as members of the kingdom of God as those who have been given the victory in Christ oftentimes seems pointed in exactly the opposite direction. While others religions seek to advance by killing, we seem to advance oftentimes by dying. Paul puts it very, very succinctly. He says: *As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."* Even Jesus never shied away from warning us that being members of his kingdom meant that in this life the good guys will oftentimes lose, the sheep will be slaughtered, and the bad guys will often appear to be the winners. It was Jesus who said: *"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*

See, there's a reason why Esther and Mordecai had a spectacular answer to their dilemma and the reason is very simple, but it doesn't make it easy. It goes back to that war between the kingdoms that we've spoken about so many different times. It was that war started in the garden of Eden when Satan took the form of a serpent and successfully tempted Adam and Eve into rebelling against God. The serpent was told in *Genesis 3:15*: *"Because you*

have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all the beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." The serpent is told that he would bruise the offspring of the woman's heel but that that offspring would bruise his head. Well, the offspring of that woman was the Lord Jesus Christ. The serpent was Satan. And ever since that day in the garden there's been this ongoing battle between these two kingdoms that ended with Satan getting his head bruised at the cross of Christ. And God tells us of his Christ at the cross: *He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.* We just saw that and we celebrated Easter. Jesus Christ's resurrection, we celebrated Jesus' triumph over rulers and authorities because his resurrection proved that in the ultimate contest in this conflict between the two kingdoms, Jesus was able to successfully ransom his sheep. See, way back in that garden the serpent had triumphed, he won that round, he triumphed by causing Adam and his entire race to give up their perfection, rendering them unfit to coexist with God. And Jesus at the cross provided the full payment in his blood for his sheep's imperfection, not by paying Satan off as if he held some kind of note against us, but by fully satisfying God's own perfect justice which had declared that

the wages of sin was death. Well, Jesus on the cross embraced that death for us. Easter celebrates the fact that he conquered death itself while paying that price. The serpent, no doubt he bruised Jesus severely at the cross, but it was there that Jesus dealt Satan a mortal head blow. That head bruise marked the death knell of Satan who knows that his time is short. He also knows that Jesus Christ won the ultimate victory at the cross. But you see, all of life needs to be viewed in terms of the conflict that is still ongoing as the dust settles and will continue to settle until Christ returns.

So the story of Esther is really a war story. It chronicles one part of the war that took place before Christ entered into the world by becoming flesh. God had made the choice to come to earth through a nation that would come out of the loins of one man, a man named Abraham. And so we read the story of Israel and the story of Israel is the story of God calling one man, Abraham, in order to begin a race that would eventuate in the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we follow Abraham and we follow him through Isaac and Jacob and the rest of the patriarchs as the nation of Israel grows and grows, and we follow that nation through its enslavement in Egypt and its liberation through Exodus out of Egypt and into the wilderness for forty years. As we look at all these miracles, we realize that they all took place for one strategic reason. They

were to keep Israel alive long enough to produce the Messiah. I mean the devil knew that the Messiah was going to come from Israel, so he did everything he could to eliminate them as a people group, thereby cutting off Messiah before he'd even have the chance to be born. Mordecai and Esther's story just happened to have its spectacular twists and turns because there was a strategic need to keep Israel alive, because God's enemy Haman wanted them dead. There's no doubt that Haman represented an existential threat to the entire nation of Israel. And if Haman had succeeded in eliminating the Jews, Christ would not have been able to enter human flesh. And so the reason why Haman lost and Mordecai and Esther won was because the Jews needed to survive, not just Mordecai and Esther.

And so we pick up on the story after Haman has met his fate. This is Esther 8, starting at verse 1. It says: *On that day King Ahasuerus gave to Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told what he was to her. That is Esther basically explained that she was a Jew under the same threat. And the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.*

So God gives this astounding victory to Esther and Mordecai, but

understand, they were not the primary characters in this story. See, they reaped the benefit individually but God's sovereignty was expressed to save the nation of Israel corporately. Pick up at verse 3: *Then Esther spoke again to the king. She fell at his feet and wept and pleaded with him to avert the evil plan of Haman the Agagite and the plot that he had devised against the Jews. When the king held out the golden scepter to Esther, Esther rose and stood before the king. And she said, "If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and if the thing seems right before the king, and I am pleasing in his eyes, let an order be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the provinces of the king." And he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed it with the king's signet ring, saying that the king allowed the Jews who were in every city to gather and defend their lives, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, children and women included, and to plunder their goods, on one day throughout all of the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. A copy of what was written was to be issued as a decree in every province, being publicly displayed to all peoples, and the Jews were to be ready on that day to take vengeance on their enemies. So the couriers, mounted on their swift horses that were used in*

the king's service, rode out hurriedly, urged by the king's command. And the decree was issued in Susa the citadel. Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white, with a great golden crown and a robe of fine linen and purple, and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced. The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor. And in every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and his edict reached, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews, for fear of the Jews had fallen on them.

