Peace and blessing in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

Please continue to remember each other in prayer. Intersession for others is pleasing to God; it is the current work of Jesus as He sits at the right hand of the Father. Our constant desire as Christians is to be more like Jesus, so intercessory prayer is a good thing to imitate.

So often, we can’t see God working when we face uncertainty and hardship in our lives. It comes about later, when we look back, that we can see God’s hand. Keep trusting Him, He has not abandoned His people.

*[B]ut Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.*

Hebrews 7:24-25

In Christ’s love

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Esther 2

Last week we began a study of the book of Esther. I hope you have had a chance to sit down and read the book in its entirety. Many books of the Bible can be studied bits at a time, but Esther is a complete account of a specific occurrence. It will make much more sense if read through all at once. If you have already read it, good; it will be even better now if you can read it a few more times.

In the first chapter we were introduced to the Persian city of Susa and the opulent royal palace. We met king Ahasuerus who ruled the empire at the time. We learned that he, in a fit of wine induced rage, and following poor advice, banished his queen from his presence forever.

As I mentioned last week, there are many places in this story where we can get sidetracked. For instance, should queen Vashti come out to the party when commanded by the king or not? Just this question has led to a lot of debate and much has been written defending one idea or the other. The thing to keep in mind is that this is not the point of the story. We must work to keep focused on what this account is all about; and that is the providence of God.

God has a plan for this world and it is going to come to pass. This does not mean that people don’t make their own decisions, but that God’s plan will work in spite of and because of them. We don’t know all of God’s plan, but it starts back in Genesis 3:15. “*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel*.” This is the beginning of the Gospel, the good news that God is sending a Saviour to earth, who will reverse the effects of the fall. It tells us that there will be a man born to a woman, who we now know is Jesus, who will deal a death blow to satan.

Later, in Genesis 12:3, we read for the first time God’s promise to Abram. “*And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed*.” God has now revealed that the Saviour will be a descendant of Abraham; He will be an Israelite. Again, we know that this person is Jesus.

In the book of Esther, there is a plot to destroy the Jews. If they are destroyed, then God’s plan can’t come to pass; we know that God’s plan will come to pass. We know that God’s plan did come to pass with the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ. He is the One who fulfills these prophecies. Because Jesus hadn’t come at the time of Esther, God was going to act to prevent the destruction of the Jewish people. It comes up, time and again in this account, where “coincidence” plays a decisive role. These cases of coincidences are God acting in His providence.

While we’re on the subject, we can look at Genesis 13:14-15. ‘*The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him,* “*Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever*.”’ This explains why the nation of Israel is still here. God’s protective care for them didn’t end when Jesus came. The land of Israel was promised to Abram and his descendants *forever*. All attempts throughout history to annihilate the Jews have failed; and they will always fail. This is due to God’s providence. He will always protect His people in order to keep His promise.

Keeping God’s providence in mind, let’s see what happens next. Chapter 2 begins about three years after queen Vashti was kicked out. History tells us that Ahasuerus had just come back from an unsuccessful campaign in Greece. His navy was destroyed and then his army was routed. He is now back in the citadel of Susa and has some time to think about things. He remembers his queen.

The servants who attend the king come up with a plan to cheer him up. They suggest that he appoint overseers to round up the most beautiful young women in his entire kingdom. The king could then choose which one he liked the best and make her his new queen. King Ahasuerus thought this sounded like a splendid idea and put the plan into action. Once again, we see how easily he is swayed by others.

Those of us who have a Christian world view know that this is a horrible idea. This is no way to pick a lifelong help and companion. The girls involved have no choice in the matter. They are being treated as less than human. As we will see later, all but one will end up living a life that can best be described as widowhood. However, to the carnal mind, this does sound like a great solution. Especially if you’re the king and you can get by with doing this.

The power of a king, an absolute monarch, is something we need to think about. We who live in a country like America have no first-hand knowledge of what it is like to live under that kind of rule. If we want to argue about policies, we can. We can often get by without following some of the rules that the government sets. There are many things we say and do; things we take for granted; that would get us killed under a rule like that of Ahasuerus.

The reason we need to think on these things is because when Jesus comes back, He will be the King. We don’t get to argue with what He says, we will do as we are told, we will serve Him. Now, certainly, Jesus will reign with truth and justice and wisdom; we won’t have to worry about Him doing things like Ahasuerus. It will be a joy to be under His kingship. Complete obedience to Him will be our pleasure as we share eternal life with Him.

Here’s the thing: We as Christians claim to be citizens of Christ’s kingdom now. Do we live our lives as subjects of our King, or do we live as Americans? To live as subjects of Christ means that we live all His commands in the Bible. And remember that doesn’t just mean only what Jesus Himself spoke; all of the Bible is the word of God. All that we learn in the Gospels and the Epistles apply to us.

Are we citizens who forgive when we are wronged, or are we Americans who hold a grudge for a while? Are we citizens who pray for those who wrong us, or are we Americans who get even at our first chance? Are we citizens who confine ourselves to the morality of the Bible, or are we Americans who go ahead and live like everyone else? If we are Christians, then we are citizens of Christ’s Kingdom; we are subjects of King Jesus, and we don’t get to pick and choose which Biblical commands we like and which we don’t. That’s having a King.

We finally get to meet Mordecai and Esther. A short genealogy is given which shows they are Benjamites in the same line as Saul, the first king of Israel. Keep that in mind because it shows up later. The text tells us that Mordecai’s ancestor, Kish, was one of the ones taken from Jerusalem by king Nebuchadnezzar. This was the same time that the king of Judah, Jeconiah, was taken to Babylon. Jeconiah is more commonly called Jehoiachin. Jehoiachin had reigned for three months when he surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar and was taken to Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem three different times. The first time is when he took Daniel and his three friends, along with others Israelites that might serve him in his kingdom. He attacked a second time and took back more of the people of Judah. This second attack is when Mordecai’s ancestor would have been taken. This would have taken place about 100 years before the story of Esther. The third attack was when Nebuchadnezzar completely destroyed Jerusalem.

Think about Esther’s life. She was given the Hebrew name Hadassah, but was called by the Persian name Esther. She was an orphan. Her parents died when she was young; young enough to need someone to care for her. She was adopted. Mordecai was righteous enough to bring his cousin into his home and care for her as his own child. She was also very beautiful.

Her life experiences had an effect on her. Even though she was extraordinarily beautiful, she didn’t let it go to her head. She was submissive to those in authority; yet she was very brave when the time came. We read that she “*found favor*” with people; this indicates that it didn’t just happen, it was in her actions and how she treated others. She remained respectful of Mordecai, even when she became queen. She had a lot going for her.

The man in charge of the women, Hegai, took a special liking to her. This was a man who knew what king Ahasuerus liked in women and he set about giving Esther the best chance. Again, the providence of God. It is recorded that this event involved 400 women; and Hegai liked Esther. After enduring a year of various beauty treatments, her turn came to go into the king. She was wise enough to ask Hegai what she should take with her and follow his advice.

We read that after their night with the king, the women would become concubines. They would only get to come back to the king if called. If not called, they simply spent the rest of their life in a harem. With this kind of life, they may as well have been widows. They couldn’t go anywhere else or start their life over; this was it. If this would have happened to Esther, there would be no story.

But, once again, in God’s providence, Esther won the heart of the king. Ahasuerus was attracted not only to her beauty, but her personality and the way she carried herself. She was the one he wanted to be his queen. Now God has her right where He wants her; in the position to cause the king to act for the benefit of His chosen people.

We don’t know why Mordecai told Esther not to reveal her nationality. He truly cared for her as a daughter, so he must have had a good reason. She obeyed his command and it turned out that a proper time came to let it be known that she was a Jew.

A few verses tell us that Mordecai learned of a plan to assassinate king Ahasuerus. He got word to Esther who got word to the king, making it known that Mordecai was the one who gave the warning. The would-be assassins ended up being hanged on a tree, or more likely, impaled on a stake. At this point, king Ahasuerus did something that was very strange, especially for an honor culture such as this: He forgot to reward Mordecai. This was not a case of arrogance on the king’s part; this would have been a blemish on the king’s honor. God’s providence is working again. As we will see, this seemingly minor detail will become very important.

Prayer

Almighty God, we are compelled to worship You when we consider that You are sovereign over all creation. You hold the universe in Your hands and direct its course. No-one will thwart Your plan and it will come to pass.

How blessed we are that the creator of the universe has allowed Himself to love us; that He will condescend to make us His children. You are complete in Yourself, yet You have chosen us to have a close relationship with You. You are glorious God; our life comes from You and our life is eternal only in You through Your Son, Jesus.

We bless You for those times that Your Holy Spirit opens our eyes so that we can see Your providence; Your constant working in subtle ways. By these times, we know that You are always there, even when we can’t tell. We always have the assurance that You are fulfilling Your promises and working out Your plan. Yes LORD; Thy will be done!

We pray this in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ

Amen