

# Like a Bird out of a Fowler's Snare

*Esther*

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**Bible Text:** Esther 8:9-9:15; Psalm 124

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## **Covenant OPC**

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I would like us this morning to continue our study in the book of Esther with a desire to fix the content of God's word in your mind and we'll simply deal with it under these 3 headings: rejected, restored, rewarded. Rejected. Restored. Rewarded. We've come to this particular passage and now that we are almost at the conclusion of the book of Esther, we are gaining, I trust, an understanding not only of the events which it records but we're gaining, we trust, also an understanding of the lessons which it has for us which it has contained for God's people down through many generations. It's the story of a man who was hated by Haman and his hatred was not just for Mordecai but for all God's people and as we have examined that portion of God's word, we understand that Haman was an Agagite, he was one of the Amalekites, sworn enemies of the people of God so Haman's hatred for Mordecai and for the people of God comes, as it were, as no surprise to us. We'd almost anticipate that his very pride and his ethnic background would lend to him a disposition to want to destroy God's people.

Of course, that hatred for God's people is not something strange or peculiar to the book of Esther and we see that the enemy of our souls has sought to kill and destroy the people of God even from the very beginning. The hatred which was engendered between Cain and Abel was surely an attempt to destroy the godly line and as we trace the operation of God's protecting hand upon his people, we see that often and again, those through whom the Messiah would come were the particular object of the hatred of men. It's good to be reminded from Scripture therefore at such times when we might face persecution although perhaps such persecution as we might find ourselves facing in our place of work, really does not warrant being compared to the persecution which our brethren in other parts of the world endure even at this time; how many of our brethren are even now kept captive in prisons only because they know and love the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps they are being held bound, even tortured for doing that which we would take for granted or speaking freely and openly about the Lord Jesus Christ. If we endure the scorn or the ridicule of a colleague in the place of work, what is that to compare with those who are imprisoned or beaten, separated from their families or have their families taken from them? So I hesitate to say that we find ourselves persecuted at all in comparison to what our brethren in other parts of the world have to face.

But even in passing, perhaps we should give thanks to God for his great grace and mercy to us that we enjoy such liberties but recognize too that what the world can give, the

world can take away and we do have this much in common with our brethren overseas who are persecuted even to the shedding of their blood, that what we have is what they have and that is a liberty to come into the very presence of our God to seek his face and to ask for his blessing. That is a liberty which the world cannot bestow and by the same token, it is a liberty which the world cannot remove from us. For he is faithful who has promised us that never will he leave us, never will he forsake us. T

through whatsoever paths we might pass, we are confident that our God remains within and that surely is the lesson of the book of Esther. Even at their darkest hour, God was working out his glorious purposes for his glory and for the deliverance of his people so that the children of Israel could sing with David. It's been like a bird trapped in the fowler's snare but the snare has not held the bird. The bird has escaped and that is our story. It's the story of the people of God in David's day, it's the story of the people of God in Esther's day and we look to God who is faithful that he will protect his people. We make it a matter of prayer but we are confident in God's goodness as Peter and John arrested by the authorities just weeks after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ held before the powers that be, beaten because they professed the name of Jesus, left the presence of the Council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

Well, we have spent perhaps long enough in the study of the book of Esther now to look more closely at how it does show us Christ in all the Scriptures. We have recapped something of the story. The story is repeated for us really in the verses that we have read before us. Not in the same detail but still we can glean the sense of what has happened. Haman has raised himself up against Mordecai. Mordecai has called upon the people of God to pray and God's deliverance has occurred.

Well, how should we see in this portion of God's word God's gracious history of his dealing with mankind? I think what we are called upon to see in this particular portion of God's word is that God graciously writes in the history of his people his own way of salvation. God is writing in the microcosm of individual lives and in the life of his people, his own purpose of salvation. And it's a purpose which, first of all, is presented to us as a purpose which includes being rejected. It's not just that Mordechai is hated and against whom Haman plots destruction but that we see beyond that. As Paul would advise us in his letter to the church in Ephesus, "that we wrestle against principalities and powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places." It is not just, as it were, an evil thought hatched by Haman who lived and died long ago but that we see that the people of God can expect to be persecuted. Why? Because our beloved Master was persecuted even unto death. Jesus himself questions those who rise up seeking to destroy us, to destroy him and as is recorded in the Gospel of Christ by John, Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of them are you going to stone me?" It seems strange, does it not, at least by any sort of superficial leading or understanding of the word of God that we have here a man who goes about doing good as the Scriptures record for us. He heals those who are sick. He even raises from the dead. He does many good works and Jesus challenges them, "Okay, you have seen what I have done. For which of these are you wanting now to stone me?"

Now we look upon the life of Jesus and we who do profess that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior, do delight in him and we are thankful for a sweet and gracious Savior. We see him to be the altogether lovely one and the chiefest among 10,000. It seems almost inconceivable to us that men should hate him so much that they wish to pick up rocks and stones in order to stone him. But such is the hatred of the world for the one who formed the world, that they would sweep aside such arguments. So it was in Mordecai's day. So it is in our day, that those whose only crime is speaking of the Savior whom they have loved are thought to be so vile and reprehensible that they are not thought fit to walk the streets and must be isolated from others in prison. Rather, they make up their evil lies, "We know this man is a sinner," said the Pharisees regarding Jesus. Well, that is surely in fulfillment of what the prophet Isaiah said who speaking about the suffering servant said that he was despised and rejected. What has changed in the last 2,000 years? Not a lot really.

There's a practical application there as we consider such things. When we ask ourselves, "How have you been treated?" Perhaps at times you have endured the scorn and ridicule. I trust that granted the liberties which we have in this land that you have not felt threatened with imprisonment, although perhaps those days might yet come. We should not take for granted that the blessings which we have as a nation received these centuries may continue indefinitely. Nations are raised up and nations are brought low. They do not stay static. Well, how have you been treated? And how have you treated others? That may seem like, well, that's a change of the direction from what we might have been expecting from the text. We identify with Mordecai more than we do with Haman but of a truth, as we recognize our own hearts, it's not a black or white situation. It's not one or the other. Sometimes we do find ourselves as being less than faithful to the commandments of God where as we are called upon to unite together and to love the brethren, to love our neighbor as ourselves and if we do not love our fellow believers, how can we begin to love our neighbors, let alone love our enemies as Christ loved us when we were still dead in our trespasses and sins?

But surely that is part of the application of God's word and is reflected even at such a key moment in the history of God's people when gathering around the table at the Last Supper, reclining to celebrate the Passover together, Jesus said, "One of you will betray me." Well, we bless the Lord that in God's gracious providence that having spent some 3 years in the seminary of Jesus, that they had learned at least a degree of grace and though like ourselves there was still much to be done, when prompted with a question that, "Who would betray Jesus?" each of them said, "Lord, is it I?" For each of them had sufficiently grown in grace to be able to question themselves knowing that they too had feet of clay and that it was possible that they might yet betray Jesus. "Lord, is it I?" And perhaps to demonstrate that none of us should rest content in our own sense of growth and grace, even such a senior figure amongst the disciples as Peter himself should be found denying Jesus 3 times.

Well, what foolishness it would be for us therefore to proclaim that though Peter needed to grow in grace even when he was at the Last Supper, that we have grown to positions

superior to his and so we should be asking ourselves not only, "Have I endured such persecution but have I perhaps if not persecuted someone, not shown them the love which I am bound to do for Christ's sake?" To love the brethren and to welcome strangers into our midst. To love them for the Lord Jesus' sake. Are we capable of being Mordecai? To endure in times of persecution? And are we capable at times of being Haman, lacking in love towards those whom we are called to love? Our prayer therefore should be, "Lord, show me my sins and show me your kindness. Show me my sins so that I might repent of them. Show me your kindness that I might show that kindness to others."

But if there is rejection in the story of Esther and Mordecai, there is also restoration. Mordecai is ultimately vindicated and perhaps nowhere more clearly upon the pages of Scripture than in these verses that we have read together where we are told that Mordecai who seems to have been something of a more minor official, is elevated to being basically the Prime Minister, second only to King Ahasuerus in the great Persian Empire. We cannot suppose that it is incidental that the fear of Mordecai as being a powerful man in the nation, as being senior to all the satraps, governors and officials of the king, that those who were in delegated responsibilities throughout the empire thought it would be as well to keep in with Mordecai and therefore to do as he has proclaimed throughout the empire to do.

Now, of course, we might say that and others might read the history of the people of Israel at the time of Esther and just say, "Well, that can be just explained naturally." Well, in a sense, that is true but God does work through ordinary means and the ordinary means was to elevate a man who was not prominent in the councils of the king to being second only to the king himself and so Mordecai is vindicated. He is not the vile and evil person which Haman has accused him of being, fit only to be destroyed, to be killed, to be annihilated along with the rest of the people of God.

