

Thank you.

[22 : 01] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[24 : 31] Thank you.

Let's pray.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[27 : 01] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

The last few months.

[29 : 31] When it's very, Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

este... Haman, who has clashed with Mordecai, has a plan to get revenge on Mordecai.

Remember, Haman's prime minister. Mordecai's just a civil servant, low level. Haman's got this rule brought in that everyone has to bow when he walks past.

[32 : 19] Mordecai won't bow. He only bows to God. So Haman gets to hear this, and he says, Mordecai must go. But his plan is not just to get out of Mordecai, his plan is to get rid of all of the Jews.

And so the first point that we come to tonight, we've got three points, and the first point is Holocaust. That was the plan that Haman had.

He wants to wipe out a whole people, which is the word that's used for Holocaust. That's what it means. And all this has happened so quickly.

When I was writing this, I was remembering my final year at university, and in my final year at university, I was staying in a house with our four boys. And one of the boys, his name was Rab, and he studied zoology.

And he was interested in all kinds of bugs and beasties and creatures, all the kind of stuff that we would want to stay away from. He was just fascinated by it, and he just wanted to get as close to it as he could.

[33 : 25] And, you know, some of us have dogs and cats as pets. Rab decided he wanted a snake. So there was this aquarium, this kind of tank that was in the house.

It was maybe just about that size. It wasn't that big. It was about, you know, that tall. And in it was this green snake. None of us were particularly happy about this, apart from Rab.

But he would say, oh, don't worry about it. There's nothing to worry about. This snake is perfectly fine in there. It's okay in there. But the snake obviously was thinking, I'm not fine in here. And I remember one evening, a few folks were asked round for dinner.

And Rab was saying, oh, you should look at the snake. You should see the snake. And he's showing them the snake. And then he closed the lid of the tank, but he never quite closed it. It's just about that much left.

And later in the evening, what do you think happened? No snake. The snake escaped. We never did find it, actually. It's probably the size of the Loch Ness Monster walking around or slithering around in Aberdeen.

[34 : 33] We kept finding the skins. It was alive, but we never found the snake. But the point of the story is, the snake, it couldn't be contained. You couldn't keep it in the tank. It was desperate to get out.

And that's the way sin works. You can't keep it in a box. You can't keep a lid in it. And for Haman, the body in this story, he has this rage and this pride within him.

We see it in verse 5. And it can't be suppressed. It cannot be kept inside. Or to use another illustration, it was like a fire inside of him.

And you know we're told, don't play with fire. This is the time of year when crofters go out with a match and Cammie's away for a week. Fire can't be controlled. It's just out of control in no time. And this hatred and rage that Mordecai has within him for the one man, Mordecai, that Haman has within him for this one man called Mordecai, very quickly it's escalated from a hatred for one man into wholesale Holocaust.

[35 : 45] He wants all of the people, all of the Jews wiped out. And we see that in verses 5 and verse 6. When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honour, he was enraged.

Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, and we thought about that last week or two weeks ago, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead, Haman looked for a way to destroy all of Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.

So there's a lesson there for us as we think about this story, this record of what happened in history. And one of the lessons for us is we're not to play with sin.

Don't play with the fire of sin. I don't think that we can allow a sin that we like to sort of dabble with. I don't think that we can keep it under control. Don't think that we can keep it in a box. Because sin by its very nature, it will grow, it will mutate, it will consume us.

[37 : 05] So we must repent of it. Hour by hour. James, in James chapter 1, tells us about sin. He tells us about the trajectory that sin works on.

He tells us that it begins with just a wrongful desire, but it always leads to death. He says this, James 1, 13 to 15.

When tempted, says James, No one should say, God is tempting me. For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone. But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.

Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. And when it is full grown, it gives birth to death. That's a picture of sin. And we see an illustration of it in the book of Esther. And the point is, we are not strong enough to deal with our sin.

[38 : 11] It's the bad news. But the good news is that Jesus came into this world to deal with our sin. And when we confess it, the moment we confess it, he has promised, he will crush it, he will carry it away.

He will deal with that at the cross. But for Haman, to get back to the story here, Haman has no will to confess sin.

He's not interested in confessing his sin. He is not interested in moving off course. He wants to go full steam ahead in his plan to kill Mordecai and all Mordecai's people.

And so in next to no time, his evil, angry desire has developed into this plan for death on a massive scale. And we read about that plan as he begins to put detail on it from verse 7 and following.

Look at verse 7 with me. It says, In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month, the month of Nisan, they cast the poor, that is the lot, in the presence of Haman, to select their day and month.

