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[0 : 00] And like unto the light he shall thy righteousness is clear, and he thy judgment shall bring forth like newtime of the day.

Pray, did the Lord, and patiently wait for him, do not fret, for him who brought spring in his way, success in sin doth get.

Do thou from anger cease and wrath, see thou forcible soul.

Tread not thyself in any wise that evil thou shouldst do.

For those that evil doers are, shall be cut off and fall.

[1 : 41] But those that wait upon the Lord, the earth in heaven shall.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Just as we turn back to Esther chapter 3, let's pray again.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Lord God, we thank you for this day. We thank you for your word.

We thank you for another opportunity that you've given us to come together as your people and to seek to worship you. And we thank you for the freedom that we have to do so.

We thank you, Lord, for the safety, for the security that we have to be able to say that we are meeting together in the name of Jesus. We see many instances in Scripture where your people, because they are your people, come under such fierce attack.

[2 : 54] We see it in the chapter this evening. We see it through Old Testament history. We see it in the New Testament as the church of Jesus Christ meets together and feels the full blast of the persecution that Satan engineers.

And we know that still today in this world there are many places where that is felt and where that is suffered. And so we remember those who are persecuted.

We remember those who have much in the way of cause, in the natural sense to fret and to worry and to be stressed.

We remember those who are fearful and yet who are obedient to your call to gather together and to praise the name of Jesus.

And we ask, Lord, for your protection over them. We pray that you would grant them courage. We pray, Lord, that you would enable them to know your presence and your peace where they are today.

[3 : 58] We thank you that in some of the places in the world where persecution is most fierce, we see that the church is growing fastest. And we thank you, Lord, that this is your doing.

So often this is your way. And we pray for your people where they endure such things. We pray, Lord, that you would help us as we move, in a sense, out of being a Christian country into a place where there is much more hostility to the gospel.

Where the name of Jesus is not honoured but is used as a curse. Lord, we ask that you would help us, help us to stand up for Jesus.

Help us to be bold. Help us to be brave. Help us to be wise. And enable us, we pray, to have the strength to stand.

Enable us to take the opportunities that you give us to speak a word in season. We think of the people that we work alongside. We think of the people who are in our families, our friends.

[5 : 09] Some of whom are even antagonistic towards the name of Jesus. And we ask that you would help us through our words and through our actions and reactions to be ambassadors for Christ.

We see in the book of Esther there's a time to be silent and there's a time to speak. And we need wisdom. We need the Holy Spirit and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit to be able to know when to speak up and when to listen and to be quiet.

So we ask, Lord, that you would help us. Help us even in this week to be aware of the fact that we are ambassadors for Christ. Enable us, we pray, if we are your people, to take the opportunities that you give us and the freedom that we do have to speak about Jesus.

And to tell people the good news of the gospel, that Jesus loves them. That Jesus came to this world and lived and died and rose.

So that we, if we believe in him, will not perish but have everlasting life. Give us, we pray, spiritual eyes that our minds would not be fixated on things below.

[6 : 25] But Lord, that we would remember that we are here just for a while. And then there is eternity. So help us to live our lives here in time, in light of eternity. We pray, Lord, for the world that you have placed us in.

We see turmoil, we see conflict in the chapter we've read. We see evil, rulers, dictators. And we know that all of that still is happening today.

So we pray for those that you have put in positions of power and authority. You've called us to pray for them. The Queen, the Prime Minister, those in government, those in positions of leadership and responsibility.

We acknowledge, Lord, that you are the one who has allowed them to be there. We can't always understand why. We acknowledge that much of what we see and experience in this world is a mystery.

But we trust you. And we ask that you would help us to fret not, but to trust you and to delight in the Lord. Lord, to come to know you, Lord, and to walk close with you all the days that you give us in this world.

[7 : 37] We pray for those in particular need tonight. We think of those who are ill. We think of those in hospital. Those who are being treated, who are receiving treatment, who are struggling with different things.

And we ask that you would be near to each other. And we think especially of Hannah again. And we pray for wisdom, for discernment, for those who care for her. And we pray, Lord, that soon she would be able to come back here.

And that she would be given all that she needs to enjoy a better measure of health and strength than she has. We thank you for her faith. We thank you for her brightness, for her cheerfulness.

And we pray that you would sustain her and be with Gordon and Julian and the girls through this time as well. We pray for those who have COVID just now in the congregation. Those who may not be feeling too bad in terms of illness, but who struggle with the isolation of it all.

