

A young boy by the name of James had a desire to be the most famous cheesemaker in the world. He planned on becoming rich by making and selling cheese, and he began with a little wagon pulled by a pony named "Paddy." After making his cheese, he would load up his wagon, and he and Paddy would go up and down the streets of Chicago to sell the cheese, but as the months passed, the young boy began to despair because he was not making any money in spite of his long hours and hard work.

One day, he pulled his pony to a stop and began to talk to him. He said, "Paddy, there is something wrong. We are not doing it right. I'm afraid we have things turned around and our focus is not where it ought to be. Maybe we should focus on serving God and putting Him first in our lives." The boy went home and made a promise – that for the rest of his life, he would first serve God.

Many years later – the young boy, now a man, stood as the Sunday School Superintendent at the North Shore Baptist Church in Chicago and he said, "I would rather be a layman in the North Shore Baptist Church than to head the greatest corporation in America. My first job is serving Jesus."

So, every time you take a bite of Philadelphia Cream Cheese, sip a cup of Maxwell House Coffee, mix a quart of Kool-Aid, pick through a Lunchable, cook a pot of Macaroni & Cheese, spread some Grey Poupon, snack on some Corn Nuts, slurp down some Jell-O, or nibble on a Chips Ahoy Chocolate Chip Cookie, remember a boy – his pony named "Paddy," and the promise little James L. Kraft made to serve God and follow as He directed.

Like James L. Kraft, this morning we are going to focus on what we should be focusing on. Now thus far, we have covered the first four chapters of **Esther** and to get everybody caught up, I want to provide a recap before we venture on.

If you remember, long before the story of Esther, the Jews had been in exile in Babylon for 70 long years until the Babylonians were later overpowered by the Medes and Persians, who were under the rule of Cyrus the Great.

Cyrus was the king of the Persian Empire, and he became sympathetic towards the Jewish people who had been in captivity for such a long time, and so he permitted the Jews to return to their homeland to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and their temple. Over time, three groups of Jews made the journey back home to Judah, but surprisingly many of the Jews chose to remain in a foreign land – they seemed content to stay right where they were.

After King Cyrus, and after his son King Darius, we are now in the reign of King Ahasuerus – the grandson of Cyrus, the son of Darius. Ahasuerus ruled everything from India to Ethiopia, but he had his sights set on conquering Greece, so after his invasion planning was completed, Ahasuerus threw a big party at the palace to celebrate. During this party, which turned into a party full of drunks, the king commanded that his wife – Queen Vashti, be brought out so she could parade herself in front of the guests. She refused, and the king looked really bad in front of his guests, so under the advice of his counselors – who were likely also drunk, it was decided that Vashti would be stripped of her crown and kicked to the curb.

Approximately three years go by – after the failed invasion of Greece, and King Ahasuerus is back at his palace moping around in depression. He misses Vashti, and those closest to him take notice, so they devise a plan to cheer him up. Their plan – let’s have a Miss Persia Beauty Contest to determine who the new queen will be, and from this contest, an orphaned Jewish girl who was raised by her older cousin named Mordecai, was chosen to be the new queen. Her Persian name was Esther, and as commanded by Mordecai, she told no one she was Jewish.

Esther is the queen and Mordecai held some kind of official position at the king’s gate. The king’s gate was a place outside the palace where people frequently passed in and out, and as such, it became a hub where people met and conducted all kinds of business.

One day, while at the king’s gate, Mordecai learned of an assassination plot against the king, and so he tells Queen Esther about it, who in-turn alerts the king. Well, after an investigation, it was determined the plot was real and the culprits were executed, but poor Mordecai was completely forgotten. He saved the king’s life, but he wasn’t recognized or rewarded in any way – instead, this guy Haman seems to come out of nowhere, and he is exalted to the number two position in the Persian Empire, and by the command of the king, everyone was to bow before Haman as a sign of respect.

That’s what the king commanded and that’s what everyone did – well almost everyone. There is one stubborn holdout – it’s Mordecai, and he has no respect for Haman. If you recall their family history, Mordecai was a Jew and Haman was an Agagite – a descendant of the Amalekites. The Amalekites were mortal enemies of the Jews starting as far back as the Exodus, and Mordecai could not bow before this man – this Amalekite. Well, Mordecai’s disrespect is eventually reported to Haman – Haman is told Mordecai is a Jew and the red-hot flames of hatred were re-ignited. It’s become personal, and Haman is determined to kill Mordecai, but

not just Mordecai – he wants to exterminate all the Jews under the rule of the Persian Empire, which would include those living in the Promised Land.

So, Haman hatches an evil plot and he gets the king’s permission to exterminate a “certain people” he only described to the king as being different and rebellious. The king blindly trusted Haman – he asked nothing about these people, and foolishly, the king told Haman he could do to these people as he wanted, and then the king gave his signet ring to Haman.

With the ring in hand, Haman summons the royal scribes and they write out the extermination order against the Jews. Haman stamps the seal on the order with the king’s ring, and it becomes official – it becomes law. On one day, 11 months away, all the people in the empire would be allowed to murder the Jews. The extermination order was sent out in advance, as a public notice, so all the people would know what is about to come.

