May the love of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, become more and more full in your hearts.

Things just seem to keep dragging on, don’t they? Remember that the Christian is called to perseverance and to wait upon the Lord.

When we keep living our lives in Christ, in spite of what is going on, that is perseverance. We weren’t promised an easy life, but we are promised help and strength to make it through. Ask for the Holy Spirit’s strength; God is pleased to give it. We also have the promise of a deep joy as we depend on Christ throughout our lives.

The Bible reminds us that we are to wait on the Lord. He is working a plan, much of which we don’t understand, but He is using us in that plan. It is our tendency to want to hurry things along according to the way we see things. We are better off if we wait on God because His timing is perfect.

Our God is in control and He loves His children. This world is in the grip of sin, but Jesus has overcome the world. Persevere; wait; cling to Jesus; we will have joy in this life and in the one to come.

*The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.*

 2 Peter 3:9

In Christ’s love

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Esther 3

In chapter 3 of Esther, we learn that five years have elapsed since Esther was made queen. Some changes have taken place in king Ahasuerus’s court. In the first chapter, the king had seven eunuchs to do his bidding and seven princes of Persia as advisors. In chapter two, there are the king’s attendants, who are actually described as “young men”. Now, all the power of advisor to the king has been consolidated into one man: Haman.

We are not told how this man came to the position that he did; perhaps it had something to do with the assassination attempt that Mordecai uncovered. The Bible doesn’t tell us, so it’s not something we need to waste time speculating about. We just need to know that Hamon is second to the king.

In verse two we are told that the king had commanded that all his servants had to bow down and pay homage to Haman when he passed by. This is our first clue that there is a problem with Haman. If the king had to issue a command to pay him homage, then he probably didn’t deserve it. Additionally, bowing down and paying homage is worship. Haman was accepting something that belongs to the LORD God alone.

Now Mordecai the Jew refused to pay these respects to Haman. Mordecai is the cousin of Esther, who adopted her when her parents died. He still kept in touch with her even though she was now the queen. The king’s servants continually asked Mordecai why he didn’t do as the king commanded. He simply told them that it was because he was a Jew. More out of curiosity than anything, the servants told Haman that Mordecai wasn’t bowing down and his reason. They wondered if his reason was good enough for Haman.

It is amusing to note that Haman hadn’t even realized that Mordecai wasn’t bowing down until it was pointed out to him. Once he saw it, the Bible tells us that Haman was “*filled with rage*”. Now we can be sure that Haman has a problem. Anyone who is honorable and worthy of honor will not be concerned about someone who simply doesn’t show him honor. Perhaps that would even be a good person to get to know; they wouldn’t be “yes men” but would give honest opinions. But Haman is not honorable and his reaction is very strong; he flies into a rage.

Because Mordecai did not bow down to Haman, he was disobeying a direct order of king Ahasuerus. If Haman had gone to the king and reported Mordecai’s behavior, he would have been executed. This would have been an over-the-top punishment, but it would have been that easy. But Haman was not satisfied with that. He decided that he would work out a way to destroy all of Mordecai’s people, in all of the Persian kingdom. For the crime of not being bowed to, he chose to commit genocide.

This is pure evil. This man, Haman, was capable of conceiving of this plan and using his power to bring it about. One thing to note about this is that he is obviously driven by satan. Satan knew that the Messiah, the one who would defeat him, would be born a Jew. It was his intent to destroy this people in order to keep the Messiah from being born. It continues to be satan’s purpose to destroy the people of Israel; God’s chosen people. As we look through history, we see this happen over and over again. We also see God’s providence that saves them each time.

There is something else to note here about ourselves. It is very easy for us to sit here and shake our heads at Haman and wonder how he could be so evil. What we need to keep in mind is that he is simply a human-being just like us; and as the Bible tells us, our hearts are evil. There is no-one who does good, not one. Anyone who is outside of Christ, is capable of becoming just like Haman. Any of us, but for the grace of God, could have turned out just as evil as him. This is why we must never look down on someone else or feel superior to them. This is why we must be willing to share the Gospel with anyone. We are no better than they; the salvation we have is a gift of God out of His mercy. It is nothing that we deserve.