I've said it many times, we are in the middle of this proxy war between two great kingdoms, the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. And the book of Esther is probably the starkest description of that proxy war being played out. It was played out between Haman, representing the enemy's wishes that Israel would be wiped out and Esther and Mordecai representing the kingdoms advanced by preserving the Jews from this existential threat.

Now it's pretty obvious that the goal prior to the cross was the preservation of the nation of Israel. What about after the cross? Well, after the cross, after this ultimate victory is won by Christ, the goal has now shifted. The goal is now a matter of advancing the kingdom until the very last sheep has entered the

sheepfold. It's been said the kingdom of God is a freight train and it's a freight train that's moving from history past through the present right through to the future return of Christ, and along the way the enemy will do everything in his power to derail it or to at least slow it down, and everything he does will eventually fail. But understand, the ultimate goal is for the kingdom to continue to press forward until that day when Christ returns. And so in the meantime, all of history continues to play itself out and in the short term, it often looks like the bad guys are winning and the good guys are losing. I mean that certainly is the way it looked last week when 800 families in Sri Lanka had their lives turned upside down simply because they identify with Christ. Understand, we're witnessing yet another battle in the war that continues to unfold. And if we don't have our eyes firmly planted on the kingdom of God's plans for the future, we can get swallowed up in the struggles in the present.

So we wonder why would God allow such carnage to unfold on the heads of his children? Well, to understand that we have to first understand the nature of the enemy. We look at the two kingdoms and we can ultimately understand exactly why folks would don explosives and kill themselves in order to have the privilege of killing others, and it's to serve the enemy, because that's the very nature of the murderer that he is. Jesus himself said of the

devil: *"He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies."* In this instance some Christians have once again come head to head with an ideology that seeks in its extreme to advance by killing, and we represent a kingdom that often advances by dying. One kingdom says the greatest thing you can do is to kill for God; the other one says the greatest thing you can do is die for him. One is right and the other one is murderously demonic. But how do we respond when we realize we're on the side that's dying? How do we relate to a God when it seems like he's almost indifferent to the slaughter of those who were killed simply because they identify with Christ? Why is Mordecai and Esther's story by far the exception and not the rule? Well, for one, it should be obvious that if believing in Christ rendered you no longer subject to bad things happening, then the kingdom of God would be filled to overflowing with people whose real desire is not Christ, it would be filled with people whose real desire is a trouble-free life. I mean who wouldn't want to have a fairy tale rescue like we find in the book of Esther? I mean if that was the rule instead of the exception, people would flock to Christ if only for the earthly benefits. I mean that's one of the main appeals of the prosperity gospel: Sign on to the kingdom and what do you get? You get health, you get wealth, you get prosperity, you get Jesus as an

afterthought, maybe Jesus as a means to an end, but certainly not as the king who we've been put here to glorify.

Secondly, we have to ask the question: Is it true that God is indifferent to the slaughter of his sheep? Well, the answer to that is actually twofold. We look back to when the apostle Paul was still called Saul, and he was attacking and murdering Christians and he's met on the road to Damascus by the risen Lord who appears to him in a vision. And he says: *"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"* And he said to him, *"Who are you, Lord?"* And he said, *"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."* Clearly Jesus identifies with us to the point where our persecution is literally his persecution. But it's also true that in the overall scheme of things God sees our lives and our deaths far differently than we do. I mean for us it's the end of everything that we are familiar with; for him, for God, it's the beginning of reality. God sees this life as the vapor, as this mist, as this fog that we're temporarily in before eternity sets in, and he alone has the full perspective of what eternity is like. He says in *1 Corinthians 2: "EYE HAS NOT SEEN, NOR EAR HEARD, NOR HAVE ENTERED INTO THE HEART OF MAN THE THINGS WHICH GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."* See, God's eyes and ears have seen and heard what we can only dream about, and in fact we don't have the capacity to dream those kind of dreams. We are the creature that Romans 8 tells us are groaning

under the curse of this fallen world awaiting a redemption that is still to come. But in the meantime, in the meantime we are commanded not to view this life at all as our final destination. Peter said: *I urge you as strangers and temporary residents to abstain from fleshly desires that war against you.* Paul said: *But our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.* That's also why Paul said: *For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* He also said: *This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.* It's why Jesus told us: *"In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also."*

So why does God say: *Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints?* Why is that God's sentiment? The answer is because he alone knows what's in store for us. C.S. Lewis put it well in his book *The Weight of Glory*. This is what he said. He said: *"The promises of Scripture may very roughly be reduced to five heads. It is promised, firstly, that we shall be with Christ; secondly, that we shall be like him; thirdly, with an enormous wealth of imagery, that we will have 'glory'; fourthly, that we shall, in some sense, be fed or feasted or entertained; and,*

finally, that we shall have some sort of official position in the universe, ruling cities, judging angels, being pillars of God's temple. The first question I ask about these promises is: 'Why any of them except the first?' Can anything be added to the conception of being with Christ? For it must be true, as an old writer says, that he who has God and everything else has no more than he who has God only."

