

Exegetical Big Idea: Esther's plans square off with Haman's plans. God will decide which will prevail.

Homiletical Big Idea: **God's people need to make smart plans, make righteous plans, and ultimately entrust them to the Lord.**

Fallen Condition Focus: Our human nature is to plan according to our sinful nature. We need faith in the sovereign God to change that.

Intro:

I don't know if you knew this but in college and university I was not originally planning on becoming a pastor. After high school I went to college for a year-long program that prepares students to become paramedics. After that year though the plans changed and I applied to go to university for a 4 year biology program with the hopes of applying for med school after I had finished. Well wouldn't you know it, near the end of those 4 years I decided that I wasn't going to go into medicine, but instead I was being drawn to ministry. Through some research and good counsel, I ended up in Bible school in a three-year program to be trained as a pastor with the plan of becoming one. Well you know how that part of the story ends since here I am today. It's funny that each time I made a plan I had thought I knew how it was going to work out.

As human beings, we have been endowed by God with the ability to plan. This is part of what it means to be made in the image of God. Being made in the image of God means that we have inherited some of God's characteristics. These are called the communicable characteristics of God. Things like the ability to create, the ability to love, having a knowledge or morality, and of course the ability to plan. There are so many more, and we could talk about the characteristics of God that we do not inherit, such as his holiness, his omnipresence, his omnipotence, his immortality. But today specifically in these verses we get a glimpse of what it means for humanity to plan things.

But here's the problem. As with every part of us, the ability to plan is affected by sin as well. Which means though we are still able to plan, the plans themselves will sometimes be wise and sometimes be foolish.

As we navigate the world around us. As we plan as a church how to go forward with preaching the gospel, how to structure our lives around our identity in Christ and the Scriptures, and as we try and plan how to respond and react to society as it moves further and further from the Lord, and even as we make plans for our families and individual lives, we are told in the Scriptures to be imitators of God, as dearly loved children.

Of course we can't do that perfectly, but to the best of our ability, I want to show us today church that we need to be a people who...

Make plans that are wise, godly, and ultimately entrust them to the Lord.

In this chapter we have two sets of plans. One set being motivated by righteousness, and one set being motivated by sinful pride.

Esther's plan: Motivated by good.

You know at first glance, it's a little confusing why Esther would invite the king and Haman to two banquets, and why she doesn't come right out and ask Xerxes right at the beginning to change his mind.

But as I'm reading this closer and reading commentators as they understand what's happening, we see a very vivid picture of a brave woman who is meticulously planning her every step.

Let's take a look at what Esther is doing in these verses.

Right at the start we see that Esther has put on her royal robes. So she's not just walking up to the king in her sweatpants. She is adorning herself in such a way as to remind the king that she is the royal queen. Now last week we talked about her identity crisis, and how she needed to choose whether or not she was going to identify as one of God's people, or embrace her Persian identity, but I think what we're seeing here is her embracing and leveraging her position as queen. She only does so for any good after she has decided that she will stand as one of God's people.

And as she stands in the inner court, in front of the king's hall, the moment has come. Will the king be offended at her presence, or will he extend her the scepter? Well by the grace and sovereignty of God she is spared her life and not only does the king decide to let her live, but he's in a generous mood! He extends the scepter to her, and as the custom was, she touches the end of it to accept his "grace". And then, knowing that she wouldn't come unless she had something rather important to ask of him asks her to share her request. His statement of "...Even up to half my kingdom, it will be given you" is not meant to be taken literal, but it's meant to convey that he's in a generous mood.

So we as the readers are supposed to be thinking "here it is, she's going to ask!" ...But she doesn't. She knows the king, and she knows that he needs a little buttering before she should ask this. So knowing that Xerxes is a king who loves banquets, as is obvious by the 2 banquets he's had in this book, shows etiquette and cunning to have him come to a banquet to hear her request. In essence she is saying "no request can be so urgent as to bother the king right now, instead, let's have a decadent banquet and while we're just relaxing and enjoying some wine, then I'll ask, but why bother you right now with my request?"

And by the way, bring Haman, your second in command.

How could the king refuse this simple request that really, was only benefiting him?

And by the way, did you notice that little phrase in verse 4? When Esther says "come today to a banquet I have prepared for him". She's already prepared the banquet. During her fast, and when she doesn't even know if the king will let her live this long, she has planned for her success before the king and had the banquet prepared, expecting him to accept.

