

Hope in the Unchanging God Part 2.

Text: Esther 7:5-10

Exegetical Big Idea: Haman's sin has caught up with him and God has sovereignly brought him to justice as an enemy of God's people, thereby holding up his covenantal promises to Israel.

Homiletical Big Idea: **Hope placed anywhere but in the sovereign God is a false hope.**

Background:

We find ourselves again in the dining hall of king Xerxes. This is of course Esther's banquet that she has planned specially for the king and Haman. She's planned this banquet of course not because she is in the mood for a party, but she is here for a very important reason. She's here to plead for her life. Haman of course has planned to annihilate, destroy, and kill, all the Jews in the kingdom of Xerxes, which is most of the known world at that time. Now Esther herself is a Jew, but neither Haman nor Xerxes knows this.

Last week we looked at this banquet from Esther's point of view. We looked at how her salvation, and the salvation of her people was not based on her ability, or her strength, or even the amount of faith she had, but that her salvation was based on the unchanging promises of an unchanging God.

Well we've just spent a good amount of time on Esther, but the majority of this chapter is not about Esther, it's about Haman. If Esther is a picture to us of where to put our hope, Haman is a tragic picture of hope placed elsewhere, namely, sin.

Haman here is a warning to all those who are enemies of the one true God. He's a warning to those who oppose the people of God, but we can't ignore that he's a warning to anyone at all, who rejects God as King and Lord of all things, and who rejects God as their ultimate Joy and Reward.

Haman is an example of hope placed in sin and idolatry.

What we're going to see is that:

Hope placed anywhere but in the sovereign God is a false hope.

Intro:

[Alana and I had an old purple Impala when we were first married. Alana had it before we were married and then it was our car for about a year or so afterwards. This was your classic car that was driven into the ground. It was a ticking time-bomb. I remember there were electrical issues, gauges not working, rust everywhere including the break-lines which did eventually rust out (thankfully that happened as Alana was pulling out of the driveway and not as we were on a highway), the exhaust was cracked and loud, and probably worst of all the air conditioner was shot. The day she finally died was the day we were in Kingsville and the exhaust literally fell off the car as we were driving. I had to pull into a parking lot, I actually called Mike to bring some tools, and we had to literally break this long pipe in half and put it in the trunk so that we could drive home. So that was our car. You think I still have that car? Absolutely not. Why not? Because hope placed in that piece of junk is foolish. Anyone can see that putting my faith in that car to take my family anywhere is irresponsible and crazy.]

How much more foolish it is for anyone to put their hope in anything other than the eternal unchanging God. If placing myself in physical danger by trusting in that old beater is foolish, placing myself in eternal danger by trusting in sin and idolatry is eternally more foolish.

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There is a reliable place, as we looked at last week, to place our hope in this world. (Our only hope is in the unchanging promises of an unchanging God.) But that's not where everyone decides to place their hope.

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Verses 5-6

Immediately in verse 5 we have an answer to the burning question of what the king will do. He's tone is furious here! He gives to quick questions "Who is he? Where is he?" we're meant to feel his anger and rage. Esther points out that it's none other than that vile Haman. And it's at that point, when all of Haman's wealth and pride and power and position cannot save him.

Listen carefully to what the king says "where is the man who has *dared* to do such a thing?"

His sin has given him a false sense of security, and so he is caught off guard when he is called out.

Now remember that neither Xerxes, nor Haman know that Esther is a Jew. She chose to keep this a secret as she was entering into the king's "contest". Mordecai had pressured her not to tell anyone. The narrator does not say one way or another that this was the right or wrong thing to do, but since she was in no immediate danger at that point, and there was only material gain to be had by keeping her identity a secret, it's fairly reasonable to assume she was in the moral wrong. Which tells us in general that neither Esther, nor Mordecai (who pressured her to do this) are perfectly moral. But regardless God, again in his providence, uses these events keep Haman in the dark about what is going on, and to show us the nature of his pride and sin.

Haman is a man who has all that one could possibly want in terms of earthly wealth. We learn a few chapters ago of his vast fortune, (which will come into play in the next chapter), his burning desire to be as close to the king and as powerful as the king as possible, and his selfish pride when honour is not given him. That's the tip of the iceberg, but enough for us to see where this man puts his hope.

