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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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Haman the Anti-Semite

Esther 4:1-5

Prayer: *Father, I thank you for the lamb. I thank you that you have provided the ultimate lamb that we may wash in to be made clean. We just thank you for the ultimate gift of the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you also for the gift of your word, the gift that we are about to explore right now, the gift that we want to open and so we pray, Lord, as we do just that, as we open your word, that you would accompany us, that we would have the power of your Holy Spirit coming alongside us making this make sense and making this of permanent value, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, this is part five of the book of Esther and as you probably know by now, the book of Esther is the story of God's sovereign will and how it works itself out behind the scenes in the lives of two people. Esther and Mordecai are Jewish exiles living in Persia which is a pagan country and culture that was known for assimilating those they had defeated in battle. Esther and Mordecai have managed to hide their Jewishness, and they've managed to assume positions of power in a culture that in many ways is very

similar to ours. As long as you don't rock the cultural boat, you could succeed, in fact you could even prosper. Esther prospers beyond her wildest dreams having become the queen itself because of her charm and because of her beauty and Mordecai, meanwhile, has assumed the position of power in the local government along the way. But both Mordecai and Esther have made significant compromises in order to survive, in order to prosper in this new culture. I mean Esther with the apparent approval of her cousin Mordecai becomes queen literally by out-competing all the other virgins in the king's harem and Mordecai takes up residence in what's called the citadel at Susa. His name is an adaptation of the pagan God Marduk and his location in the center of government power, well they both point to his willingness to set aside his Jewish origins in order to survive in this new culture.

So we pick up the story where we left it off last week with a look at the two major villains in the book of Esther. They just happen to occupy the two highest positions of power in all of Persia. The second ranking person is a man named Haman, and he's risen so high in the ranks of Persian officials that the king commands every single person who comes in contact with him to bow in his presence. We know that Mordecai becomes the lone person in Persia who refuses. We're not told the reason why Mordecai refuses but we're told that Haman is an Agagite. That means he is a distant relative

of King Agag who was the king of the Amalekites and that's a people group that was dedicated to the destruction of Israel. We're not told what Mordecai's motive was in refusing to bow, whether it was his awareness that Haman was from a long tribe of anti-Semites or whether he resented the fact that Haman had achieved a position of prominence that Mordecai had not. We do know that Haman had been promoted to this prominent position shortly after Mordecai had uncovered a palace plot to assassinate the king. Instead of being rewarded for his diligence and loyalty, Mordecai got nothing while Haman became vice regent of the entire nation. But one thing that Haman could never get, the one thing he could never get was Mordecai's respect. Haman's ego and insecurity just could not allow him to set aside the disrespect that he received from Mordecai's refusal to bow to him and so his dislike begins to turn into disgust, his hatred becomes an obsession not only just with Mordecai but with every one of his fellow Jews as well. Haman wants nothing, nothing more than the destruction of all the Jews in Persia. We find out that Haman is also a very superstitious person who won't make a move without consulting his equivalence of a Ouija board. We pick up the story at *Esther 3:5*. It says this: *And when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury. But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had made known to him to the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of*

Mordecai, throughout the whole king kingdom of Ahasuerus. In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, they cast lots) before Haman day after day; and they cast it month after month till the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. See Haman wants to consult with the gods as to the best timing for his act of genocide and so he begins to cast lots for each single month. And as each month goes by, the lot says no until finally he gets to the month of Adar which is the twelfth month, fully a year later, and the lot says yes. Haman has no idea that he is already beginning to fall into the hands of a sovereign God he knows nothing about. He thinks casting lots gives him access to the gods. What he doesn't realize is that a sovereign God controls every single cast of the lot. Proverbs 16 says: The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord. Haman and his henchmen decide on a one-year plan to destroy the Jews. Of course not realizing that this one-year plan also gives God's people time to respond. And with this timetable established, Haman decides to approach the second villain of our story, King Ahasuerus, with a proposition designed to wipe out the Jews by telling the king: "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king's laws, so that it is not to the king's profit to tolerate them. If it