So Haman, Esther, and Xerxes sit down together and enjoy the banquet prepared by Esther. At some point during the evening, when the king is in a good mood from the wine, he again asks Esther what her request is, with the same generosity he had earlier that day. He uses the same phrase as before "even up to half my kingdom, it will be granted." So as readers we're supposed to think again that this is the point where she will ask the king for mercy...but again Esther doesn't do it! Instead she asks the king and Haman to another banquet? Is she scared? Is she backing out?

No I don't think so, I think Esther still doesn't have the king and Haman exactly where she wants them. Here's what I think she's doing. Look at verse 8. Esther says "If it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfil my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them." The difference between the last banquet and this one is that Esther is looking for a soft, but public

acknowledgement from the king that he's going to say yes before even hearing the request. She is essentially saying "if you are willing to give me what I'm asking, then show me that you are by coming to another banquet."

On top of that, the original language for her answer is a little odd here, and we don't see that in the English. Verse 7 and verse 8 are part of the same sentence in English, but verse 7 stands by itself in the Hebrew. What commentators think she's doing here is starting to act like she's going to ask, but then restarts her thought and asks the king and Haman to another banquet. This piques the king's interest, and as we've said, makes him give a soft but public acknowledgement that he's going to say yes. And to top it all off, as we see later, she is getting the king alone with Haman so that when she finally makes her request the king has no time to talk to his advisors and forces him to make a decision right then and there. She's playing on his rash decision making.

So by the end of all this, Esther has exactly what she wants without showing her hand, and the cherry on top is making it look like she's the one doing what the king wants with her concluding statement in verse 8.

Esther has made a strategic, and god-honouring plan to save the Jews.

[Ever have a dream where you find yourself in the middle of a presentation or something and you have no idea what you're supposed to be presenting? I've had that. I've dreamt a few times where I'm sitting in church and the music team is playing, and I know that in a few minutes I have to get up and preach. So I'm frantically flipping through my Bible looking for a passage that I can preach. So I'm searching for something that I've read recently or a passage that I've preached before. But usually in my dream I'm flipping through my Bible and I can't find anything! In fact most of the time I find that as I'm flipping through, I can't even navigate my Bible. It's like the books are not the right books, and not in the right order. That's the point where I usually wake up]

Thankfully I've never been in such a position. And sometimes there are last minute or emergency situations, but God is honoured with his people plan wisely.

What can we learn from this?

- 1) We ought to be shrewd. Know the positions of those we disagree with or who charge us with something. Know the attitudes. Know how to gain favour. Know how to gain respect from outsiders.
- 2) We have the truth. If the Christian world-view is true (and it is) then it makes sense philosophically and logically. Christians can and should learn to be sharp in our understanding of the world, based on our understanding of Scripture.
- 3) But we can do all this in a godly way. We do not need to lie. We do not need to cheat or steal or demean. We have the singular purpose of glorifying God by preaching the gospel and defending the faith, and by definition that means we aim for godliness, and have pity and compassion on every soul.

Esther shows us that God's people can and should be smart and shrewd in our planning. But that's only one side of the equation. God is not honoured with only smart plans. After all, there have been many "smart" plans that are evil and motivated by pride or selfishness.

That's what Haman teaches us.

Haman is a perfect example of a person who only makes plans to glorify the self. He's an exactly opposite example of Esther.

Unlike Haman, God's people must...

Make plans that are wise, godly, and ultimately entrust them to the Lord.

Let's take a look at his plans.

Haman's Plan (Verses 9-14):

We shift to our friend Haman. We're left in suspense after getting excited about the prospect of Esther's plan actually working and her being able to save the Jews. But all this is put on pause for a moment as we shift our attention to Haman. Not only is this just simply great storytelling, but it allows us to see what Haman is thinking and doing during all this.

And wouldn't you know it, the prideful Haman is doing what he does best.

Haman is clearly in good spirits. He was honoured by the king, and now is honoured by the queen. He's received a special invitation from her to attend a private banquet just himself and the royal couple. Obviously this can be nothing but a good sign right?

Well as in high spirits as he is, on his way home from the banquet he passes Mordecai as he usually does and is reminded of the thorn in his side. Mordecai still refuses to show respect, and on top of that, we are told he is not showing "fear". Likely Haman thinks that Mordecai would be shaking in his boots after the edict that went out, and knowing that Haman was the author of the edict, Haman would expect Mordecai to show a little fear and respect now right? Well, apparently not.

So he continues on his way home sulking and angry. Well what does a prideful man do when his pride is hurt? Boasting to others of course. So he summons his wife and friends and proceeds to boast about his money, kids, and position. Just a side note, if you're looking at the order of these, it is telling that he lists his sons as second on the list under his wealth. I think that's telling as to the type of person Haman is. In case we need any more evidence at this point.