He's bought into the idea, hook line and sinker that earthly pleasures will satisfy him.

Let's get this straight, hope placed in the things of this world is just as sinful as any other sin. Looking for anything else to satisfy the desires of your heart is idolatry. And this idolatry simply cannot satisfy you, and gives you a false sense of hope.

[I love those mini eggs that are in the stores around Easter. Let me explain to you just what I mean by "love them". So you go to the store for them, and you have three options. First, you have the option that only a crazy person would go for. It's the small little bag that holds about 10 of them. Frankly, that's not enough. So you could a step up. The next size is pretty decent, it holds maybe 50 mini eggs. That's a respectable size...if you only need on serving. But then there's the last option. It's the Costco-sized mega bag. There are probably a few hundred mini eggs in there. Guess which one I go for. Now as I have that bag in my hands and get to the register, here is what I'm thinking. This bag contains not only yummy mini eggs, but this bag contains a promise. The size of this bag communicates the promise that if I buy this one, I will have enough mini eggs to last me a long time. If I buy this bag, I will not need to come back for more for a long time. Except that this is an empty promise. That bag does not stand a chance at

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my house. That giant bag will last a week tops. And guess what happens when I finish that bag...I am back in the van, headed to the store, to spend another \$15 on a whole lot of mini eggs, and another empty promise.]

What happens when sin does not satisfy the desires of the heart? We look for more. Sin holds out for us the promise of satisfaction. Sin promises us that if we just indulge this time, we will be satisfied and not need any more. But that is an empty promise. Sin may satisfy for a short time, but that satisfaction is shallow, it is fleeting, and in the end leaves us emptier than before. And where do we find ourselves after? Going back to that empty well for more sin, to try and find satisfaction that is impossible to receive from sin.

Eventually we end up in a spot where we never thought we'd be. In fact, we end up in a spot where we nether *dared* to be. Look at the progression of Haman's sin in this book. Anger, revenge, hatred for a people group, planning murder, pride, building a gallows in his yard for Mordecai. Esther calls him "vile" in verse 6. That's exactly what he's become because of his unending desire for the satisfaction of sin.

Will hanging Mordecai give him satisfaction? No. Will destroying the Jewish people give him satisfaction? No.

We need to watch our lives carefully. Satisfying the cravings of the flesh only grows and grows until those desires are mountainous, and satisfaction for the soul is still out of your reach. We are warned here that the desires of the flesh and the temptations of this world will lead us down into a spiral of despair, eventually leading to our eternal destruction.

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Haman is a man who placed the hope of satisfaction in sin, but he's also a reminder that sin will eventually catch up with us.

Verses 6-9

Verse 6 tells us that Haman was terrified before the king and queen. Xerxes gets up in rage and "leaves his wine" and goes out into the garden, presumably to cool off. In a book with so many feasts, for the king to get up and leave his wine is a noticeable thing! Things are not looking good for Haman.

Nobody in the story have said anything about Haman's fate, but the vivid actions in the story are loudly telling us that his sin has led to his destruction. Haman himself knows this, as he throws himself at the mercy of Queen Esther while Xerxes is out in the garden pacing in anger. She'll have nothing of it, and whether or not we think she should have acted in mercy is almost beside the point, because the author says nothing of it, and either way, just as he's doing this Xerxes walks back in the room and sees Haman at the feet of Esther.

Now, Xerxes sees this and exclaims in verse 8 "will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house." This is another confusing part, what does the king mean by that? Is he mad that Haman is begging for his life to the very person he was trying to kill? Does he actually mean that Haman is using this opportunity to "flirt" with the queen? Seems like it's not the best time for that! Maybe Xerxes, as some commentators point out, says this to give a reason to right then and there deal with Haman. But again, it's kind of beside the point because the point is that Haman has reached a point where no amount of back pedaling will save him from the judgement of his sin.