please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay 10,000 talents of silver into the hands of those who have charge of the king's business, that they may put it into the king's treasuries." Now this amount that Haman is offering the king, it's a staggering amount. To put it into perspective, Athens at the height of its power and influence had cash reserves of about 9,000 talents and here's Haman, a single individual, offering the king ten thousand talents. I mean the amount of money was staggering but Haman is not being generous here. See Haman has a plan to make back all of his money. His interest was not to just utterly wipe out each and every Jew in all of Persia but also to plunder their goods. Haman intends to do with the Jews exactly what Hitler and the Third Reich did not only by slaughtering the Jews but also with plundering their wealth. All of his viciousness is directed at a people who have done absolutely nothing and caused no harm whatsoever to the nation that is attacking them. King Ahasuerus who we've called out as the second villain in the story, agrees to Haman's terms not even caring enough to find out who it is that Haman is actually going after. Neither he nor the king realize that they just signed the death warrant for Queen Esther who still has yet to reveal her Jewishness. Again we pick up at verse 13. It says: *Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with instructions to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day*

of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods. A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province by proclamation to all the peoples to be ready for that day. The couriers went out hurriedly by order of the king, and the decree was issued in Susa the citadel. And the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was thrown into confusion.

I want you to stop and think about this for a minute. Haman and the king have just signed a death warrant for thousands of people. I mean, they've ordered the death and destruction of men and women and children and what do they do? They go out to celebrate. They go out for a drink. I mean as I've said before, Persia has been more or less welcoming to these other cultures that they had defeated and as long as you didn't rock the boat, you could assimilate in their culture and maybe even attain a position of some power and influence as Esther and Mordecai had attained. We don't know specifically how many Jews there were in Persia but there was a sizeable number who had successfully assimilated into the culture. And now literally out of the blue comes an edict from the head of the government to every single city, town, and province and it says not that the Jews are going to be sanctioned or penalized or even fined for some unknown and equally unspecified offense, no, instead it says that every single Jewish man, woman

and child was to be destroyed, to be killed and annihilated all on one single day and then all of their goods were to be plundered.

Well, like I said last time, it required two different kinds of evil for the Jews to be attacked this way. Haman was the active purveyor of hatred and destruction and Ahasuerus was the passive purveyor whose ignorance and indifference allowed it to flourish. And all of this murder and bloodshed just because Haman was insulted by a Jew named Mordecai? I mean do you think there might be something more to this than a simple desire for revenge? Do you think this might have something to do with the war between the two kingdoms? Do you think that Haman's rage was just a natural inclination or perhaps an unnatural desire placed within him by the king of the kingdom of darkness, a king whose desire was to destroy the Jews before they could produce a Messiah who would destroy him. I mean we all know that the enemy was unsuccessful at preventing the Messiah's arrival and that Jesus did do precisely what the enemy was afraid of. He lived out that perfect life then he offered his life up as a payment for our imperfection on the cross. And God actually describes his triumph through Jesus this way, he says this in *Colossians 2*. He says: *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal*

demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him. I mean it's right there in the word. I've said it many times, Satan is an already defeated foe. He's one who has been disarmed and put to open shame by the Lord Jesus Christ, but that doesn't mean that Satan's given up doing his best to wreak havoc on the one responsible for defeating him and for the people group that produced him and that would be Jesus and that would be the Jews. I mean have you ever wondered why anti-Semitism has been a huge part of human history going all the way back to the very first anti-Semites who enslaved the Jews in the Egypt and why it's still a part of our history that appears to be growing even now? I think once again you just have to put this into the context of this war between the two kingdoms. This planet still belongs to the kingdom of darkness and to the extent that you identify with it, it's going to love you. To the extent that you reject this earthly kingdom for the kingdom of God, it's going to hate you. And that's not speculation on my part. That's a simple fact attested to by Jesus. This is what he said. He said: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." Many folks would blanch at this idea describing our relationship with the world as being a kind of a love-hate

relationship and they just, they don't see it in nearly so stark a term. But what does God say? I mean, God is saying if your view and your perception of life itself is earthbound, if it's material and limited to what you can taste, touch, see, hear, or feel, you're going to get along fine with this world. But if you challenge that view, if you challenge it by placing your faith in the one who chose you out of this world, you're going to find that this world is quite capable of turning on you just like it turned on Mordecai. I mean imagine being a Jew in Mordecai's Persia. Just picture what was going on in his mind. You've assimilated enough into the culture, now you've got friends, you've got neighbors, you've got people who may not worship the way you do but still they're pleasant, they're accommodating, they're your neighbors. You've managed to fit into the neighborhood rather well. Suddenly the government sends out an edict to all the states that states these very neighbors now are commanded to start sharpening their knives, get out their clubs and systematically start butchering you and your fellow Jews. I mean you probably could be forgiven for not even imagining that that might be in the hearts of everyone who's locked into this kingdom. But you know, we all sense that all it takes is the right ruler and the right circumstance and the kingdom of darkness can overwhelm a culture and that thin layer of civilization can evaporate in a heartbeat. The more you understand the binary nature of our loyalties to these

two kingdoms, the more you understand that eventually you are going to have to make a declaration at some point of which kingdom you are part. And that's precisely what we're going to find happening to Mordecai and Esther.

See, the enemy has but three things that he has to do to overwhelm a culture and wipe out a people group. He only has to render those people as silent, as powerless, and worthless, and the rest is history. I mean he did it with the Jews in Nazi Germany, he did it with the Hutus destroying the Tutsis in Rwanda, he's doing it right now in our culture with his war against the unborn. We're going to find out the one place he failed at miserably is chronicled in the book of Esther. God sovereignly guided and protected the Jewish nation but he did it through the choices that were made by two individuals, Mordecai and Esther. Now extreme circumstances may have driven their choices but the hard fact for us as Christians is that all of us have choices to make about which kingdom we're going to serve. James told us that we just cannot love the world and God at the same time. He said: *You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* John goes even farther. John says if you really do love this world, you can't possibly have love for the Father. And again the choice is stark, he says: *"Do not love the world or the things*

in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." You have to understand, the ruler of this world is not neutral about where your loyalty lies. I mean he's a bitter sworn enemy of the kingdom of God and to the extent that you identify with God's kingdom will be the extent to which he will become your own bitter sworn enemy. The greatest mistake that we can make is thinking that somehow we can accommodate both kingdoms. That's exactly what Jesus told us we cannot do. He said: *"No one can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other."*

And again we go back to this proxy war between these two kingdoms that we're right in the middle of. These are not just different kingdoms, they are polar opposites of each other. One represents the light, the other represents the darkness. One represents truth, the other represents a lie. I mean, this is not just colorful language that's used to describe an enemy, this is an actual description of who the two parties are. The God says the kingdom of God is just and pure and lovely and excellent but he also says the kingdom of this earth is immoral, impure, full of envy, strife, and jealousy. And just as it was in World War II, it would be impossible to even imagine somebody trying to give their loyalty to Nazi Germany and to the allies simultaneously. Well, so, too, would it be out of the realm of possibility to consider

bridging a chasm between these two kingdoms. You simply have to make a choice. If it is the kingdom of light, it is not the kingdom of darkness. And if your choice is the kingdom of light, don't expect the kingdom of darkness to make this life easy. 2 Timothy says: *Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will, will be persecuted.* See, the fact is the more you identify with Jesus Christ, the more the kingdom of earth is going to harass you at the very least. Certainly what they did with the Jews, certainly what they're doing with the Jews. But Jews don't identify with Christ at all. So why are they still being persecuted? Well, it just so happens that the prince of God's kingdom left heaven itself, and then he became a person of earth just so that he could defeat the power of the king of this earth. And it just so happens he was Jewish.

See, the nation of Israel is a constant reminder to the ruler of this world that God will do what he wants and that he is the ultimate victor. If you just step back and consider Israel, you have to see that they represent a corporate miracle unheard of in all of human history. There's never been in all of humankind a people group that have gone extinct for nineteen centuries as the Jews did and then suddenly reappear. I mean there's been plenty of groups of people who cease to exist because they've been plundered and scattered and absorbed by the vast sea of humanity itself. I

mean, at one time the Aztecs and the Incas were a great and mighty people. And so were the Mayans and so were the Vikings and so were the Phoenicians. They all went out of business. I mean they all became extinct, never to be heard from again. Well the Jews went out of business as well. I mean in A.D. 70 the temple in Jerusalem was utterly and completely destroyed, it precluded their ability to offer sacrifice, destroying the only means they had to get right with God. That temple's destruction was by design. Jesus had come to earth as a Jewish savior but his death marked the end of the sacrificial system as Jesus became the ultimate sacrifice who paid the price of sin once and for all. The destruction of the temple marked the beginning of the end for Israel and the Jewish people, like all other extinct people groups, they were scattered over all the earth. You probably know that people have all kinds of opinions as to what role Israel's going to play in the end times. Well, there's only one thing that I can tell you with certainty, and that is that it is God's hand that miraculously brought Israel back from extinction. You know if anyone's looking for a miracle to prove God's presence and power, you need look no further than the nation of Israel and the miracle of its reappearance. You know Isaiah prophesied that one day God would restore Israel and draw back the remains of his people from the four corners of the earth. In *Isaiah 11:11* he says: *In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his*

people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the costlands of the sea. He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. Well, folks, on May 14th, 1948 that day actually happened. That's the day Israel became a nation. And once again we see Romans 8:28 at work. See, God caused one of the most horrific acts of evil ever to take place in human history to work together for good, the birth of Israel as a nation. Now, am I saying that God killed six million Jews in order to produce the nation of Israel? Not at all. Understand, God didn't do that. We humans did that. Hitler did that. What God is saying here is that he can take the very worst that human beings can do and still manage somehow to squeeze good out of that, and Israel's just another example.

I love to point out to people that in the history of mankind, never once has it happened that a previously extinct people group suddenly reappears. I mean it's the equivalent of the Mayans just reappearing and taking over Arizona or the Vikings suddenly taking over Minnesota. I mean in all of human history that simply does not happen. You liked that Minnesota, right? It never happens with the exception of this one gigantic miracle. And not only did Israel miraculously reappear after 19 centuries but in an

incredibly short period of time it's become, according to an international poll taken by *U.S. News and World Report* the eighth most powerful nation in the world. I mean not only does a nation go out of business for 19 centuries but in less than a century it's ranked among the top ten powers in the world. How in the world could somebody not see that as miraculous? The world simply shrugs its shoulders and it tries to get you to believe it's no big deal when in fact it's never happened to any other people group ever. And it just so happens that's exactly what God said he would do in the Bible and it's continuing to unfold even to this day.

Well now, you might argue, well, Jewish people don't accept Jesus as Savior, and that's true. I mean most Jewish people don't. And because of that they need the gospel as much as anyone else who rejects Christ. But that doesn't mean they are not still a unique people group and that they are not still being singled out by the ruler of this world for a unique type of hatred. See, there's a reason why anti-Semitism has been with us since the beginning of a Semitic people. I believe it's because they are inextricably bound up with the story of the kingdom of God. They are the very people group that produced the very son of God who not only destroyed the devil's work on the cross but who continues to plunder his kingdom every time a new person comes to faith.

We see this anti-Semitism rising even today. I mean the news this week was filled with the high profile account of a hate crime. A gay black television actor claimed he was taunted and beaten for his sexuality and for his race. Well, it turned out to be a hoax and it was a hoax that dominated the news cycle for an entire week. But the very same night of that hoax, a Jewish man was surrounded by three thugs and beaten to a pulp. The entire attack was caught on video. It also showed that nothing was stolen, they had no interest in robbery. The man was obviously Jewish and the attack was obviously and blatantly anti-Semitic, but chances are very good you didn't hear about that one at all. Ben Shapiro wrote an article about it entitled "On January 29, Two Hate Crimes Occurred. The Media Only Covered The Fake One. Here's Why." Shapiro said:

"Outside of a report in *The Jerusalem Post*, the story received virtually no attention. This isn't the only story of anti-Semitism in New York. Not by a long shot. Two weeks before that beating, a Jewish man, 19, was 'violently assaulted' as he walked past a local laundromat by a group of teenage black males. In December, a 16-year-old Jewish teen spent a week in a hospital after being beaten by two other teens; witnesses said that the teens screamed 'Kill the Jew.' The NYPD categorized the attack as 'gang related' rather than a hate crime, angering Jews in the area. This weekend vandals shattered the window of a Chabad in Bushwick as the rabbi

and his family slept inside. In fact, according to *NBC New York*, 'The city has seen a sharp increase in reported hate crimes so far in 2019, the NYPD said. Police had investigated 42 hate crimes through Feb. 4, compared with 19 at the same point last year. Most of those were anti-Semitic.' The *New York Times* reported in October of last year that 'there have been four times as many crimes motivated by bias against Jews -- 142 in all -- as there have against blacks. Hate crimes against Jews have outnumbered hate crimes targeted at transgender people by a factor of 20.' None of this has received media attention comparable to the Smollett situation. Why? Because, as the Times also admitted in October, 'anti-Semitism bypasses consideration as a serious problem in New York because it refuses to conform to an easy narrative with a single ideological enemy.' In other words, it doesn't fit the narrative."

May I suggest another reason why it doesn't fit the narrative? Could it be because there is a proxy war still going on between two kingdoms and that the ruler of this kingdom still has an axe to grind against the very people group who produced the Savior who guaranteed his doom? And could it be that he so controls the narrative that blatant attacks against both Christians and Jews produce nothing more than a shrug of the shoulder. I mean after all he is the ruler of this world.

So how do we respond when we sense that the anger and hostility on all counts in this culture is rising against the kingdom of God? We go back to Romans 8:28. We go back to our absolute certainty that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love him and who are called according to his purpose. To our absolute certainty that our sovereign God is still in charge and that the ultimate narrative is his to shape as he pleases to advance his kingdom. It is here in our story that Mordecai and Esther both begin to enter the arena of the heroic, and we'll see that both of them were able to do so because they both utterly abandoned themselves to the sovereignty of God. We pick up the story at *Esther 4*. It says: *When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry. He went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.*

Mordecai tears his garments and he runs screaming into the center of the city bewailing his fate and the fate of his people. And so he runs screaming right up to the entrance of the king's gate where

he's prevented from entering. Understand, Mordecai was in this predicament because Israel as a nation had been overwhelmed militarily and he was part of the collateral damage. The temple had been destroyed, the sacred articles in the temple had been stolen and used a party favors by their conquerors, and he and Esther were still trying to kind of find a way to keep their faith quiet and assimilate into this pagan culture, and now it's all come undone. Well before we come down too hard on Mordecai, we have to remember that he had been part of a culture that was constantly reminding him that his God was absent. His God was absent during the temple's destruction, absent during the wholesale kidnapping and relocation of the remnant of Jews and absent now as Mordecai realizes that he and his fellow Jews have only two choices, either to flee or face certain death. Mordecai takes his cause right up to the palace to Esther. And Esther basically tells him that her hands are tied, there's nothing she can do. I mean it makes perfect sense to picture Mordecai screaming out in agony. See, at this part of the story his mortal enemy, Haman, has not only gotten his revenge on Mordecai, but because of Mordecai's intransigence, he's now successfully taking it out on the entire Jewish people. Things couldn't get worse than this. Well in fact they don't. I mean you probably know the book of Esther ends like a fairytale. Every single thing that looks bad for Mordecai and good for his mortal enemy Haman in the end gets reversed. Through a series of

stunning God-orchestrated reversals, God turns this entire story on its head. Instead of Mordecai and his fellow Jews being destroyed, killed and annihilated, it's Haman and his fellow Jew haters who suffer that fate. For those of who haven't read the book, sorry for the no spoiler alert, the cat's been let out of the bag.