And even as they perhaps listen at home just now, we pray for your blessing to be upon them. That they would know your presence. That they would feel part of our gathering together to worship you.

[8 : 49] We pray for those who are grieving. As we think of this week and as we think of the funeral service on Tuesday and the worship tomorrow evening for the late Amy.

We pray, Lord, that you would be close to the family and all who will gather. We pray for your comfort. We pray for your strength. We pray that we may find refuge as we come to you.

We pray especially for John and for Susan and for Cailis. We ask that you would uphold them through this time. We pray that they would come to you. That they would hear the words of Jesus who says to all, Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden.

And I will give you rest. So we pray that they would know your rest in this week. And we pray for Mark as he takes these services. That you would lead him and that you would guide him in all that he does.

So hear our prayers and help us as we open your word now to hear your voice and to know your presence. Take away our sin. We ask as we acknowledge it.

[9 : 53] Fill us with the Holy Spirit. Empty us of all that is of self. Enable us to fix our eyes on Jesus. And we pray these things in his name and for his sake.

Amen. Esther chapter 3.

And we're just continuing on through the story that we've begun. It's good to see some boys and girls. I wonder how much of the story you've been kind of following so far.

If we just look back over the book to remind ourselves of what happened. Can you tell me, boys and girls, just to refresh our minds of everything.

Who was King Xerxes? Lewis? Yeah, he was selfish.

[10 : 52] He tried to show everything off. He tried to be the boss. He was a boss of a huge big area of land. But he wasn't a good boss. He wasn't a humble man.

He was a proud man. And if we look at chapter 1 of Esther, we see that he's showing off to everybody and anyone.

He brings all these people into his house. He has this huge, massive, long, big party where he wants everyone to see how amazing he is.

He shows off all his money. He shows off all his stuff. And he wants everyone to see how beautiful his wife is. Queen Vashti. So he sends someone to get his wife because he wants all these men who are drunk to see his wife and how beautiful she is.

So he sends a message and he says, send her. And what does she say to him? What was that, John? She says no. And that made him very angry.

[11 : 55] So that was the end of Queen Vashti. And in chapter 2, the king, King Xerxes and all his men, they go on a search to find the most beautiful woman in all of the massive area that he was king over.

And they have this big beauty contest almost. And they go searching. And after a search, various people are taken back to the palace.

And to cut a longer story short, who becomes queen? Esther. Esther. Esther. And Esther has a cousin, isn't it?

And he is looking after Esther because Esther, she lost her mother and her father when she was very young. And so she was brought up by this man who was called Mordecai.

So Esther is now, she's just a young girl. She's probably ages with Anna and Natalie and she's just a mid-teenager. And she's been taken out of a safe place where she was with Mordecai.

[13 : 07] And she's been put into the center of this palace where this bad king is the boss. And now she's his queen. And so Mordecai, who loved Esther and cared for Esther like she was his daughter, is very worried about everything that's going on.

And now we come to chapter 3. And what we see in chapter 3 is a baddie step forward.

Do you know what the baddie's name is? Did you notice it? Anyone? Haman. So when you see the name Haman, when you hear the name Haman, he is like the baddie of all baddies.

So anyway, that's what we've got so far. We're at chapter 3. And we were singing twice tonight in the service from Psalm 37.

And the thing we're told in Psalm 37 is to fret not. We're not to worry. When we see evil men and maybe women do bad things and get away with them, it makes us mad.

[14 : 21] It makes us worried. But we're told in the Psalm not to stress, not to worry, not to fret. When bad things happen to good people and when bad people get away with bad things.

But what we're told in that Psalm is that we're to set our trust upon the Lord and try to do good. Don't try and take revenge.

Don't try and take matters into our own hands. But we're to set our trust upon the Lord, the one who sees all. And try and do good. And that's a word that would have been very helpful for Mordecai in the situation that he was in.

There's three things that we'll see hopefully in the time that we have. And the first thing is we see here that there's honor for the unrighteous. There's honor for the unrighteous.

That's how the chapter begins. And it begins in chapter 1 and verse 1 and it says there, After these events, King Xerxes honored.

[15 : 31] And I want to hit pause there. King Xerxes, he's going to honor somebody. After all the events that we've just heard about, King Xerxes, he's got somebody and he's going to honor him.

And if we were to hit pause there and ask the question, Who's going to get honored? Then whose name would you put in? Well, if you glance back at these events, as it says in verse 1, and look back at the previous chapter, chapter 2, what do we see in chapter 2?

Well, we see two things mainly. The first thing we see is a royal wedding. where Esther, the girl Mordecai, had brought up so well, is crowned as queen.

And Xerxes, he is delighted with Esther, his new queen. He falls for her. So that's what we see. We see Mordecai's adopted daughter, Esther.

She becomes the queen of Xerxes. And then we see an attempted assassination. We see in chapter 2 that two of the king's disgruntled officers.

[16:47] They're conspiring to kill Xerxes. And Mordecai just happens to be in the right place at the right time. God has engineered it. And he overhears this plot between these two thugs.

So Mordecai tells Esther. And Esther tells Xerxes. And she makes sure that Xerxes knows that the person who's uncovered this plot, the person who is saving the life of the king, is Mordecai, not her. And Mordecai, after an investigation, is finding that everything he said is true. So the life of King Xerxes is saved.

So that's the gist of what happened in chapter 2. So if we look back at these events, as it says in verse 1, and we ask the question, who would we expect to be honored by the king?

Then it's a no-brainer. You would expect Mordecai to be honored by the king. But that's not what we read in verse 1. It says in verse 1, After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman, son of Hamadatha, the Agadite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than any of all the other nobles.

[18:12] So Mordecai, who's deserving of honor, we learn nothing of honor for him. And Haman, who we haven't even heard of up until this point, is given this high place.

So what did he do to deserve such honor? Well, if we scan back through the verses, we can see that he did nothing to deserve this honor. And as we get to know Haman, and as we get to know his character, we will see that there was nothing in Haman's character that was worthy of honor.

In my Bible study notes here, it says, The fact that no reason is given for the promotion of Haman provides an ironic contrast between the unrewarded merit of Mordecai and the unmerited reward of Haman.

So to go back to the point, honor for the unrighteous. The man who acts righteously is overlooked at this point, and he's given no honor.

And the man who is so clearly unrighteous, as we will see, and is so undeserving of honor, he gets a seat of honor higher than anyone else in the whole kingdom.

[19:38] Honor for the unrighteous. That's what Mordecai could see to his frustration two and a half thousand years ago, three thousand years ago.

And that's what we still see today. The Bible helps us to read the world that we live in today. And what we still so often see today is that it's the unrighteous who are honored.

If you switch on the news and listen to the news stories and watch what's going on in global politics, very often, it's the unrighteous who seem to come out on top.

If you look at the global economy, it's not usually the honest man who gets the best deal. It's usually the crook.

And even if we think about our own lives and our own circumstances, the places that we work, the companies that we deal with, there are so many scenarios in our lives where we feel that the person who wants to do the right thing loses out.

[21:03] And the person who wants to do next to nothing and just sit on their backsides and do as little as possible for as long as they can, they seem to get the promotion.

They seem to get ahead. Honor for the unrighteous. It's frustrating. But this is what we have to expect in a world that is fallen and sinful.

We can expect to see this. We can expect to experience this. But when we do experience this, rather than rage and take things into our own hands and become all bitter and twisted, we're taught in the book of Esther to trust God.

The God who is invisible, but who's seeing everything. The message, I think, that overwhelmingly comes through in Esther is to trust God.

The message of Psalm 37 is trust God. Let me just read verses 7 to verse 9 of that psalm.

[22:33] It says, And that's the truth ultimately.

Those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land. That's the truth ultimately, but we need faith to hang on to that when we are going through times like Mordecai was going through.

He saw honor for the unrighteous. And the second thing we see in this chapter, the second point, is there's a very evident hatred for God's people, of God's people.

Now, as we think about Mordecai for a second, up until now, Mordecai, although we know already he's one of God's people, he's a Jew, he was keeping his nationality, he was keeping his faith secret, and he was telling Esther as well, keep your head down, keep your mouth shut, don't tell anybody who you belong to, don't tell anyone about your nationality, don't tell anyone about your faith.

That was his policy up until now, but at this point, there's a change, and from this point forward, Mordecai begins to stand up and speak up. Look at verse 2 to verse 4.

[24 : 21] Haman has now come into focus, he's the body, and he's risen to this position of great power, and he says in verse, to all the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honour to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him, but Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honour.

Then the royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, why do you disobey the king's command? Day after day, they spoke to him, but he refused to comply.

Therefore, they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai's behaviour would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew.

He's come out and he's told them. This is why I won't bow. This is why I will not give worship and honour to this man Haman.

It's because I'm a Jew. It's because I bow my knee to no one but God. And so from this point forward, Mordecai, he stands up for Jesus.

[25 : 41] We use our New Testament terminology. And there always comes a point where we have to stand up for Jesus.