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[Alana and I and the kids did some gardening in our front garden the other week. As we're weeding, Alana pointed out the dandelions in our garden. She asked me if I noticed that they aren't terribly big on their own. They actually have a flower that's not totally ugly, in fact kids pick it all the time because it looks like a pretty flower. She then asked if I noticed though just how deep their roots go and how hard they are to get rid of once they've taken root. Then she said, "Doesn't that remind you of sin?" She's absolutely right, and in fact, one or two dandelions are easily managed, but if you come and take a look at my lawn they've taken over. My lawn is about 90% weeds. How am I supposed to get rid of all of them now? There's no way. Sure, I can mow the lawn and hid them for a few days. The lawn looks great when I hide them, but in just a few days they come back.]

The reality is, sin may seem harmless now, but they grow and take hold. They may seem cute now, but they'll grow and take hold. The roots of sin will go deeper and deeper into your heart, and choke any desire for good. At that moment, Satan will say "aha, I got him".

There will come a time when you will have to give an account for your sin.

Why is God waiting to return and judge the living and the dead? Because he is patient with humanity, giving every opportunity for us to repent, before it's too late.

Look at verse 8 with me. His face is covered, and this is significant. The Hebrew word for "face" is the same word that means "presence". By covering the face of Haman, they are effectively removing him from the presence of the king.

What is all this pointing to?

Quite clearly, all of these things are showing us that the wages of sin is death.

Read verses 9-10 with me.

Haman gets what he deserves.

Hope placed anywhere but in the sovereign God is a false hope.

Haman serves as a warning to the enemies of God's people for sure. That's his main purpose in this book, to show us that no matter what, nothing and nobody can stand against God's people, because God has given them his covenant.

But we can't ignore that Haman also serves as a warning to us. Are we doomed to suffer the same fate as Haman?

After all, there is no one who is righteous, not even one. No one who seeks God. No one who can keep the laws and commands of God. And God is not a God of the "good enough", God is a God of perfection when it comes to his standards of righteousness.

This chapter should end, not with gallows just for Haman, but with gallows for Xerxes, and Esther, and Mordecai too. None of them are righteous in this book. None of us are righteous.

But even here, if we look closely, there is a whisper of the hope that Jesus offers.

Look again at 9 with me.

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Haman has built a gallows (or a pole for impaling) out of wood obviously, in his yard. And Haman, as a direct result of his sin, is lifted up and hung on that tree as a payment for his sin.

Here is a man who is paying the price for sin, by hanging on a tree. Now this man, hangs there for his own sin, and rightfully so. But there is another man, who hung on a tree to pay for sin. But not for his own. Jesus hung on a tree as a payment for my sin, and your sin, and the sin of all who would look upon him for mercy. And because Christ was righteous and perfect, his sacrifice on the tree was effective to pay for our sin. So now, there is no tree for the Christian. Yes we deserve it, but he hangs there in our stead.

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. Jesus paid those wages for us, and now there is in store for us who believe, eternal life. Why am I spared from the tree? Not because I am better than anyone, or without sin, or stronger or smarter, but solely on the covenantal promise of God that all who turn to Jesus in faith receive the gift of forgiveness and the hope of eternal life, by the loving grace of God.

I'll end with this: Look at the last sentence in this chapter. So the death of Haman on the tree for the payment of his sin lead to what? The verse reads "then the king's fury subsided."

What beautiful words in the ear of the Christian. When we think of our filth and guilt before the King of kings and our deserving of his wrath and punishment and eternal conscience torment. To know that it should have been us hanging there, but instead, through no merit of our own, hung Christ. Taking upon himself the full measure of God's wrath and our guilt. All so that we can hear those glorious words "then the King's fury subsided".

Church, there is hope for the person who endlessly runs after sin for gratification and satisfaction. There is hope for the person who realizes sin has them in a choke hold and is strangling the life out of them. That hope is Jesus. Jesus has broken the power of sin and death, and has satisfied the anger of the Holy God. That's our only hope church. By God's grace we hold onto that hope.

Psalm 31:23-24

"Love the LORD, all his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful, but the proud he pays back in full. Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD."

Hope placed anywhere but in the sovereign God is a false hope. But your hope is secure is placed in the unchanging promises of an unchanging God.