Well, we look beyond the pages of Esther to see Christ in all the Scriptures and would recognize there is for us something of a type of Christ. That there will come a day when Christ shall return to this world and his glorious name will be vindicated. He may have been despised and rejected, that stone which the builders rejected but he is made the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing. This is marvelous in our eyes so that when we read of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ in all his glory, then we are assured that every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. The stone that is rejected is made the cornerstone. That verse from the Psalms which we have already sung together, Psalm 118, is recorded for us in Matthew. It's recorded for us in Mark. It's recorded for us in Luke. It's recorded for us in Acts. It's recorded for us in 1 Peter. Do you get the impression that the writers of our New Testament Scriptures would have us mark this particular prophecy that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, though it might be despised amongst men, will be vindicated?

Well, we live in a generation as any generation does since the fall of mankind, where the name of Jesus Christ is despised. Men will look down upon it. They will treat it with indifference and perhaps to our shame if we are not numbered amongst them as those who would outwardly despise the name of Jesus, perhaps we treat it at times with a

degree of indifference which belies the faith which we would profess. We ignore his commandments in some respects, despise his word when it suits us. Now, I say this not to, as it were, challenge you as though I hold you as being anything different from myself. It's just a recognition that we are not the Christians that we long to be and perhaps if we confess that we do long to see Christ's return, part of that reason is that we long to be quit of sin because we wouldn't recognize that at times we do despise, we are more indifferent than we would care to admit to the name and the demands of the Lord Jesus Christ. And when that is brought to our attention either by the faithful preaching of God's word, by the reading of Scripture in our private devotion or by the prompting of the Holy Spirit who brings to our attention something we have said or done and we say, "Well, we really shouldn't have said or done that," and we say, "I long for Christ to come again so that I wouldn't have those struggles, so that I might be closer in approximation to being that godly man or woman which perhaps others think me to be." So we long for the return of Christ because we do desire that the temptations would be brought to an end and with the bringing of those temptations to an end, all the times in which we fail. We fall into those temptations. "Lord, make me a better Christian. Fulfill your word which you have promised which is to make me conformable to the likeness of your Son." And that daily surely is a struggle for each and every one of us.

We don't come this day to proclaim that whereas the world is filled with Haman's, the church is filled with Mordecai's. There is that perhaps somewhat unwelcome admixture amongst the people of God and in individual believers. But beyond desiring that the sin which so easily entangles should be at last brought to an end, there is this: that the name of Christ Jesus shall be vindicated as the name of Mordecai was vindicated. Perhaps it is an indication of our own selfishness that at times we are more concerned with what the implications are of the return of Christ for ourselves personally than we are that the name of Christ should be vindicated, that those who despise the name of Christ should at last be put to flight. If you've ever had the experience when someone has spoken ill of you, you might say to yourself, "Well, I desire my day in court. I want to have my name cleared." You have perhaps been accused of something, you say, "Well, that's just not fair. It's just not right. It's not just." If you really believe that is true, "Then give me my day in court. Let me clear my name." Perhaps we have known those who have desired such a thing when they have been brought under false charges.

Should we not have the same desire that the lovely name of Christ should be vindicated? Men speak ill of him. They despise his name. They are oftentimes indifferent to the claims of Christ. Should it not be our longing that the name, the wondrous name, should be vindicated to the uttermost ends of the earth? That the lovely name of Jesus should be the name before which every knee shall bow and every tongue confess and to that end, should we not pray, "Even so Lord Jesus, come quickly?"

Rejected, restored and rewarded. Well, we see Mordecai's reward. It's quite a transformation as we have followed and traced the history of Mordecai in what is a really very short period of time. We see him at one point as a man who is clothed in sackcloth and has sprinkled himself with ashes to the embarrassment, it would appear, of Esther who sends out robes to him so that he could set aside the sackcloth and ashes. "Well,"

says Mordecai, "it is right that I should mourn for the people of God are even now threatened with extinction. How can I put on the robe of rejoicing while the people of God stand under the executioner's ax."

But here we have Mordecai vindicated who goes out in robes of blue, an outer garment of purple, showing his royal authority and his elevation. His reward has been granted to him, not only as we saw previously has he been granted the estates and wealth of his arch enemy, Haman, that home, his possessions, all that he had is now handed over to Esther who hands it then on to Mordecai for him to supervise. But more than that, he has been elevated so that he now assumes the mantle of office that once belonged to Haman, a great golden crown fixed upon his head.

