

I read about a 747-passenger plane that was halfway across the Atlantic when the captain got on the loudspeaker and said, “Ladies and Gentlemen, we have lost one of our engines, but we can still reach London with the three we have left. Unfortunately, this will make us one hour late.”

An hour later, the captain made another announcement, “Sorry, but we lost another engine, but no need to worry because we can still make it on two; however, this will make us two hours late.”

*A short while later, the passengers heard the captain’s voice again, “**Guess what folks?** We just lost our third engine, but rest assured – we can fly with only one. We will now arrive in London three hours late.”*

At this point, one passenger became frustrated and shouted out, “Are you kidding me! If we lose another engine, we’ll be up here all night!”

Well, no you won’t, for if you lose your last engine, if you lose your air speed, there is this little thing called the “law of gravity” which essentially says, “what goes up, must come down.” In our atmosphere, the fundamental law of gravity is a constant force – it’s always in effect, and unless the higher laws of aerodynamics can counteract the weight of the aircraft, the law of gravity will always act to force that heavy metal object in the sky back to the ground. What goes up, must come down.

This morning, we are going to look at two decrees – two laws authorized by King Ahasuerus – laws which in many respects interact with each other in a similar way as the laws of aerodynamics interact with the law of gravity.

If you recall, Queen Esther had saved her cousin Mordecai and the Jews from Haman. Haman was executed by the king – he’s dead, but his handiwork, his extermination order against the Jews was still very much alive. Esther knew this, she was deeply burdened for her people – a condemned people, and she felt compelled to stand in the gap before King Ahasuerus. So, once again, Esther went before the king uninvited and pleaded that he would revoke the extermination order against them, and this morning, we are going to see what happens next.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Esther 8** and we will pick up with where we left off from last week, beginning with **verse 7**.

⁷ So King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, “Behold, I have given the house of Haman to Esther, and him they have hanged on the gallows because he had stretched out his hands against the Jews. ⁸ Now you write to the Jews as you see fit, in the king’s name, and seal it with the king’s signet ring; for a decree which is written in the name of the king and sealed with the king’s signet ring may not be revoked.”

Okay, this is going to require some explaining. As I said, Queen Esther made her passionate plea for the lives of the Jews and here is the response of King Ahasuerus.

First, the king points out that he has already executed Haman for raising his hand against the Jews. He’s killed the guy who wanted to exterminate them – he’s shown that he is in favor of the Jews, he’s on board with saving their lives, but he’s done all he can do. Then the king tells Esther and Mordecai if they can think of something else, something better, they can prepare another decree – a second one – write in it whatever they want in the **king’s name**, and then they can **seal it with the king’s signet ring** to make it official – to make it law. This was some great news – Esther and Mordecai have free reign, and the king also reminds them, a decree **sealed with the king’s signet ring may not be revoked**.

According to the law of the Medes and Persians, a document signed by the king, sealed with his signet ring, may not be revoked because that would imply the king had made a mistake – even if he did, and let me show you what I mean.

Let’s take a moment to look at **Daniel 6**, where King Darius, the father of King Ahasuerus was reminded of this very law by some government officials who hated the prophet Daniel and wanted him out of the picture. Beginning with **verse 6** we are told,

⁶ Then these commissioners and satraps came by agreement to the king and spoke to him as follows: “King Darius, live forever! ⁷ All the commissioners of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the high officials and the governors have consulted together that the king should establish a statute and enforce an injunction that anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions’ den. ⁸ Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document so that it may not be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked.” ⁹ Therefore King Darius signed the document, that is, the injunction.

¹⁰ Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously. ¹¹ Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God. ¹² Then they approached and spoke before the king about the king's injunction, "Did you not sign an injunction that any man who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, is to be cast into the lions' den?" The king replied, "The statement is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked." ¹³ Then they answered and spoke before the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the injunction which you signed, but keeps making his petition three times a day."

¹⁴ Then, as soon as the king heard this statement, he was deeply distressed and set his mind on delivering Daniel; and even until sunset he kept exerting himself to rescue him. ¹⁵ Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, "Recognize, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or statute which the king establishes may be changed."

Three times, King Darius was reminded that any law the king establishes cannot be changed. This was true for Darius and it was just as true for Ahasuerus. So, that's really good to know as Esther and Mordecai prepare a decree in the king's name – a decree that cannot be revoked. That's worthy of praise, but wait a second, that brings up a problem. Wasn't the extermination order against the Jews – the one prepared by Haman just a few months earlier and sent throughout the Persian Empire also written in the king's name and sealed with his signet ring? Yes, it was and therefore, it cannot be revoked either.