Certainly, none of this excuses Haman for his actions. Just as there is no excuse for any sin that we commit. We are responsible for our own rebellion against God. This is why God’s grace is so amazing; He was willing to take our punishment on our behalf. Jesus suffered and died in our place, so that we could have eternal life with Him. It’s all hard to imagine; but He has given us faith to believe.

This chapter gives us some important background information about Haman, although you have to look for it. Verse 1 calls him “*Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite*”. In verse 10 he is referred to as “*Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews*”. Any time something is repeated this close together in the Bible, it lets you know that there is some importance associated with it. These verses are more important than just letting us know who Haman descended from.

If we go back to the beginning of the Hebrew people, we remember the twins born to Isaac and Rebecca; they were Jacob and Esau. The promise of God to Abraham passed through Jacob who became Israel. Esau was not chosen by God but still blessed by Him with land and a nation of people that descended from him. In Genesis 36, a grandson of Esau was named Amalek. From Amalek, a whole people group came into being called Amalekites.

In Deuteronomy 25, Moses reminds the people of Israel what the Amalekites did to them.

*Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt, how he met you along the way and attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God.*

A battle that Israel fought against the Amalekites is recorded in Exodus 17. The Amalekites attacked Israel at Rephidim very soon after they had left Egypt and Joshua got his first experience leading his people in battle. This is the account in which Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up on a mountain overlooking the battle. Moses held his hands up in supplication to the LORD. As long as Moses held his hands up, the Israelites would push back the Amalekites. When Moses got tired and let his hands down, the Israelites would be pushed back. (By the way, this demonstrates the necessity of continued prayer.)

Moses ended up sitting on a rock while Aaron and Hur held up his hands for him and Israel defeated Amalek. (This shows how necessary it is for us to help bear one another’s burdens in intercessory prayer.) As a result of the Amalekite’s behavior and their disdain for God, God tells Moses, “*Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.*” God has ordained that the Amalekites will be wiped out entirely due to their continued sin and absolute refusal to repent.

Fast forward to 1 Samuel chapter 15. Saul has been made king of Israel. He receives a direct command from the LORD through Samuel the prophet. He is to gather his army and attack the Amalekites. He is to destroy everything: all the people, all the livestock; it is to be devoted to destruction and by this carry out the word of the LORD to Moses. But Saul doesn’t obey God. He brings back some of the best livestock to sacrifice to God. Sounds like a good idea; but it is in direct violation of what God told him to do. Additionally, he didn’t carry out the destruction of the people. In fact, he captured the Amalekite king alive and brought him back to Israel.

The name of this king is Agag. Recall that Haman is an Agagite; he is descended from this king, Agag. Haman is an Amalekite. It is no wonder that Mordecai wouldn’t bow to him; Haman’s people had been an enemy of Israel and an enemy of God for centuries. In last week’s study of chapter 2 there was a short genealogy of Mordecai and we saw that he is from the line of king Saul.

In all of this it is important to see how necessary it is to be obedient to God. Even if we think we have a better idea, even if it may cause us problems, we must be obedient to God. He desires obedience from His people more than any sacrifice that we can offer. Time and again in the Bible, we see the effects of disobedience to God. Disobedience is sin, and sin has far reaching effects. It tends to reach out far beyond the person committing the sin and affecting those who had nothing to do with it. This isn’t fair, but don’t blame God; sin is evil and this is what sin does.

Saul sinned by his disobedience. Because of this, God turned away from Saul and he lost his kingdom. But here’s Mordecai and Esther, people of Saul’s family, centuries later, who will now suffer because of Saul’s sin. And even more; the whole nation of the Jews is now slated for destruction by a man who shouldn’t even exist.