Well, as we read of Jesus and his being rejected and restored, we see that Paul writes in this manner, Philippians 2:9, "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name." Boys and girls, every time you see "therefore" written in Scripture, you know that there is a logical conclusion that is being presented to us. Now, we don't read the whole of chapter 2 to see that but just immediately prior to that, we are being told about Jesus suffering even unto death, death on a cross, cursed therefore God has highly exalted him. Becoming obedient even to death on a cross. God is glorified. Now, it may be somewhat perplexing even to us. How is it possible for the Son of God to receive a new name? A name that he didn't already possess and yet there it is upon the pages of Scripture and it is bestowed in the context of one who suffered even unto death. Truly, God's ways are not our ways. When we think of the titles and the vindication, we think of those who have won great battles, those who have achieved great prominence as kings or as princes but as God reveals his glory, his glory is shown through not just death but the most ignominious of all deaths: death as a common criminal nailed to a cross.

Well, perhaps it begins to open up for us the reason why Mordechai and the people of God did not lay their hands upon the plunder to which the decree of the king had entitled them. And that's because we do tend, as all men, there's no sin but that is common to man, we tend to be somewhat avaricious. We want to have more and more of the things that this world has to offer. We think, "What a wasted opportunity." The people of God were told not only could they defend themselves against their enemies, those who desired to destroy them, but they could take as plunder anything that belonged to them. But no, neither out in the provinces nor in the capital did the people of God take the plunder to which they could have laid claim. Well, that surely bespeaks an understanding of the nature of the blessings of God.

Why are we believers? Is it as Satan accusing Job would say, "Well Job's a follower. He trusted you because you have made it worth his while. After all, he has received many of the blessings of this world: flocks and servants and houses and family. You take it all from him and he'll surely curse you to your face. He's only a believer because you've made it worth his while." And the grace of God is poured out in chapter after chapter of Job to demonstrate that though God should slay him yet would he trust in him. It's not because God has made it worth his while but because God and God alone is worthy to be

worshiped. The child of God loves God and would worship and adore him, not because he has gained from the things of this world. The things of this world really are insignificant. They will not continue forever. This world will pass away. We've already examined in the light of Scripture that the name of Christ that was once rejected is still being rejected by the ungodly will be vindicated then whatever good the possessions of this world will be remove from us. They are only temporary. They are passing. So the people of God in Mordecai's day as a testimony to the world would say, "You know, there are more important things than the riches of this world. Better to have the things of God and have no things of this world." It is perhaps an illustration of that truth which Jesus spoke long ago that, "There is no profit for a man if he should gain the whole world but lose his soul."

We come therefore to Esther and we would see Christ in all the Scriptures. We see that in this world there are many who despise and reject the name of Christ and perhaps amongst our neighbors and our friends we hear things which indicate that they do not love that lovely name as they should and perhaps at times we grow convicted that we have said things which show that we have treated lightly or with at least a degree of indifference, that lovely name as well. But that name which was despised, that stone which was rejected is restored. It's vindicated and we pray that the Lord Jesus Christ's name will be vindicated when he returns, that at his name you and I and everyone else will bow the knee and with our tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. You and I and all the world with us will confess him as Lord but we can confess him as Savior today as well as Lord, that our trust and our confidence is in a God who watches over his people for if we have learned anything from the story of Esther it is surely this: that though God might hide himself from our experience, he does not always announce himself, but in the most ordinary of ways, and the ways in which historians might record without any reference to God, God is still sovereign, God is still at work and God will protect his people. So with the people of God down through the generations, we do pray, "Come Lord Jesus. Vindicate your name and redeem your people." But in my prayers, let that be the order. "Get glory to your name and protect us. Bless your saints."

Let's pray together.

*Our gracious God and our heavenly Father, we do thank thee for the story of Esther. We would read it with the eyes of faith. We would see that Mordecai was rejected, persecuted, threatened with death, but then you vindicated his name. You protected your people that not for an instant was your eye off your people. That did not happen because you had turned away your attention but that sometimes, Father, thou art pleased to lead thy people through the valley of the shadow of death, but even under such circumstances, we need fear no evil and that surely goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our life and that we will dwell in thy house forever. So bless, O Lord, thy word to our hearts. For these things we would ask in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.*