On one single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the people in the Persian Empire will have a license to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews. It's an empire-wide death sentence on the Jews, and it remains in effect. It cannot be rescinded. It's irrevocable. The king cannot revoke his own decree; therefore, a new decree is necessary to address the problem created by the first one.

So, knowing that the decree created by Haman cannot be revoked, Esther and Mordecai are given permission to write a second decree in the name of the king to counteract its effect which leads us to **verse 9**.

⁹ So the king's scribes were called at that time in the third month (that is, the month Sivan), on the twenty-third day; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded to the Jews, the satraps, the governors and the princes of the provinces which extended from India to Ethiopia, ¹²⁷ provinces, to every province according to its script, and to every people according to their language as well as to the Jews according to their script and their language. ¹⁰ He wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, and sealed it with the king's signet ring, and sent letters by couriers on horses, riding on steeds sired by the royal stud. ¹¹ In them the king granted the Jews who were in each and every city the right to assemble and to defend their lives, to destroy, to kill and to annihilate the entire army of any people or province which might attack them, including children and women, and to plunder their spoil, ¹² on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar). ¹³ A copy of the edict to be issued as law in each and every province was published to all the peoples, so that the Jews would be ready for this day to avenge themselves on their enemies. ¹⁴ The couriers, hastened and impelled by the king's command, went out, riding on the royal steeds; and the decree was given out at the citadel in Susa.

Mordecai is the number two man in the Persian Empire, and with the assistance of royal scribes, he takes it upon himself to create this second decree. Mordecai knows he cannot cancel the first decree, but there is something he can do to counteract its effect to “even the playing field” so to speak. He can issue a new decree that would allow the Jews to assemble together on that thirteenth day of the last month of the year to defend themselves against anyone who would come against them.

Under the first decree prepared by Haman, the Jews were essentially powerless – for since it came by a royal command, it could very well include some official action against them by the Persian army, but Mordecai’s decree now empowered the Jews to gather together and take up arms to defend themselves against those who might attack them without any fear of official retaliation.

In his decree, like in the decree from Haman, the Jews – in self-defense, were allowed **to destroy, to kill and to annihilate** any people who might attack them, including their women and children, and I think it was written this way not only to mirror the words of the extermination order but also to scare off anyone who still might try to attack them.

And, what's up with the horses? If you notice, this thing about the horses seems to be a big deal. We are told that once Mordecai's decree was completed, it would be sent out by **couriers** who rode horses sired by **the royal stud** which was a detail not mentioned in the extermination order created by Haman.

Now, just so you know, the Persian kings, beginning with Darius, had developed a very efficient postal system used throughout the empire, and it might be best described as an ancient version of the pony express which worked on a relay system. A courier would get on his horse and ride like the wind for a prescribed distance, then he would hand off the message to another courier for the next stage who would ride like the wind, and so on, and so on. This is how the new decree would be sent out, **but why on royal horses – horses sired by the royal stud? Why are we being told this?**

I think this detail was added to make it clear that the king stands behind this new decree from Mordecai. The king was not able to revoke the first decree according to the law, but by offering up his own royal horses to the couriers, he let it be known where he stood – he's in favor of the Jews.

Now we come to the last few verses in the chapter, a chapter that began with tears but ends in rejoicing. Beginning with **verse 15**, we are told,

15 Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white, with a large crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced. 16 For the Jews there was light and gladness and joy and honor. 17 In each and every province and in each and every city, wherever the king's commandment and his decree arrived, there was gladness and joy for the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many among the peoples of the land became Jews, for the dread of the Jews had fallen on them.

The Jews had been in mourning, but with this new decree from Mordecai, the mourning had turned into gladness, and if there was any doubt in the validity of this new decree – there stands Mordecai the Jew next to the king in royal clothing. **Isn't it ironic?** At the beginning of our story, Esther and Mordecai were afraid to make their identity known as Jews, but now, it's necessary for all to see.

The appearance of Mordecai was proof beyond any doubt that the good news was true, in fact, it was so startling that many of the Gentiles came to the realization that the God of the Jews was working behind the scenes on behalf of His people and they wanted to know and follow their God.

When thinking about these two decrees, I am reminded of God's great love for His people – for us, in light of a seemingly hopeless situation. Like the Jews in this story of Esther, we too were condemned – we too faced certain death. In **Ezekiel 18:4**, we are told,

The soul who sins will die.