For a man who seems to have it all. You'd think that he'd be a happier guy. You'd think that if you had all the wealth and status and as Haman, that if something bothered you, you could just take a private jet to Hawaii for a little bit and get your mind off of things. But that's not how it works is it? Despite all that Haman possesses, he is vexed by that pesky Mordecai. And I think his anger is getting worse. Notice that Mordecai isn't angry only that Mordecai won't show him honour, but he's angry "as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate." It seems that he's not just enraged at Mordecai's existence.

And so the plan is made. Haman's wife seems to be the spokesperson here for the group, which by the way is a comical reversal of the king's edict in chapter 1 that "every man should be the head of his own

household." Remember that? This is just more irony being played out. The plan is not only to kill all the Jews, and not only to personally kill Mordecai, but to personally and publicly humiliate the man by hanging him on a gallows that is 75 feet high for all of Susa to see. And this gallows, as we learn later, is built right beside Haman's house so everybody knows what happens when you don't honour the mighty Haman. They then tell Haman that the first thing he should do tomorrow is ask the king's permission to hang Mordecai.

They reassure him that this will make him feel better as they tell him to have this done and then go on his merry way and dine with the king.

Well this delighted Haman! What could possibly go wrong with such a fool-proof plan? Haman is ecstatic at the plan and has the thing built that very day.

Some plans glorify God, and other plans just glorify the self don't they?

One commentator I read says that ironically, the height of the gallows that Haman has built is equal to the size of his pride.

We need to take warning from Haman's example.

- 1) Pride only leads to downfall.
- 2) Sinful lusts are never satisfied and only grow. Sin itself does not satisfy.
- 3) Beware from where your counsel comes. The crowd should not dictate our plans, the Scripture should.
- 4) The planning of sin causes the heart to become callous. The advice from Haman's friends and wife to hang Mordecai and then go be happy is a strong indication of a callous heart. How dig into sin must someone be to order the death of another human being and then go be happy at a party afterwards?

So we have two diabolically different plans. Esther's plan to save her people, and Haman's plan to kill Mordecai and glorify himself.

And guess what, at the end of this chapter, neither of them come to fruition. We don't know which one will play out!

This is where Christians need to do our best to make god-glorifying plans, but ultimately to entrust them to the Lord. Because...

In the end, all throughout human history we have been making plans. Some of them are for the glory of God, and some of them are for the glory of self. You want to know what every single plan has in common no matter what?

Every plan, belongs to the Lord, and will ultimately only lead to accomplishing God's sovereign plan.

This is where we need to understand that this is ultimately where the Christian needs to end up with every plan they make. We ultimately end up here because this is ultimately a question of where we are placing our faith. Are you placing your faith in your circumstances, or in God himself? Do you have ultimate faith in your plans? What's going to happen when they don't turn out? What's going to happen

when your circumstances change for the worse? What's going to happen is so will your faith. This will lead to confusion, anger, fear, hopelessness, despair.

But if you place your faith in God himself, and entrust every plan to him, he will never disappoint no matter the circumstances. He is immovable and unwavering in any storm. I cannot promise you that you will always see the wisdom in God's plans. I cannot promise you that on this side of eternity you will understand why your best plans are frustrated. But I can promise you that one day when you stand with the Lord, you will have no sadness or sorrow or frustration when you think back on those plans you made but never came to pass. Instead you will joyfully give praise to God that he did things the way he chose to do it, because he always chooses the plans that glorify him the most, and that are best for his children.

Where are you putting your faith? If you're putting your faith in your own plans, rather in God, today is your day to change that.

Human plans are the last word in the chapter...but whose will is actually being done?

Esther's is directly accomplishing the will of God sure. But Haman's is equally accomplishing the tasks of God.

[a treadmill runs in a single direction. You can run forward, you can run backwards, you can moonwalk on it if you want, and if you're really really good, you can walk on your hands. But it doesn't matter one bit how you walk or which direction you're walking in, you'll always be at the mercy of the movement of the treadmill]

God's sovereign will moves in one direction. You can walk along with it, you can walk against it. You can love it, you can hate it, and you can even try your best to ignore it. But the fact of the matter is that God's sovereign will has been established before time began, and nothing in all of creation can change that will even the slightest amount.

Do I understand how exactly this works? No, but I am certain that he does what he does to display the riches of his glory to the objects of his affection.

So church let us be people who make smart plans, and who make righteous plans, but most of all let us be a people to ultimately put our plans in the sovereigns hands of God who does all things for the praise of his glorious name.