We who are Christian must be very careful with sin. It is very easy to develop the attitude that because Jesus died for us and our sins are forgiven, we can sin and it won’t make much difference. That is the wrong way to look at sin. Sin has consequences and many times those consequences are suffered by others. As Christians, we must hate sin. We must abhor sin. We hate sin because our God hates sin, and because of our own sin, our Saviour Jesus had to suffer for us on the cross. One of the sins that we primarily commit, is disobedience to God. This is a shame, because obeying our Lord Jesus Christ ought to be one of the greatest joys of our lives.

Mordecai had made a decision: He was not going to bow to Haman. He had been forced to chose between obeying the civil law and obeying God. King Ahasuerus had made it law to bow before Haman. To bow and worship a mere man, and especially to bow to a man whose entire nation had defied God and who continued to do so himself, would have been against the law of God. Mordecai chose to obey God.

In the past few decades, and pointedly, within the last few months, we have been faced with deciding what to do regarding laws that are contrary to God. We have been faced with deciding whether some laws are contrary to God or not. These are difficult questions and require thought and prayer. Issues such as the legalizing of abortion are obviously against God’s will. We can simply not participate in this action, we must vote against it when we have a chance, and peaceably speak with others about it. The recent closing of church services during the pandemic are a little more tricky. Our response varies from state to state, county to county, and town to town. Overall, we must try to be good citizens of where we live, but never at the expense of disobedience to God.

Haman had his own gods that he believed in and he believed in divination to find their will. He used the pur to find out when he should carry out his plan. Pur is the Akkadian word for the lot; it was a small clay cube like a die. Again, we have the providence of God because Proverbs 16:33 tells us, “*The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the Lord*.” The date chosen by the pur was 11 months away. This gave plenty of time for the rest of the events in Esther.

It would be good for us to note, that the pagan Haman didn’t get upset that his plan was delayed for a long time. If this is how a pagan could be content believing in his false gods, how much more should we be patient when we are made to wait on the one true God.

We have already seen that king Ahasuerus was easily influenced by others and here we see Haman play him. He is deliberately vague in who he is describing and flat out lies by telling the king that the whole people do not obey his laws. He even offers a hefty payment to the king’s treasury. It appears that Ahasuerus doesn’t really want to deal with this so he turns the whole thing over to Haman. Haman takes full advantage. With the authority of the king, he sends a decree throughout the Persian empire that all the Jews are to be done away with. His language leaves no question as to what needs to be done. *“[T]o destroy, to kill and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, women and children … and to seize their possessions as plunder*.” All this would take place in one day, eleven months from now.

It is horrible for us to consider that with king Ahasuerus’s blessing, Haman put all this into motion, and then he went and sat with the king to drink wine. Because this took place in Susa, the decree went out in this city immediately. Of course, the city was in confusion. The Jews had to be completely caught off guard; why would this be happening? Some people would have no problem with the Jews and they, too, would be wondering why this was happening. Some, who did not like the Jews, would have been excited at the prospect of getting rid of them and collection their belongings. Confusion reigned in the city, while those who were supposed to reign, drank wine.

The day this decree went out was the 13th of Nisan. This date may sound familiar: that’s because it is the eve of the Passover. The Jews would have been preparing to celebrate the miraculous delivery from Egypt that God had performed for them, when they received this news. Perhaps God was trying to reassure them that He would deliver them again.

Prayer

We praise You almighty God for Your providence; for how You always keep Your promises; for how You are always faithful to Your covenant people, Israel.

In Your faithfulness to them, we who are followers of Jesus Christ, find reassurance that You will also be faithful to us in all the good things that come to us from His work on the cross.

Lord, by the help and strength given by the Holy Spirit, may we also be faithful to You. Help us to be obedient to Your commands as we receive them from Your word. By the Holy Spirit’s work, Your commands are not burdensome to us and we are grateful for that. Give us the courage to obey You, no matter the cost.

We pray these things in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen