

Sight Unseen: When God Goes Off the Grid!

Week 4: Caught in His Own Trap

I. Today, we're continuing in our sermon series, Sight Unseen: When God Goes Off the Grid, and we're going to be covering a lot of ground. We ended last week by saying:

A. [Slide]: God is making a way; we obey today!

What step of obedience is before us today? We rarely get the big picture and many times it does feel like God is off the grid, but rest assured God is working and he's calling us to take the next step of obedience before us. Esther demonstrated that principle in a powerful way last week. Mordecai had challenged Esther that she was the plan! There was no Plan B! Esther wasn't given a guarantee of the events unfolding in her favor, but she came to believe that her position wasn't one for her own privilege but an act of God's providence. If she perished, she perished, but she was willing to trust God and obey.

B. When we concluded last week Esther had taken the step to address the king regarding the edict to annihilate the Jewish people. Esther is the Queen of King Ahasuerus who is the head of the Persian Empire. Haman, who is the king's right-hand man, nor the king, know that Esther is Jewish at this point in the story. The king is complicit in the edict that has been declared. He lackadaisically declared the annihilation of a people group under Haman's suggestion and the king didn't even take the time to ask who the people group was!

C. Esther has called one banquet with the king and Haman, and Esther got a "yes" before she even made her request. She asked the king that if it pleases him to grant her petition and perform her request, show back up tomorrow with Haman and I'll make it. Esther is piquing the interest of the king and Haman let's all this attention go to his head in a big way. He's in cahoots with the king and queen, so he thinks!

II. That's where we pick up today in Esther 5:9.

Esther 5:9-13 (CSB) [Slide]: 9 That day Haman left full of joy and in good spirits. But when Haman saw Mordecai at the King's Gate, and Mordecai didn't rise or tremble in fear at his presence, Haman was filled with rage toward Mordecai. 10 Yet Haman controlled himself and went home. He sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh to join him. 11 Then Haman described for them his glorious wealth and his many sons. He told them all how the king had honored him and promoted him in rank over the other officials and the royal staff. 12 "What's more," Haman added, "Queen Esther invited no one but me to join the king at the banquet she had prepared. I am invited again tomorrow to join her with the king. 13 Still, none of this satisfies me since I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's Gate all the time."

A. Esther sends the king and Haman on their way from the first banquet with an invite to come back tomorrow. Haman is full of good wine, full of good food, and most of all is full of himself! Haman is tickled pink about his stroke of luck that in all the empire Haman alone has been invited to dine with the queen and king! As he's walking home in good spirits, his ego gets deflated by none other than Mordecai. Again, as we've seen, it isn't what Mordecai does but does not do. In this instant Haman is furious that Mordecai isn't intimidated when Haman walks by! Haman just a few days before has successfully enacted a plan to annihilate the Jewish people. Mordecai is a Jew. Why isn't Mordecai trembling when Haman walks by? That's the question Haman is wondering, and the actions of Mordecai infuriate him! Haman heads home and gathers his wife and friends for a little self-esteem boost.

B. By now we can probably see that Haman isn't going in a great direction. And we're going to see this guy's life implode over the events ahead, but I want us to pause and consider a principle of life. A principle is something we can plan on to come true. It might not happen today or tomorrow, but there are principles in this life that have held up to the test of time.

1. Here's the principle:

[Slide]: Pride against God's providence leads to pain!

I'd like us to keep this principle in mind because as we look at the downfall of Haman it might be easy to look from the outside at how foolish this guy was. Pride can cloud any of our perspectives. We need to take notes on Haman's downfall.

- C. Haman is at home with his friends and wife. He basically needed an audience so he could talk about himself and that's exactly what he does. He goes through all the reasons why he's the whole enchilada! He's talking about how rich he is and how great his kids are. I hope he at least had free food! After all this, there is still one thing on Haman's mind:

Esther 5:13 (CSB) [Slide]: 13 Still, none of this satisfies me since I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's Gate all the time.

1. One of the ways it's evident we were designed for eternity is that apart from a relationship with God in Jesus Christ, our desires fixate on what we don't have. No amount of money or power will ever be enough because we're chasing after a mist. For Haman it appears that what he wanted more than anything was not power or money but:

[Slide]: Recognition.

- a. He needed to be validated by others. There's nothing wrong with affirmation or needing words of encouragement, but when we place our value and worth into the approval of others, we set ourselves up for a difficult time. Even if Haman had the respect of everyone else in an entire empire, it wouldn't have been enough if Mordecai was still slighting him!

Esther 5:14 (CSB) [Slide]: 14 His wife Zeresh and all his friends told him, "Have them build a gallows seventy-five feet tall. Ask the king in the morning to hang Mordecai on it. Then go to the banquet with the king and enjoy yourself." The advice pleased Haman, so he had the gallows constructed.

- b. Not one person said this was a bad idea. Haman had already convinced the king to annihilate Mordecai's entire people group. Just let it go. Instead, they all instruct Haman to go in the morning and get permission to kill Mordecai and display his body 75 feet up in the air. Why? So everyone in the town of Susa would have been able to see that this is what happens when you don't recognize Haman.....I mean the king.

D. [Slide]: Pride against God's providence leads to pain!

How do I know that? Because I've experienced it to be true! We all have some degree of Haman in us, and we can easily rationalize why we think it's o.k. in this particular instance to do things our way. That's called pride.

1. The providence of God is most evident in his instruction manual for life.

That's what the Word of God is for us.

2. God's providence is the reality that before we were ever a thought, God declares:

[Slide]: I Am!

From beginning to end, God is! You and I find ourselves just like Haman at a point in time, limited by our perspective. God who sees from beginning to end says, "fear me." Why? Because he sees the big picture and calls us to trust. Our pride convinces us that we know better than God. When we try to ram our pride against God's providence, it's like ramming into a freight train. Not a good idea! And yet we easily convince ourselves, like Haman, that we know best. Haman's pride is going to lead to a whole lot of pain!

3. God is still sight unseen. He's still off the grid in that none of the events in the book of Esther have been attributed to the direct hand of God. The book of Esther is the only book in the entire Bible in which God's name is never mentioned.

- a. And that's the major theme of the book! When it feels like God is off the grid, is he? Absolutely not! He's always working on behalf of his people even when his ways are mysterious.

E. Go back and read Esther chapter 6, because we only have time to hit the highlights. But in Esther 6:1-4, I count at least 4 unique events that all aligned to totally flip the switch on Haman's plan. If you see more or less, email me, and I'd love to hear from you!

1. The night before the 2nd banquet, the king is deprived of sleep so he's like, "bring me the business log! That will surely put me to sleep!" As the reports are being read, they just happen to come across the report

from 4 years earlier about Mordecai preventing the assassination attempt! The king is thinking through how to honor Mordecai when he is informed that Haman has just arrived at the court!

Esther 6:6 (CSB) [Slide]: 6 Haman entered, and the king asked him, “what should be done for the man the king wants to honor?” Haman thought to himself, “who is it the king would want to honor more than me?”

This is so painful to watch because we’ve all probably felt what it was like to put the cart before the horse. Long before I even knew Bethany existed, during my freshman year of college, I’d taken this nice girl to a dance and a few days later she called to meet on the quad for a chat. I was like, “yeah!” 10 minutes into the conversation, I realize that she’s not even talking about me, but her boyfriend back in Huntsville or somewhere. Bummer! Haman takes it to another level!

Esther 6:7-11 (CSB) [Slide]: 7 Haman told the king, “For the man the king wants to honor: 8 Have them bring a royal garment that the king himself has worn and a horse the king himself has ridden, which has a royal crown on its head. 9 Put the garment and the horse under the charge of one of the king’s most noble officials. Have them clothe the man the king wants to honor, parade him on the horse through the city square, and proclaim before him, “This is what is done for the man the king wants to honor.” 10 The king told Haman, “Hurry, and do just as you proposed. Take a garment and a horse for Mordecai the Jew, who is sitting at the King’s Gate. Do not leave out anything you have suggested.” 11 So Haman took the garment and the horse. He clothed Mordecai and paraded him through the city square, crying out before him, “This is what is done for the man the king wants to honor.”

2. Haman thought he was “the man” but it turns out he’s not! Haman sets his own trap! His pride running headlong into God’s providence proves to be no match. Imagine what Mordecai was thinking though as he was riding on the back of the king’s horse while Haman paraded him around town. If it were me, I couldn’t have helped but to ask Haman, “how are those new sandals working out for you down there?” 4 years earlier Mordecai had done the right thing by foiling the assassination attempt and only now was the reason for the delayed recognition coming to fruition. I know I preach about this often, but God sees the big picture and we don’t. We must be patient and trust that God is making a way even when it feels like he’s gone off the grid.
3. After the parade, Haman and Mordecai split ways and Haman walks through the door of his house and it’s not even lunch time yet. His wife Zeresh is like, “bad day at the office?” And Haman is like, “I can’t even begin to tell you!” When King Ahasuerus signed the edict to annihilate the Jews, he didn’t even bother to ask what people it was Haman planned to annihilate nor look at the edict. Go back and look at chapter 3, the king takes off his ring and gives it to Haman and sends him on to write what he wills! Zeresh is the first one to put two and two together. “Honey, you’ve plotted the annihilation of the Jews in a backhanded way and out of all the people groups that comprise the Persian Empire the king just gave a royal parade to a guy in that designated group. You’re toast!”
4. Haman left the banquet the day prior full of good wine, full of good food, and most of all full of himself! Haman has had a really rough day and it’s going to get worse. This time, the eunuchs come and drag him to the banquet. We can’t help but realize why Haman is a bit apprehensive.

Esther 7:1-6 (CSB) [Slide]: 1 The king and Haman came to feast with Esther the queen. 2 Once again, on the second day while drinking wine, the king asked Esther, “Queen Esther, whatever you ask will be given to you. Whatever you seek, even to half the kingdom, will be done.” 3 Queen Esther answered, “If I have found favor in your eyes, Your Majesty, and if the king is pleased, spare my life; this is my request. And spare my people: this is my desire. 4 For my people and I have been sold to destruction, death, and extermination. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept silent. Indeed, the trouble wouldn’t be worth burdening the king.” Ahasuerus spoke up and asked Queen Esther, “Who is this, and where is the one who would devise such a scheme?” 6 Esther answered, “The adversary and enemy is this evil Haman.”

- F. Everything comes together in a moment! We never know what a day holds! The narrator leaves a lot to be filled in, but perhaps the king went outside in his anger, because he knew he had guilt on his hands. He had willy-nilly taken off his ring and given it to Haman to do what he willed. He couldn’t really punish Haman for

an edict the king had placed his stamp on. But as providence would have it, the king returns to find Haman groveling with the queen. Doubtfully trying anything funny in a moment like this, but it was enough to charge Haman with inappropriately touching his wife. You don't touch a queen period! Harbona, one of the king's eunuchs, conveniently noticed that someone had erected a gallows in the past 24 hours. The king decides that will work and has Haman executed on his very own gallows. We can smell the irony in that one!

1. We've covered a lot of ground today and it really is a remarkable story preserved for us in Scripture! If we had to consolidate Esther 5:9-7:10, there're major lessons to learn from both Haman and Mordecai/Esther. We're 12 years into King Ahasuerus's reign and we can't appreciate Esther 5:9-7:10 without remembering that the first 2 chapters are a decade in the making. A large expanse of time! Esther 3 it slows down to months in the making. Esther 4 weeks and then 5-7 down to hours! Mordecai and Esther didn't start trusting God and walking in obedience the day before this happened. They had been fueled by faith for years even when it felt like God was off the grid! I wish I could tell you that everything you're going through is going to make sense for you this afternoon, but I can't! Why? Because God never calls us to make sense of life or understand what we're going through. That's not our call as believers. Our call is to obey. That's what we see consistently from Esther and Mordecai.

2. Haman gives us an important principle too:

[Slide]: Pride against God's providence leads to pain!

Haman thought he could outsmart God. I don't think there would be many of us who would outright say that about ourselves, and yet God has demonstrated his providential hand throughout Scripture. He's downloaded his wisdom in the Word.

3. And yet we can convince ourselves that in this particular case we know what's best. Don't do it!

Not because I'm trying to shame you or point a finger,
but because God intends good for our life and when we bend to the Book our relationship with God and others thrives!

4. I want to walk in the way of faithfulness with Esther and Mordecai.

III. It might be easy to think this is the end of the story, but it's just getting started! Come back next week and the week after for the "untold story of Esther!"