There may be a time to be silent, as we saw in the first couple of chapters of Esther, but there's also a time to speak. And for Mordecai, that time had come.

And so when he's quizzed day by day and asked, why will you not just bow? Why will you not just do the easy thing here and get on your knee and just get it over with?

You don't have to bow your heart, just bow your knee. Would have been an easy thing to do, but he won't do it. And when he's asked why, he told them he was a Jew.

He's one of God's people. It's the time to speak. It's the time to stand up. I wonder if for someone here, it's that time for you.

[26 : 58] I wonder if there's someone here and for many months, maybe for many years, you've been almost silent. about your faith in Christ.

But now it's time to stand up. It's time to speak up. Maybe in our workplace, we've been hearing the name of Jesus taken in vain over and over again and we've been quiet.

It's time to speak up. Or even as we think about the communion season, it's only a few weeks away now. We hear the call that's going to go out over the next few weeks to profess faith in Christ.

Perhaps for someone here or someone at a distance who's not here, this is the time to speak up and tell people openly that you are one of God's people.

It's what Mordecai did. He would not bow to Haman. And there would be consequences. There would be a cost for that. And it says in verse 5, when Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged.

[28 : 27] Now let's step back for a second and think about who Haman was and who Mordecai was. And thinking first of all about the workplace, Haman, if we think about him in terms of our government structures, Haman was the prime minister.

He's been promoted to that position. So he is the top job in government. And Mordecai, by comparison, he's just an ordinary civil servant.

He's in a back office. He is, we're told in chapter 2, verse 21, sitting at the king's gate, which meant that he was attending to sort of low-level legal and administrative tasks.

So Mordecai's low down in the ranks, Haman is high up, but Mordecai will not bow. And this enraged Haman.

And it really enraged him. The anger that we see in Haman is an anger which is just, it's that boiling point, it's spilling over.

[29 : 36] So we ask the question, why is he so angry? Is this just because his ego is bruised because of this insolent man and his refusal to bow?

Is this just an embarrassment that Haman's taken personally? Well, no, I think it's more than that. Is this just a workplace dispute where Haman is enraged because he sees a low-level minion not giving him the respect that he thinks he's Jew?

Well, no, it's more than that too. The reason that Haman is so enraged was not because, wasn't so much because of what Mordecai did, but it's because of who Mordecai was.

It's because he was a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin. That's how Mordecai is introduced to us.

He's introduced to us as a Jew. And now he's come out and said it openly. So how is Haman introduced to us? Well, Haman in verse 1 is introduced to us as Haman son of Hamadatha the Agagite.

[30 : 59] And why do we need to know that? Well, we need to know that because that explains why he hated the Jews. Because if you rewind all the way back to Exodus, we see that there's a certain people who attack God's people as they're on Exodus out of Egypt towards the promised land.

And the people that attacked God's people from the Exodus, Exodus 17, onwards, from generation to generation, were the Amalekites. And who was the king of the Amalekites?

Well, it was Agag. So if you look back over history, we can see that for generation after generation after generation, Haman's people and Mordecai's people, they were at war.

They despised each other. So there's a whole lot of history that's gone into the hatred that Mordecai has for Haman, that Haman has for Mordecai, sorry.

But to get to the real root cause of this, we have to go back even further. We have to go all the way back to Genesis 3.15 because in Genesis 3.15 we are told that there would be a conflict that would rage between the seed of the woman, God's people, and the seed of the serpent, the people Satan would use, people like Haman.

[32 : 39] So this clash, this battle, it was far more than a personality clash. It was far more than a battle of egos.

This was spiritual warfare that went all the way back to the fall. Warren Weerspie in his commentary says, this was another stage in the age-old conflict between the flesh and the spirit, Satan and the Lord, the way of faith and the way of the world.

So in the book of Esther, we can't see the name of God anywhere. But God is at work everywhere. And in the book of Esther, we can't see the name of the devil anywhere.

But he is clashing with God's people at every opportunity. There's a spiritual battle that, although not visible to the human eye, it was raging.

And it still is. So we need the strength of God if we are his people.

[34 : 08] If we are God's people, if we are those who stand up for Jesus, if we are those who are willing to say that we are trusting in him, we have to expect the battle.

We have to expect to know something of the spiritual warfare that has been going on from the beginning and will go on to the end of time.

Paul speaks of it in Ephesians 6. And I've got no time to go into that. But he gives an insight into the the ferocity of the spiritual battle that we're in and the need to have God's protection, to have gospel armor on.