God has declared judgment against every guilty person – a judgment that demands death for sin. Ever since the fall of man, the law of sin and death has always been a constant force upon mankind because mankind inherited this sin nature from Adam. Our human condition, our fallen carnal nature, is controlled by sin, and as proof of this, the Apostle Paul says in **Romans 3**, beginning with **verse 10**,

¹⁰as it is written, “There is none righteous, not even one; ¹¹There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; ¹²All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one.”

These verses from Paul tell us that according to God's perfect standards, all of mankind – left to themselves – without the influence of God, is fallen under the power of sin. Sin has infected and affected every part of our being, it pulls us down like gravity, and then to hammer home his point just in case anyone thinks they might be that rare exception, Paul says this in **Romans 3:23**,

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

In other words, using Jesus Christ as our comparison, there can be no doubt – all have sinned. All have fallen short of God's perfect standard as revealed in Jesus.

Now, from our perspective, we might say that some people seem better than others, and I can understand that, but as someone once said, "*If sin were blue, we'd be blue all over. Part would be dark blue, part would be sky blue, part would be light blue – but every part would be blue in one shade or another.*" No matter how you slice it, blue is still blue, and from God's perspective, sin is still sin, and we have all sinned.

So, all are declared guilty of sin before a holy and righteous God, and He has determined that the penalty for sin is death – ***the soul who sins will die***, and it's irrevocable. All have sinned, and therefore, just like all the Jews in the story of Esther, all are sentenced to death – and unless God does something to counteract that – mankind is condemned to eternal damnation and separation from God. Like

gravity, like the decree of Haman, the law of sin and death remains over us unless God steps in and makes a way. For mankind, without an act of God – it's a death sentence, but then the Apostle Paul tells us in **Romans 6:23**,

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Here Paul first reminds us of the law of sin and death – he says, “**For the wages of sin is death.**” Sin will bring a paycheck of death – we know that, and it’s a problem, but then in contrast, he includes the solution to the problem and says, “**but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**”

In His great love, despite our sinful condition, God stepped in and made a way. God did not revoke the law of sin and death – it has to stand, instead He counteracted it with a free gift of life through a sin offering – a once and for all sacrifice by His Son who would set us free from the death penalty held over us. In our sin, we were sentenced to death until God solved our problem and satisfied the law of sin and death by freely giving His Son Jesus as a sacrifice to bear our penalty on the cross. Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves, and as a result, Paul later tells us in **Romans 8:1**,

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

That word **condemnation** is a legal word that refers to “judgment” – specifically, adverse judgment *coming down on someone* who is found guilty. It refers to a legal finding of guilt and the penalty that comes with it, but for those in Jesus Christ – for those united with Him by faith, Paul says, “*God's judgment, His eternal judgment, is not going to come down upon you – not now, not ever!*”

But, how is that possible, because I don’t know about you, but I still struggle with sin, I stumble and fall, I get tripped up, I wander off the path, and I get pulled in this direction and that direction. Like the Apostle Paul said of himself in **Romans 7**, I chose to do what God doesn’t want me to do. I want to do right but sometimes I can’t seem to do it, in fact, sometimes, I do the very things I hate.

This is how Paul – God’s man in the early church, described his own personal conflict, and yet, he can still say, “**Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus?**” Yes, for those who have genuinely trusted Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, there is no possibility of receiving condemnation – correction – oh absolutely there’s correction, but no condemnation – no way,

because God said so. He has decreed it. **And why?** Because, for those of you who have received Jesus Christ by faith, Jesus has paid the penalty for your sin in full. You were found 100% guilty, and Jesus took your death penalty upon Himself. He was your substitute. He took your place. He took your condemnation – all of it. That's what He did.

Did He take away all your problems, all your failures, and all your struggles?
Nope, but in spite of your problems and failures and struggles – there is no condemnation and nothing will separate you and me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

I want to close by reading a few of the lyrics to a song called “Amazing Love”.

*I'm forgiven because You were forsaken
I'm accepted, You were condemned
I am alive and well, Your spirit is within me
Because You died and rose again
Amazing love
How can it be?
That You, my King would die for me?
Amazing love
I know it's true
It's my joy to honor You,
In all I do, I honor You*

The thing that makes this truth so amazing is that we were once hopelessly condemned to death, but by the love and mercy of God, those who believe are graciously saved, and in light of that stark reality, the only reasonable thing to do, the only grateful thing to do, the only loving thing to do, is to live our lives in a relationship with Him, seeking to follow and honor the One who saved us.

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