So how are we to respond when we find ourselves on the side given to dying? Well, as difficult as it is, it's recognizing that dying for the kingdom is one of God's primary weapons in advancing this kingdom. Consider the sermons given by both Peter and Stephen in the book of Acts. I mean when you look at what they said, they both essentially said the same thing, and they concluded by castigating their hearers for their rejection of Christ. And as we read the story of Peter, we come to this amazing response, the entire crowd is cut to the heart and they repent and they had add three thousand souls to the church that very day. But then we get to Stephen basically saying the same thing, he castigates the crowd and the crowd is furious, they're enraged. They're so enraged they take Stephen out of town and they stone him to death. We say why such different responses? Well, we also know that after Stephen's execution persecution began in earnest and it had the effect of spreading the church throughout the entire region of Rome. And if

we look at it analytically, we understand there was a strategic reason for Peter's success in that it grew the church. There was also a strategic reason for Stephen's -- quote -- "lack of success." God blessed Peter to grow the church and God blessed Stephen to spread the church, but it cost Stephen his life. It was a price that God was prepared to pay. And so we ask why? And the answer is because God knew what he had prepared for Stephen. See, there's a reason why Jesus actually spent precious little time weeping for those who wound up dying for the kingdom, and my guess is because he knew the blessings that were in store for them. I mean we know he wept at Lazarus's tomb, but we know that he wept because he hated the idea of death itself and maybe the idea that Lazarus was going to have to die twice. But the only other time that Jesus wept was for Jerusalem, a city that rejected him wholesale. We look at this, we say Jesus was far more pained over the eternal fate over those who were going to reject him than he was ever pained over the fate of those who were dying for him. And the reason why is because he saw that pain as strictly temporary. He said in *Matthew 10*: "*Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*" See, Jesus acknowledged that death was the inevitable result of the fall but he also stated that through his sacrifice on the cross he had the ability to minimize its effect. Going back to the grave and Lazarus, Jesus says to

Lazarus's sister, it says: *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"* See, Paul understood that. Paul understood that this life which seems so precious to us in the grand scheme of God's kingdom, he sees this life only as having value as it's poured out for God. Paul said in Acts 20: *But I count my life of no value to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of God's grace.* Paul believed it so thoroughly that he actually mocked death for thinking that it had far more power than it could ever possess. He said this in 1 Corinthians 15: *"DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY." "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING? O HADES, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY?"* The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. You know, Jesus actually told his followers again and again that dying was going to be a very real part of their commitment to him. He said in John 16: *"They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming when whoever kills you will think that he offers God service."*

So what's our takeaway from all of this? I mean do we conclude that God doesn't much care whether we live or die? I don't think that's right. I think what we conclude is that God cares a great

deal about how we live and how we die. I want to go back to Stephen's execution to pick up on one of the details of what happened there. As I said, Stephen is castigating the crowd as stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears who always resist the Holy Spirit. And we pick up at *Acts 7:54*. It says: *Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."* See, as we read that text, we get a little glimpse of what it is that Stephen saw, and what he saw was all of heaven waiting for Stephen. What he saw is exactly what C.S. Lewis spoke about, the glory of God is there waiting for him, and Christ who sits at the right hand of the throne of God is seen by Stephen now standing at the right hand of God. It's as if all of heaven is standing at attention waiting for the opportunity to welcome Stephen into *"WHAT EYE HAS NOT SEEN, NOR EAR HEARD, NOR HAVE ENTERED INTO THE HEART OF MAN"* and *"THE THINGS WHICH GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."*

So Mordecai and Esther did indeed receive an extraordinary and unique blessing from God not because they were any better or any worse than you or me, but simply because they fit into God's strategic plan that way. And you and I are no different than

Esther and Mordecai in that we too have been given *for such a time as this*. And whether our lives are marked by blessing or pain, by success or deep troubles or even death itself, we have God's guarantee you will not go through this alone. And God says in *Psalm 23: Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil -- why? -- for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me*. Jesus has already led the way going through the valley of the cross so that we could have his presence when it's our turn. God has promised us all the grace we need while we're in this life and a welcome beyond our wildest imagination as we enter the next. He says: *For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's*. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for the encouragement that Esther and Mordecai are to us. But we also, Lord, want to look with sober eyes at the way this world works. We see Esther and Mordecai as grand exceptions, we see five hundred families turned upside down in Sri Lanka as the rule. And Lord, I pray that you would give us the ability to see as Paul saw, as Peter saw, as the disciples saw, that our lives have meaning as we pour them out for you and for the kingdom, that this life here is this temporary mist, vapor and fog that will end far more quickly than we imagine, and then the real

life will start. Lord, give us a heart and a determination to make this life count so that when we are welcomed into that new life, we will be prepared for all of the glories and all of the blessings that are there. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.