

# Esther 4

by William MacDonald

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*William MacDonald explores the themes of courage, divine providence, and the power of prayer in Esther 4.*

**Duration:** 50:30

**Topics:** "Esther"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher reflects on the story of Esther and how God worked behind the scenes to deliver the Jews. He emphasizes that God is always working, even when we can't see it, and encourages those facing challenges to trust in God's plan. The preacher also highlights the importance of seizing opportunities and fulfilling our purpose in God's kingdom. He concludes by noting that God's weaving of events may seem chaotic at times, but ultimately, a pattern emerges and His plan becomes clear.

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## Transcript

Could we turn in our Bibles tonight to Esther chapter 4. Esther chapter 4. When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry. He went as far as the square in front of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth.

And in every province where the king's command and decree arrived, there was great mourning among the Jews with fasting, weeping, and wailing, and many lay in sackcloth and ashes. So Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her. The queen was deeply distressed.

Then she sent garments to clothe Mordecai and take his sackcloth away from him, but he would not accept them. Then Esther called Hatak, one of the king's eunuchs whom he had appointed to attend her, and she gave him a command concerning Mordecai to learn what and why this was. So Hatak went out to Mordecai in the city square that was in front of the king's gate.

And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries to destroy the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the written decree for their destruction, which was given at Shushan, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her, and that he might command her to go into the king to make supplication to him and plead before him for her people. So Hatak returned and told Esther the words of Mordecai.

Then Esther spoke to Hatak and gave him a command for Mordecai, all the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces, know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king who has not been called, he has but one law, put all to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go into the king these thirty days. So they told Mordecai Esther's words and Mordecai told them to answer Esther.

Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place. But you and your father's house will perish.

Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this. Then Esther told them to return this answer to Mordecai. Go gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan and fast for me, neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day.

My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.

Then Mordecai went his way and did according to all that Esther commanded him. Last night, as it were, we took our seat in the heavenly. And we were concerned with watching God in his marvelous control of the circumstances of his people.

We saw man having his wickedness, but we saw God having his way through it all. We saw him working with unerring and unhastening skill. And working all things according to the counsel of his own purposes.

You remember, as the book opened, the king has thrown a tremendous banquet lasting 180 days. Probably quite a routine thing in a kingdom in Persia at that time. As far as the kingdom is concerned, he was showing off his own glory and his own power.

The greatest kingdom upon earth. And, of course, there was a lot of drinking there. He actually put on two banquets, if you'll remember.

And then Vashti, the queen, put on one as well. And there was plenty of wine served. It's interesting, isn't it? The world can't have a good time without alcohol.

Isn't that a strange thing? And I always think in that connection of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the spirit. Christians don't need that. They can be filled with the spirit and reap far better benefits.

And God is up there, and he's looking. God didn't ordain this. God in his sovereignty didn't choose this, but he allowed it.

And then the king commanded that his queen be brought in. And, of course, you know, and I know that his motives were not pure. It was to be a very immoral, really, presentation to the inebriated guests from all the kingdom.

And Vashti refused to do it. And in some ways, we feel sorry for the queen. Some of you don't feel so sorry for her.

I think some of you feel she was wrong in disobeying her husband. But there were times when, for the sake of righteousness, we have to refuse a human authority. And she was to suffer for her righteousness

as a result of her decision.

But she refused to come and reveal her beauty to all of those drunken guests from all over the kingdom. And, of course, this threw the palace into a tizzy. As we said last night, they thought they had a tremendous case of militant feminism.

And the only way they could solve it was that the queen must go. And God is up in heaven. And he's looking down.

And in the purposes of God, the queen had to go anyway. All they were doing was accomplishing what God would have had to do himself. God makes the wrath of men to praise him, we said, and the remainder of wrath he restrains.

Really wonderful. God had to get a young Jewish maiden there in that place. Why? Because he knew what lay ahead.

Nobody else knew what lay ahead, but God knew what lay ahead. And God answers prayers before they're ever uttered, doesn't he? Before they call, I will answer. And here God is moving these checkers, as we said last night, moving the checkers on the checkerboard in such a marvelous way.

As he looks forward to the future, and he's putting all the parts of the puzzle together. And then, of course, you remember that they had a tremendous beauty contest there in the kingdom. With men set out throughout all the provinces to bring the most beautiful of the young women in.

God had a young woman, too. He had his hand on a young woman named Esther. And he moved the hearts of men.

And pretty soon, Esther is there, Isabella. A Jewess of all things. A Jewess in a pagan court.

God has his ways of accomplishing his purposes. And God gave her favor in the eyes of the chief eunuch there in the harem, Haggai. And nothing was too good for young Esther.

And, of course, you know by now the outcome. I would think that from every possible standpoint, she shouldn't have been the one to win. But she did.

She did. And God inclined the heart. God works on the intellect and the emotions and the will of people.