But here's what I want you to take away from this, that is that there's danger in a story like this. And the danger is it lies in thinking the story is great only because it has a genuinely fairytale-type ending. See in the end the good guys win or and the bad guys lose. What God is trying to tell us through the story has to be understood in the context of all the different stories that God tells in his word, and once again it's the story of Romans 8:28. And what God is trying to tell us is that he's far bigger than you could ever imagine, and in a story like this he can take the evil that Haman intends and reverse it for Mordecai's good and God's glory. What gets lost, though, when you focus in on stories like this is that God has promised that if you belong to Jesus, he's going to do the very same thing that he did in Mordecai's life and your life as well. Not that he's going to promise you some kind of fairytale ending, but what he does promise is that every single thing in your life is going to wind up being for your good and God's glory because God is far bigger than you and I could ever imagine. And he is the one who has promised to weave your story so

that it's the best it could ever be for your good and his glory. Remember we're talking about the very same God who spoke a trillion stars into existence and calls them all by name, who created all of the wonders of creatures and oceans and sunsets and seasons and all of those things that we ascribe no longer to him but to that ubiquitous demigod known as "mother nature." I mean God is telling us through this story that no matter the situation, he's got this. The problem is thinking that Mordecai and Esther's fairytale ending is normative. There's lots of other endings in scripture people equally loved by God that don't come near ending like Mordecai's did. Consider John the Baptist, the first cousin of the Lord Jesus, Jesus himself said, *"Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist."* He died in a dungeon having his head severed and served as a party favor for Herodias. Look at the apostle Paul, arguably the greatest servant in the New Testament, responsible for the bulk of the New Testament, he was beaten and starved and shipwrecked, stoned and beheaded. And yet their story is just as God infused and God ordained as Mordecai's.

Hebrews tells us many other stories. It says this in *Hebrews 11:32*. It says: *What more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets - who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced*

justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Those are all stories with fairytale endings like Mordecai's. But God doesn't stop there. He goes on to say: Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated - of whom the world was not worthy - wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

God is very clear in saying these terrible things happen to people -- quote -- *"of whom the world was not worthy."* God says they didn't receive in this life their reward because God had something better in store for them eternally. Well, how are we to believe that? Why would we believe that? Well the answer is one word. That word is the cross. The same God who was capable of monitoring every single move by every common sparrow everywhere in

the world simultaneously has shown us that he can superintend all the machinations of Mordecai's story but that's not why we believe him. We believe him because he became one of us, and then he allowed himself to be stripped naked and nailed to a cross in order to ransom and rescue us. How much further does God have to go in demonstrating how broad and wide and deep his love for us is than the cross? I mean his power is unfathomable but so is his love. What he wants us to understand, what he wants you to understand is that he has just as much interest and the overwhelming power to make your life and my life as marvelous and miraculous as anything that's happened in Mordecai's life. I mean no doubt you and I are going to have times when we feel just like Mordecai, trapped, beaten down, abandoned, reduced to tearing our clothes and screaming in agony at a God who seems to have left us completely alone. The extent that you believe that is the extent to which you believe the enemy's lies. And the proof that God has that it is a lie, is the cross. God says: *What shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Can you trust a God who is so for us that he's willing to give up his only begotten Son? Can you trust that he's powerful enough and wise enough to shape even your life for his good, for your good and his glory?*

You know Norma Ewbank, there she is. Calling you out, Norma. She always ends her emails with a quote from the prince of preachers, Charles Spurgeon. It's a wonderful quote. I just want to end with his quote because he sums up far better than I could what I'm trying to say about the marvel of the God we serve and the life he's given us to lead. Listen to what Spurgeon has to say. He says: "Unerring wisdom ordained your lot, and selected for you the safest and best condition. Remember this, had any other condition been better for you than the one in which you are, divine love would have put you there. You are placed by God in the most suitable circumstances. Be content with such things as you have, since the Lord has ordered all things for your good." Let's pray.

Father, we just want to recapture that idea, that you are so sovereign, so powerful, and so loving that you would have each and every one of our lives and that you are shaping and molding each of us for that one goal, to be shaped and molded into a unique representation of your Son, that everything that happens in our lives if we love you as Lord and Savior happens because you love us and you want for us that ability. Father, give us the ability to trust in you when circumstances and situations scream like Mordecai's situation screamed. Help us to focus on the cross whenever we think that we're being abandoned. Help us to understand your great love, your great power, your great wisdom

belongs to us as well and we pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.