

## A Very Difficult Decision

Call to Worship: Psalm 33

Hymn #700- *Trust and Obey*

1<sup>st</sup> Scripture: Daniel 3

Hymn #13- *O Worship the King*

2nd Scripture: Esther 4

Hymn #699- *'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus*

### Introduction:

Last time, we were introduced to the antagonist of the Book of Esther, Haman, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. Haman had been exalted by King Ahasuerus, to a high position of authority, above all of the princes of Persia. And by the king's order, the people within the king's gate were to bow and pay homage to Haman. However, Mordecai, being a Jew, refused to honor Haman in this way, because of Haman's cursed Amalekite heritage. When word got back to Haman concerning Mordecai's refusal to honor him, Haman had come up with a devious plan to annihilate, kill and destroy all of the Jews in all of the provinces of the kingdom of Persia. Casting "pur" (lots), he determined to set the date of this mass destruction to the thirteenth day of the twelfth month. Haman then met with King Ahasuerus, and deceptively swayed and bribed him into letting him move forward with this evil plan. The king gave Haman his signet ring, thereby giving Haman free reign to carry out his plan in accordance with his own design. Having the ring, he drew up and sealed a decree in the name of the king, calling all people in all of the provinces to kill all of the Jews on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month. Following the completion of the decree, the couriers speedily delivered it to all of the provinces, and while Haman and the king were drinking and celebrating together, the capital city of Shushan was perplexed and in confusion.

From a worldly standpoint, it was all over for the Jews. Virtually every Jew lived within the provinces of the kingdom of Persia. Once the decree had gone out, their fate was sealed and there was no turning back. The Jews faced an impossible dilemma, and it was only a matter of time before they, their wives and their children (young and old) were to be brutally destroyed, and their assets plundered.

This morning, we move on to see the mournful response of the Jews, and a very difficult decision that Esther has to make, which could ultimately lead to her own death, with no guarantee of aiding her people during this time of great need. And once again, we will find another clear picture of God's sovereignty working together with the responsibility/accountability of man...all and always unto the glory of God alone!

### **I. A Summary of the Events of Esther 4**

Needless to say, the Jews are distraught when they learn of the king's decree. And again, while there is no direct mention of God here, clearly they perform the acts of mourning that are right in keeping with humbling themselves before God, and seeking His divine assistance. They take those steps that would clearly indicate that they are casting their souls upon the mercy of God.

Mordecai tears his clothes, puts on sackcloth and ashes, and goes about weeping loudly and bitterly throughout the city. Obviously, he realizes that his faithfulness to God has brought about this decree. The rest of the Jews in all of the provinces follow suit, expressing their mourning by fasting, weeping, and wailing, with many laying in sackcloth and ashes. Again, all of these are clear signs of desperately seeking the help and mercy of God.

News comes back to Esther, concerning all that is going on with Mordecai, and naturally, she becomes deeply distressed. She attempts to comfort Mordecai by sending him new clothes to replace his sackcloth, but he refuses to accept the gift. Esther then sends out a man named Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who was appointed to attend her, to find out exactly what was going on and why. Mordecai then conveys all that has happened to Hathach, explaining the evil plan of Haman, and he gives him a copy of the decree, to deliver to Esther, charging Esther to go and plead with the king concerning the present plight of her people.

After receiving this information, Esther then sends Hathach back to Mordecai, explaining the very difficult dilemma that she was facing. Esther has been unable to see the king for the past thirty days, and the law forbids her from simply going to him. In fact, the king's law states that if anyone seeks to come before him (without receiving a call from the king), unless he holds

out his golden scepter, that person, man or woman, is to be put to death. Having not seen the king in at least thirty days, Esther would be putting her life in great jeopardy, if she simply went into the king's inner court.

Certainly overwhelmed by the desperation of the situation, Mordecai then responds with very strong words. First, he warns Esther that she too will be directly affected by this decree, though she is in the king's palace. At the end of the day, she will not be able to escape her Jewish heritage. And then, Mordecai says something very profound, revealing his thorough confidence in the sovereignty of God, even over this seemingly impossible situation. [Read verse 14]. First, note here that Mordecai is confident that deliverance will come from some other avenue, even if Esther should fail to do the right thing. Only, Esther and her house would be judged for her failure to do what is right. And then, secondly, Mordecai expresses the very theme of this entire Book (in one sentence), when he says, "Who knows if you have come into your position as Queen, in order to help bring about this great deliverance?" Mordecai recognized that Esther's calling into such an influential position of the kingdom, was nothing less than an act of divine providence. And it could be possible that what she did now, would be a major portion of the purpose for her providential exaltation. Now, while Mordecai could not be absolutely certain of this reality (still not knowing what the results of even Esther's faithfulness would be), *we* know the certainty of it now, don't we? Needless to say, Mordecai's statement here is profound, and paramount to the whole purpose of this Book, especially as it relates to Esther's primary purpose in the Canon of Scripture for every subsequent, future generation.

Esther then responds by charging Mordecai to gather all of the Jews in Shushan for a three day full fast (no food or drink), as she will now step out in faith, knowing that she will be breaking the law, in going before the king, and that this could very likely lead to her own death. Esther and her maids will fast as well, and though the risk is great, she will take the risk. If she perishes, then so be it. And the chapter ends with Mordecai doing exactly what Esther had commanded, as Esther will now prepare to go before the king.

## **II. A General Principle Found Here**

Brethren, I want you to consider the providence of God here, especially in so far as it relates to the difficult decision that Esther has to make. I want you to note something very revealing, about God's perfect timing, which we often forget, when it comes to our own circumstances. There is a principle here that pervades all of Scripture, from Abraham's decision regarding the sacrifice of his son Isaac, to the plight of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, when called to bow before the king's idol, to the charge for King Saul to wait for Samuel to come and make the sacrifice before warring with the Philistines, to Job's temptation to curse God, to every conflict revealed in Scripture and ultimately every conflict that you will ever face as a child of God. Someone in Esther's shoes could easily complain here, saying, "You know, of all the luck," or "of all times for this to happen, it had to happen when I have not seen the king for thirty days," or "why would God allow this at this time...etc?" How often do we have such an attitude about the dilemmas and challenges that we face throughout the course of this life, as if somehow our circumstances just happened to slip under God's radar?

Well brethren, herein lays the general principle. Esther was cornered into having to make a very difficult decision here, because that is exactly where God wanted her. It had to be difficult; there had to be a deep sense of uncertainty with unknown results, forcing her to act faithfully, while trusting in the hidden, and yet, very real divine reality of God. Esther was right where God wanted her. If she were to be faithful to God, it could very well lead to her death; she would have to violate man's law, hoping that a divine intervention would take place to preserve her through it. Every benefit and glory she had gained and achieved as queen, could very well be thrown out the window right now...on account of this one decision. What will she do? What will she value? "Well, could not God have given her some other guarantee, to ensure her that all would be well?" Well, He could have, but He didn't, because doing so, would have shut the door on a key growth spurt for Esther's faith. This decision, with all of its unknowns, was prepped by God, suited just for Esther, to test and bring her to a place of great growth in her faith, and in her communion with God. Do you see that, brethren? Put yourself there. What do you do? Do you risk everything at this point? Where is your faith and hope in a God whom you cannot see or feel or touch, in the midst of a trial that is very visible and tangible?

God tests the righteous, brethren, not to learn something new about them (of which He is ignorant), but to prove them and to strengthen their faith in Him. In Hebrews 11:17-19, we are told, "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called,' concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense."

Here then is the heart of the matter, brethren: God will bring your faith to the place where the rubber meets the road; where your profession of doctrine will be converted into real life experience. God will bring you to the ledge at times; no, He will hang you over it, so that your faith in His living reality will be tried, proven and strengthened. You will be forced to entrust your life, your very soul, into the hands of His invisible reality, and if you stand firm, your faith in the living God will be greatly strengthened. The Jews were in an impossible situation...the decree had already gone out. But, what would deliverance mean, should God heed their fast, and bring about some impossible deliverance. Esther was in an impossible situation. But what would deliverance mean, should God intercede and grant her the bending of the king's golden scepter? What would it do to their faith? What would it do to their faithfulness? You see, brethren, working through such impossible dilemmas can and will stretch us, but when we come to the other side, and the glory of our invisible God is revealed, we will be as silver refined. Our trials, brethren, are good and necessary. Can we say that, although for the time being, they are anything but easy or comfortable?

### **III. Closing Thoughts**

Friends, let me ask you this morning, is God this real to you? Going beyond doctrinal confessions, church attendance, religious traditions...etc, are you ready to take steps into the unknown; life-sacrificing risks, if necessary, to express your confidence in the God of Scripture? Or is God only palatable when He is convenient and non-intrusive in life? What is the barometer measurement for your faith and trust in this God? If things change drastically tomorrow and you are called to die even, for your faith, how will you fare? Oh, may God help us, brethren. Such a

sacrifice is much harder in a country such as ours, where so-called dreams of prosperity are born and sought after every day.

For some of you, this is all just a part of your life routine. You do all sorts of things...and church of course, but you have no real faith in the living God. Friends, Christianity is not a religion of the lips; it is a religion of the heart. It is fellowship with the living God. It is your inner man in touch with the reality of God, so much so, that He means everything to you. You believe all of this! You live it! You live it in grace, but indeed, you live it!

You see, here is the reality, my friends. A far more significant decree, written by the hand of a far greater and infinitely more powerful King, has gone out. God has stated from the beginning that the soul which sins must die! Do you understand why we die, friends? No, no one wants to die, and it seems so out of place in so glorious a creation...what could have possibly gone wrong? Well, in one word, "Us!" We have sinned against our holy God. We have missed the mark of His glory; we have lived contrary to His will, to His purpose, indeed, to His very nature, and we are at enmity with our God because of this. And the decree of God has gone out...and so, we die. Sin earns death! The just payment for sin is death! Only, death moves beyond what we can presently see with the naked eye. We simply see the outward manifestation of the soul being unnaturally wrenched from the body, but there is more...there is far, far more, friends! Beyond this life, we must all stand before God, and it is at that point, that a great separation must and will take place. We will all stand before God to give an account to Him, and most; following that judgment, most will have to face a second, eternal death; eternal suffering and torment in hell. If you truly understood this, you would be far more desperate than even the Jews were, when faced with their imminent annihilation. For, their destruction would have been temporal...but yours will be eternal.

I said that that would be the final destination for most...but not for all. There are some who will never taste the second death. In fact, they will be cleared of all of their guilt on that day, and they will be welcomed into God's glorious heaven, forever! Who are these people? Only those who are found in Christ; only those whose debt of sin has been fully paid for by Christ on the cross. Do you know this Christ in truth, friends? Have you repented of your sins and embraced Him with the arms of faith? Is He real to you? Has your soul connected with Him, so that, though you have never seen Him, you love Him in truth? If not, let today be that

day. Repent of your sins; turn away from the life you are presently living, embrace Him by faith; call upon Him, and follow Him! You will never regret it!

And brethren, let me leave you with one closing thought this morning; just something to put into your conscience; something to consider here:

What might we expect God to do, if we laid aside our non-essentials, fasted and prayed for the lost, our love ones....our children? What if we sacrificed precious time for precious souls?

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25