[39 : 30] And the lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of Adar. So Haman, he wants to put this plan into action. He wants all this killing to begin.

But he needs to set a date for it. And he wants to have the support of his pagan gods that aren't gods at all. And see, he goes through this ritual of the poor, of casting the lots so that the date will not be chosen by him, but he hopes the date will be chosen by his God.

And we don't do this kind of thing anymore, casting lots. But probably the closest week to what we see happening, you know, in the Champions League, John, you've seen it, the Champions League, when the draw is happening.

And they put all the balls into the big ball and they're trundling this thing around and then somebody puts their hand in and they pull out the ball and then you decide it's Manchester United against Borussia Dortmund or something like that.

And that's kind of how lots worked. Lots were, I note down here from my commentary, specially marked stones that were placed in a jar or a fold in a garment and shaken until one fell out.

[40 : 49] So Haman, he cast lots to see when are they going to strike? What month? And the lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of Adar, which probably annoyed Haman because he's got to wait twelve months now until he gets this killing going.

But we see even in that the patience of God and the grace of God because he's given Haman time to repent.

He's given Haman time to wake up and realise how dark and how grim and how sinful this plan was. He's given Haman time to realise behind all these dark thoughts that were consuming him was the devil himself.

So God allowing this date to be twelve months away, he's giving Haman time to repent but Haman doesn't want to repent.

He's an obliging, willing servant of Satan. And so the date is set, twelve months time. That's when the Jews are going to get wiped out, he says.

[42 : 17] That's what's in his head but he needs to pitch this to the king because he needs to get approval. So he goes to the king and he makes this speech.

If you look at verses eight to verse eleven, you can see how clever Haman is with his words to try to persuade the king. Then Haman said to King Xerxes, notice he doesn't actually tell Xerxes the name of the people, he says, there's a certain people dispersed and scattered among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom whose customs are different from those of all other people and who do not obey the king's laws.

Wasn't actually the truth. Their customs were different but they were obedient to the king's laws. But he goes on anyway, it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them.

If it pleases the king, verse nine, let a decree be issued to destroy them and I will put ten thousand talents of silver into the royal treasury for the men who carry out this business.

Now that was an awful lot of money in that place at that time. about 15,000 talents of silver was the revenue of the whole kingdom.

[43 : 38] So two thirds of the expenditure for the whole year, Haman says, I'll give it, I'll put it into the budget. I'll pay for this war, this holocaust.

So the king took a signet ring from his finger, which was like a signature in these days, and he gave it to Haman, some of Hamadatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.

Keep the money, the king said to Haman, and do with the people as you please. To Haman, he knows how to push the buttons of this king, and so he appeals to the ego of King Xerxes because we know that his ego is everything, and Haman tells Xerxes about a people who are just a bit different from him, hard to understand, a people to be wary of, a people who don't obey the king's laws.

We can imagine Xerxes sitting up, who defies my laws? And when Xerxes just gets a sniff of this, when he gets a small indication of the fact that this people would be insolent enough to defy him, he gives the order, wipe them out.

No investigation, doesn't check if any of this is true, there's no consideration of the cost of life, how many people will die. When he gets a sniff of a people who are not giving him the honour that he is due, he says, push the button, Haman, just wipe them out.

[45 : 38] So the lawyers get busy, they're drafting the legislation, the civil servants are called to attention, they have to get all listened to practice as this new law goes forth.

And then verse 12, we're told there, on the 13th day of the first month the royal secretaries were summoned, they wrote out the script in each province and in the language of each people, all of Haman's orders to the king's satraps, the governors of the various provinces and the nobles of the various peoples.

These were written in the name of King Xerxes himself and sealed with his own ring. So this order for mass death, it's going forth.

The laws are coming into focus, the plans are now in movement and it seems that Haman, as he takes this plan and develops it into reality, Xerxes, whose name is all over this and whose signature is on all the pages, through the signet ring, we just get the impression he's not even interested in what's going on.

You get the impression he's probably not even read through the details of these papers before they go out. And yet they go out. Verse 13, dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill, and annihilate.

[47 : 10] See the force of this. Wipe them all out, no one survives, destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, women and little children, on a single day, the 13th day of the 12th month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.

We'll come back to that date. A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province, and made known to the people of every nationality, so that they would be ready for that day.

It's one day. And you might ask the question, why all this blood shed on one day? Why does it all have to happen on one day?

Why the urgency? And although we're not told expressly the answer to that question, I think the answer is pretty clear.

The reason Haman wants all this on one day is so that there's no time to reconsider. He doesn't want anyone to be able to go in on day two to the king and say, have you seen the blood shed? [48 : 19] Have you heard these tragic stories? Bring an end to this. Stop. That's enough. He doesn't want that to happen. He doesn't want any opportunity for mercy.

See, by the time people realized the horror of this edict, if this edict was to progress, all the Jews would be dead. And that was his plan.

No mercy. None spared. Holocaust. So that's the first point. And the second point we come to here is hope.

And you might ask the question, where on earth is there hope here? Because the situation looks absolutely hopeless. And everything has happened so fast.

Because if you go back to the beginning of the chapter, things actually look quite hopeful. In verse one, Esther is queen. She's a good queen.

[49 : 27] She's God's queen. In position. Mordecai has done this great thing in saving the life of the king.

He's waiting to be honored. God, the chapter begins. So God has his people in key positions and everything looks to be quite secure. Everything looks okay.

But in a matter of days, everything's changed. And God's people have been served with a death sentence.

So where's the hope? Where's the hope to be seen? And the answer is, well, the hope can't be seen with the naked eye at this point. And the reason for that is because God cannot be seen at this point.

He is active, but he's behind the scenes. And that's where there was hope. hope. And we get little hints of it as the story unfolds.

[50 : 35] Even in terms of the dates and small details, Proverbs chapter 16 verse 33 says to us, the Lord, the lot is cast into the lap, but it's every decision is from the Lord.

So although the practice of casting lots was used, it wasn't disconnected from God. He could be involved in that. And if we go back to the dates when the casting of lots was done, look at the date that was set for the Holocaust.

We're told in verse 7 and then verse 13, the dates. The month was month 12, it was 12 months ahead. We thought a little about that.

And then the actual date itself precisely was on in verse 13, we're told this was to be on the 13th day of the 12 month, the month of Adar.

So what was the significance of that date? Well, it was the date before Passover. That was the date that the lot fell.

[51 : 51] Passover, it was the date before Passover, which was this huge festival and still is for the Jews. And what was full of their minds as they approached Passover?

What did God's people remember as they thought about the Passover? Well, they remembered how 900 years previous to this, God rescued his people.

they remembered that in the past, when all looked hopeless, when everything looked dark and grim, when it looked like Egypt had a stranglehold on God's people and there was no way out ever, God intervened.

And he rescued them, he saved them, he brought hope, he brought salvation into the most hopeless situation. So on the one hand, this edict, as it arrives and is heard by the Jews, it couldn't come at a worse time.

It's like getting the most crushing news on Christmas Eve. Just when the people were ready to celebrate God's rescue in the past, this edict arrives and it advises them of a death warrant that's served on them in the present.

[53 : 11] It's the worst possible time. But on the other hand, I think as the people received the news of this, they would be thinking, what will God do?

Because we see in Xerxes and Haman, another Egypt-like power, who were seeking to crush God's people.

And we're left wondering, as we read this story, we're left wondering, what will God do here? As we think about this and we think about the timings, we're encouraged to believe, as we see the Passover coinciding with this, we're encouraged to believe that God is still able to save.

even in this desperately grim situation. And we can't see how he can save. We have no idea how it's possible that he can intervene here and reverse this plan and save his people.

But remember, as we're told in Luke 18 and verse 27, what is impossible with man is possible with God. Remember what it says in Ephesians 3.20, God is able to do exceedingly above all that we ask or think.

[54 : 44] So where God is, even when we can't see him, there is hope. Remember a nurse telling me in her training, she was told various things, but the one thing that kind of stuck me when she spoke about her training was she was told, never take hope away from people.

the human body is a complicated thing. Never take hope away from people. But I guess medically there is a time where there's no hope.

But spiritually, for God's people, there is never a time where there's no hope. And for Mordecai and for Esther and for all of the Jews, it was going to take faith to hold on to that and believe it.

I wonder, do you, do we believe this? Do we believe there's always hope for yourself, for ourselves, as we look in the mirror and we see our own hearts?

we see how we mess up, we see how we fail, we see how we sin. The devil tells us, you're done.

But with God, there's always hope.

[56 : 18] Never look at somebody and assume that they're beyond hope. With God, there's always hope. Because hope is built, not on us, but on Jesus.

We sing that hymn often, my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus, blood and righteousness.

And so if we are God's people, there's never a time where there's no hope.

Because God is sovereign. He's the ancient of days. He's never on strike, he's never slumbering, he's never sleeping, he's always active, he's always working.

And just as it's often darkest just before dawn, often it can be the darkest time of our lives just before the light and hope of God's grace breaks through.