Mordecai learns of the extermination order and he’s beside himself. He’s grief-stricken. He puts on sackcloth and covers himself with ashes as a sign of great sorrow and despair, he’s loudly wailing for all to hear – doing all of this while he makes his way to the city square just in front of the king’s gate.

Now Queen Esther lives in pampered seclusion, and she knows nothing about the extermination order against the Jews; however, she is told that Mordecai is making a spectacle of himself in the city square. This troubles Esther and she hopes he will stop for his own sake – but he won’t, so she sends out a messenger to Mordecai to find out what’s happening, and through this messenger, she learns about the extermination order. That’s why Mordecai is so upset, and he tells Esther to go to the king and plead for mercy for her people, but there’s a problem with that.

Even though the king is her husband, Esther can’t approach him without a personal invitation. That’s the law of the land – the one law everyone knows, and to approach the king uninvited will result in instant death unless the king extends his golden scepter to grant life. And to make matters worse, Esther has not seen the king in 30 days, so she’s not sure where she stands with him at the moment. All of this is relayed to Mordecai, and he sends a message back to Esther – essentially explaining that she is the right person, in the right place, at the right moment, and she needs to do the right thing. *“Esther, God made you the queen for such a time as this. It’s not a coincidence that you, an orphaned Jewish girl, is in the palace.”*

Now, when we left off last week, Esther called the Jews to fast and pray for her – for three days, and then – no matter what, she would do the right thing, place her life in jeopardy, and plead for her people. Esther had come to that place where she surrendered her life to God – leaving the outcome in His hands.

So, now that you are all caught up, we come to **Esther 5**, and let's start with **verse 1**.

Now it came about on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace in front of the king's rooms, and the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room, opposite the entrance to the palace.

After the three days of fasting and prayer – waiting on the Lord for courage and for clarity, Queen Esther puts on her royal robes and walks down the hall towards the king's throne room. Esther has not been summoned by the king – she's uninvited, and she has no idea what the king will do to her.

Now, as a reminder, God is not mentioned anywhere in the book of Esther – not one single time, but He's clearly working behind the scenes, even with this king. We are told in **Proverbs 21:1**,

“The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes.”

In other words, God can handle this king, and unbeknownst to Esther, like shaping the banks of a river to change its direction, the invisible hand of God is at work in the heart of this king – arranging the circumstances in Esther's favor, and we are told beginning with **verse 2**,

² When the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, she obtained favor in his sight; and the king extended to Esther the golden scepter which was in his hand. So Esther came near and touched the top of the scepter. ³ Then the king said to her, “What is troubling you, Queen Esther? And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be given to you.” ⁴ Esther said, “If it pleases the king, may the king and Haman come this day to the banquet that I have prepared for him.”

When the king sees Esther **standing in the court**, he extends his golden scepter to her – which is his way of saying, *“Come on in.”*

Esther had no idea what would happen to her – she could have been killed on the spot, she could have been stripped of her crown and kicked to the curb like the last queen, but here the king invites her in and says, **“What’s troubling you, Queen Esther?”** In fact, he goes further and says, *“I’ll give you up to half of my kingdom”* which seems to be a common expression of kings which means **“What can I do for you? Just name it.”**

Esther replies, **“If it pleases the king, may the king and Haman come this day to the banquet that I have prepared for him.”**

Just so you know, in that culture, banquets were a common setting for discussing serious matters, and once the meal was finished, and after some wine, then important issues would be discussed. So, Esther is following the proper custom with her request – and in her request, she also asks that the king bring Haman along as well, and that leads us to **verses 5-8.**

⁵ Then the king said, “Bring Haman quickly that we may do as Esther desires.” So the king and Haman came to the banquet which Esther had prepared. ⁶ As they drank their wine at the banquet, the king said to Esther, “What is your petition, for it shall be granted to you. And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be done.” ⁷ So Esther replied, “My petition and my request is: ⁸ if I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and do what I request, may the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king says.”

So, Queen Esther, King Ahasuerus, and Haman attend this private banquet, but the king still does not know what’s troubling Esther, so he asks her again, **“What’s on your mind?”** Now, it’s here that Esther seems to pause, and then she says to the king,

“There is something I do want to say to you, but I want to wait until tomorrow if that’s okay. After another banquet with you two – then I will tell you.”

Now, this is a very important moment for Esther. She’s focused on her mission. She’s focused on what she needs to do. She’s ready to drop a bomb on Haman, but at the same time, she’s sensitive to God’s leading, she understands that timing is just as important as action, and she’s keenly aware of what’s going on around her. For whatever reason, Esther realizes this isn’t the right time nor the right place to point a finger at Haman, and instead of jumping ahead of the Lord and doing

something rash or saying something she will regret – she waits – and as we will learn next week, God’s perfect timing required just one more day.