So as we look at this point and we see the hatred of God's people that's so evident in Haman, there's two things that we can note by way of application.

And the first thing we can note in terms of application is if we are God's people, we can expect to be hated. And Jesus was crystal clear on that.

[35 : 25] If we are God's people, we can expect conflict. We can expect trouble as long as we are in this world. And if we don't know anything of that, we have to ask really if we're one of God's people.

So if we are God's people, we can expect to be hated. But if we are God's people, we can expect also to be helped. And that's what we're going to see in this unfolding story.

We see the invisible God helping his people. And that's what we see all the way through the Bible. we see the invisible God coming to help and to deliver and to save his people.

And that's what we'll see in our own lives as we trust God. Yes, we're going to know what it's like to be in battles.

Sometimes we're going to feel the full force of the wind of spiritual warfare as we hear it blasting on the windows just now. Sometimes we're going to feel hated.

[36 : 49] Sometimes we're going to be hated. Sometimes it's going to seem as if the whole world is falling apart as it would have done for Mordecai and Esther at this point in time. But the message that we're taught is that we can depend on the help of God and our calling is to trust the Lord.

Honor for the unrighteous. A hatred of God's people. And the final thing we see here is a holocaust. But my time is gone. So let's pray. We'll come back for that next week. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this, your word.

And we thank you that as we read this story that goes back two and a half thousand years in time to a culture and a place that is alien to us.

We thank you that we see truths that are repeated all the way through history. We know that in this world we will see and we will experience much in the way of trouble.

[38 : 28] We see injustice. We see those who are unrighteous, those who act unjustly being promoted and seemingly getting away with things.

And we know that in this world we, like Mordecai and Esther, will experience hatred and will experience all kinds of opposition the moment that we say that we belong to you.

We thank you that none of this goes unnoticed to you. We thank you that you are the God who is in control of all things and who sees all things. We thank you that when evil men do evil things and when those who seek to do good are overlooked, we thank you that although no one else may see it, you see it.

And in your time, Lord, you act. And we thank you, Father, that you call us to stand up and to profess that we are trusting you.

We thank you that you are loving and honest enough to tell us that when we do that there will be trouble. That we praise you that you are the God who is with us in trouble, the one who promises to help us and to deliver us and to save us when we cry out to you.

[40 : 03] And so we do that even this evening. once more, Lord, we cry out for your help. Perhaps there's someone here who has never before cried out and asked for the help of God.

Perhaps there's someone who knows now the reality of sin in their hearts but has never yet cried out and asked for Jesus to be saviour. We thank you that as we cry out, the moment we cry out, we are promised that you will save us, that you will rescue us, Lord, that you will cleanse us, that you will deliver us.

And we pray that even one person may do that even this evening. And yet, Lord, we know that as we follow you, we still struggle with sin.

We stray, we wander, we fall. And so we continue to cry out. And we thank you that as we do so, we continue to know your help.

So help us, Lord, we pray. Help us to be faithful. Help us to be trusting you. Help us when we cannot see what's going on in our experience and why things are going the way they're going.

[41 : 27] to trust in the Lord and to do the right. To hear our prayers and go before us in the rest of this evening. Help us in this week to come to look to you, to trust you, and to seek to be ambassadors for Jesus.

And we pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. we'll sing to finish our mission praise 496.

496 in mission praise. Oh for a thousand tongues to sing. my great Redeemer's praise, my great Redeemer's praise, the glory song of my God and King, the triumphs of his grace, the triumphs of his grace, the triumphs of his grace, the triumphs of his grace.

Jesus' name that charms our fears, that bids our sorrows cease, that bids our sorrows cease.

His music in the sinners' years, his life on health and peace, his life on health and peace, his life on health and peace, his life on health and peace.

[43 : 33] He breaks the power of counsel sin, he sets the prisoner free, he sets the prisoner free, his blood can make the fall flee, his blood of ill for me, his blood of ill for me, his blood of ill for me, his blood of ill for me.

He seeks to listen to his voice, new life the deadly sea, new life life the dead receive, the mournful broken hearts rejoice, the humble curvillie, the humble curvillie, the humble curvillie, the humble curvillie, the humble death, the death has made he done, your loosened tongues employ, your loosened tongues employ, in light behold, your Savior come, and live healing for joy, and live healing for joy, healing healing for joy, healing healing for joy, my gracious master and my God, assist me to proclaim, assist me to proclaim, to spread through all the earth abroad, the honors of thy name, the honors of thy name, the honors of thy name, the honors of thy name, and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and forever more.

Amen.