So there's hope here. We'll see that as the story develops. It begins with the Holocaust, but there's little glimpses of hope.

[57 : 37] And the final thing here, and just very briefly, is history. Look at verse 15. There's this chilling end to the story. it says, they're spurred on by the king's command.

The couriers went out and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered.

God and we can just imagine it as the news goes out and people start to hear it.

As they are notified of this edict to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, women and little children, on a single day.

We can imagine the bewilderment, the confusion amongst the people. What's going on? We can imagine in our mind's eye the look of panic in the faces of Esther and Mordecai and King's Urses and Haman.

[58 : 54] They're out on the front veranda of the palace, bellies full, glasses, raised as they drink, seemingly without a care in the world.

And what we need to remember is this is not some dark fable. This is history. This really happened. Real people in real time made these plans and got them through the legal framework in order to kill

so many thousand or million people in one day.

This is history. Now, two weeks ago, when I intended to preach this, this kind of event seemed far from us.

but today, as we look into Ukraine, as we see this little man whose power and pride crazy, we see how this kind of evil still happens.

This is like reading a newspaper. This is history. Jeremiah 17 and verse 9 helps us to understand why we keep reading this stuff.

[60 : 31] It says, the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? And, you know, the thing that's troubling as well in the midst of all this is that so many people knew and were involved and did nothing.

There were couriers, there were secretaries, there were officers, there were a whole army of civil servants involved in making this happen. And as far as we can see here, not one of them challenged it.

A quote which I read, I'm not sure who said it, there's a debate over who said it, but the quote is, the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing.

That's what happened. These people did nothing. It happened in history and it keeps on happening over and over again in history, especially to God's people.

And even though we think about God's people today, there are thousands of God's people who are killed each year because of their faith in Christ.

[62 : 08] And it's not even reported in the news, never mind challenged in the governments. history. This is history. But to get back to the plot of Esther as we finish, we ask the question one last time, does this have anything to do with me personally?

we see how it connects with Ukraine, we see the reality of Russia and how we can draw lines to what's happening there and what happened in Esther. But what about me personally, 2022, Tarbert Harris, anything to do with me?

And the answer is yes. You know that our salvation depends on what happens next in the story. because remember what we said last week, behind Haman is Satan.

And behind Haman's plan is Satan's scheme and his scheme is a scheme to wipe out a people and not just any people but the Jewish people. And why is Satan so intent on wiping out the Jews?

Well, Jesus tells us in John 4, 22, salvation is from the Jews. the Savior of the world was to come through the line of the Jews. So if the Jews could all these years before Christ be wiped off the face of the earth, the Savior could not come down that line.

[63 : 43] And if the Savior could not come, our sin could not be forgiven and we could not be saved. God so this story is very much to do with you and me.

The difference between us and Esther and Mordecai is that we can see how the story ends. We can see that this is round three or four in a battle that would continue until it reached Calvary and on Calvary Jesus, the King of the Jews, would go to war with Satan and he would overcome once and for all, securing salvation for all who believe.

So if you believe, this is like flicking back through an album where you can see pictures of your salvation story.

and as we see the hand of God at work in this book for Esther and for Mordecai and for the Jews and for us, we should praise him and remember his saving death until he comes.

on that day when every eye will see and every tongue will confess that he is the Lord, he is the King, he is the victorious one. Until that day, trust him and praise him.

[65 : 37] And we will pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Lord, we thank you for this book of Esther.

We thank you that as we read your word, we don't have to work hard to draw lines of relevance. Your word is relevant in every age and in every time.

We see how strikingly relevant it is in the global dynamics of the world at this time. But we see also how relevant this is to our own hearts, our own salvation.

salvation. We thank you that salvation is from the Jews. We thank you that Jesus did come down that line. We thank you that he lived for us.

We thank you that he died for us. We thank you that he did battle with Satan on Calvary and he overcame. He finished the work of salvation. He rose from the dead and promises salvation, eternal life to all who believe.

[66 : 42] so help us Lord we pray each of us to believe and to remember the vastness of your love for us. That you would do this to save us.

And we pray all this in Jesus name. Amen. We'll sing to conclude here is love vast as the ocean. loving kindness as a flood when the prince of life were ransomed shed for us this precious blood who his love will not remember who can cease to sing his praise.

He can never be forgotten through our times eternal days. On the mount of crucifixion fountains open deep and wide through the flood gates of God's mercy flowed a vast ungracious tide.

Praise the love like mighty rivers for it sets a throne above and there's peace and perfect justice
kissed a guilty world in love.
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the
Holy Spirit be with us all now and forever more. Amen.