Then we come to the last portion of this chapter beginning with **verse 9**, where we are told,

9 Then Haman went out that day glad and pleased of heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king’s gate and that he did not stand up or tremble before him, Haman was filled with anger against Mordecai. 10 Haman controlled himself, however, went to his house and sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh. 11 Then Haman recounted to them the glory of his riches, and the number of his sons, and every instance where the king had magnified him and how he had promoted him above the princes and servants of the king. 12 Haman also said, “Even Esther the queen let no one but me come with the king to the banquet which she had prepared; and tomorrow also I am invited by her with the king. 13 Yet all of this does not satisfy me every time I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.”

As Haman leaves the banquet on a huge ego trip, bursting with pride with an invitation to another banquet, once again he goes through the **king’s gate** and once again, he sees Mordecai – that stubborn disrespectful Jew who now won’t even give him the time of day. Haman is livid over this disrespect, but he maintains his composure and makes his way home.

At home with his family and friends around him, Haman gloats over himself – talking about his power and his prestige and his possessions. He’s the number two man in the entire Persian Empire, he has everything he could ever want – even the beautiful Queen Esther seems to like him – but there’s this one guy who makes his blood boil – Mordecai.

Haman is fixated on him, and he tells his family and friends in so many words,

*“I’m great as you all know, but I can’t even enjoy my greatness because all I can think about is this one guy who disrespects me. Yes, I have everything that life has to offer and then some, but nothing will **satisfy me**, and I mean nothing as long as that guy is still in the picture.”*

Haman is trapped in tunnel vision where the only thing that matters to him is this one guy he hates. He’s on top of the world, blessed beyond measure, and yet his fixation with Mordecai consumes him – it poisons him – it robs him of any satisfaction and joy in life, and it can do the same to us.

If we are not careful, we can fall into the same tunnel vision trap as Haman. We too can become so fixated and stuck on certain people, on certain issues, on certain experiences, on certain problems – that we can lose sight of God, we can get distracted from our purpose, we can become blinded to His blessings, and our thoughts can turn to poison.

Several years ago, my wife and I went up to Canada to serve as chaperones with a bunch of teenagers who were putting on a Vacation Bible School. During one of the evenings, I was in a large room with the teenage boys trying to sleep, but they wanted to talk with me, and the conversation turned to the topic of girls.

These boys told me that their thoughts about girls were not the kind of thoughts that were pleasing to God, they knew their thoughts were sinful, and they wanted some insight from me. I told them that the Bible teaches we are to renew our minds – replacing bad thoughts with good thoughts, and then I gave them an exercise to illustrate my point.

*I said to them: think really, really hard about the number 5. After they thought about it for a few moments, I then told them to stop thinking about that number. I could see them straining and I asked them, **so what are you thinking about**, and they replied the number 5. They couldn't get it out of their heads and that's what I expected, so I told them to take the number 5 and multiply it by 4. I could see their minds working, and then I told them to divide it by 2. I asked them again, **what number were they thinking about** and they answered the number 10.*

Removing the number 5 from their minds would be hard, but replacing the number 5 with another number was so much easier. All I did was to redirect their thinking.

Now, I assumed the boys got the point from my exercise, but the next day the director of the Vacation Bible School approached me and asked what I was teaching them. When I asked why, she told me she took the boys to the mall, and as they walked through the mall, she could hear them doing math equations.

The point is, if you find yourself in this poisonous fixation that robs you of your joy and your satisfaction in life – redirect your thinking, and do what the Apostle Paul tells you to do. He says in **Philippians 4:8-9**,

⁸Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. ⁹The things

you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Simply put – renew your mind by replacing your trash with God’s treasure. Day by day, saturate your mind with the truths found in God’s Word, so that the Spirit of God can transform your way of thinking.

Okay, we aren’t done with Haman just yet, for he needs some advice, and in **verse 14** we are told,

Then Zeresh his wife and all his friends said to him, “Have a gallows fifty cubits high made and in the morning ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on it; then go joyfully with the king to the banquet.” And the advice pleased Haman, so he had the gallows made.

Apparently, Haman is married to a sweet lady and she tells him,

*“Honey, I know this must be hard for you, so how about you put up a sharp wooden stake about 75 feet high so everyone can see it, then tomorrow morning go to the king and have Mordecai impaled on it. After that, you can go to your banquet and enjoy yourself. **How does that sound?**”*

Well, it sounded great to Haman and he got a work crew right on it so it would be ready in the morning.

Seemingly, everything is going Haman’s way. The Jews whom he hated, were going to be exterminated in a matter of months, but even better yet, Mordecai will die tomorrow – or so he thinks, for he doesn’t realize that there is a God working behind the scenes – working behind what is seen, on behalf of His people. God did it then, and He does it now.

Now, maybe you are here this morning and you realize, like Haman, you are satisfied with nothing. Your thoughts are consumed on something or someone and this fixation has poisoned you. If you are a Christian, I would encourage you to renew your mind by saturating yourself with the truths found in God’s Word. Replace your thoughts with His Words.

Maybe you are here this morning and you do not know Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. In that case – ultimately, nothing will satisfy and fill the empty void in your life expect for Jesus. He desires a relationship with you – more than you could ever know, and He wants to satisfy you with the life only He can give.

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