And the king selected her as his queen. And then you'll remember that her cousin, Mordecai, he kind of has a prominent place out there at the palace gate. It's an amazing thing.

And one day he's down there in the right place at the right time. And the spirit of God comes upon him and tells him just to move over a little bit in this direction. And a little bit in this direction.

So he'll be closer to two men who are talking. And he nudges over toward them, but not too conspicuous. He didn't want to blow his cover.

And as he gets rid of all things, he hears them making a plot against the king. A plot to assassinate the king. And as a loyal subject of the kingdom, he makes it known.

And a record is made in there in the kingdom. And no thanks at the time for him. It was written in the book of the Chronicles in the presence of the king.

And then Satan's emissary enters upon the scene. The ancient struggle between God and Satan. And the emissaries of God and the emissaries of Satan.

And this man, Haman, ingratiates himself so much in the mind of the king that he's exalted to the second place there in the kingdom. And he just demands that everybody pay homage to him. And most people did.

As far as the record's concerned, there was only one man in the kingdom of Persia who refused to bow to him. And his name was Mordecai. And this incensed him beyond description.

He could not stand that despised Jew who refused to give him the homage that he sought. And so he went to the king and he said, look, there's a people in your land. Actually, he knew one.

He just knew one. But you know how people generalize when they want to do something like that. And he didn't know that the queen was another.

He said that the people in your land and they're not loyal subjects and they must be killed. They must be exterminated. And so he was successful in getting the king to put his signet on a decree, a law of the needs of the Persians that they must all be killed.

They must all be put to death. And then he resorted to all kinds of occult practice to set the date. We don't know whether he threw dice or not.

It doesn't say. But we suggested last night that even if he did, God controlled every movement of the dice, every turn of the dice, every world of the dice. So that when they landed on the table, they gave almost a year for the Jews to do something, if they possibly could, about that decree.

Isn't that wonderful how God can harness forces like that in the world to accomplish his purposes? And so the document is sent out with great speed to all the kingdom. And that brings us to where we are, where we begin tonight. Mordecai.

Mordecai. He's in Sacklot, and so he's going to be beyond the gate now. And he's really putting on quite a dramatic presentation of mourning.

I can never read this without thinking of two visits I paid to Auschwitz, the concentration camp at Auschwitz. And here's dear Jewish people coming from all over the world. They see the suitcases of those who had been cremated.

They see the little shoes of the babies that had been gassed. And I want to tell you, if you want to see a dramatic presentation of mourning, you go to Auschwitz and you'll see it. I mean, the wailing is really beyond description, and the Jews are throwing their arms around with good cause, I think.

And there was a little exhibition in Jerusalem. I don't know if it's still there. I never saw a more dramatic demonstration of mourning than at that, where you went up to a glass cabinet and there were some cakes of soap there.

And they had three letters on them, and those three letters stood for pure Jewish fat. And I want to tell you, when the Jewish people came there, it was really quite a scene. And I say, rightly so.

And so I picture Mordecai out there, and he's really, really sad, clothed in sackcloth and wailing at the top of his lungs. Pretty soon word gets in to Esther about it all, and she thinks, well, I can just solve that problem. She sends him out a new suit of clothes.

You know, new clothes do nothing for a broken heart, do they? And he had a broken heart. But in all of this, you know, God was even harnessing that mourning of that man, that wailing of that man. Otherwise, how would the word have ever got in to Esther in the first place? She would not have known what was going on, but now she does know what's going on.

And finally, when she inquires as to what this is all about, he reveals the whole story to her of the decree against the Jews and Haman's contribution to finance the operation. And then, of course, Mordecai swings into action, and he commands Esther to go in and plead for her people. This is a serious problem for Esther.

In some ways, we're at the very darkest point in the book, aren't we? Really dark. Some of you have been at very dark points in life as well. When God seems to be silent, he really isn't.

When God seems to be absent, he's really there all the time. When it seems that God doesn't care, he cares very much, and he's working out his purposes step by step. And he even commands the lips of Mordecai to bring this solemn charge to Esther.

Well, of course, she begins to weigh the consequences. And if she goes into the king without his holding forth the golden scepter, it's all over with her. And not only that, he hasn't called her in before him for 30 days.

So the situation is quite bleak. And not only that, but it doesn't come out quite yet, but before she does go in, she's going to be fasting three days. And I can just see her face pale and worn and drawn.

Not exactly the greatest beauty in the palace. In other words, a picture of utter weakness. But God uses weakness, doesn't he? God uses weakness.

His strength is made perfect in weakness. And God is working it all out, weaving it all out in his wonderful tapestry. And then Mordecai just lays it on the line.

He says, don't think that you'll escape more than any other Jews. This is your golden opportunity. How do you know that you've come to the kingdom at such a time as this? If you don't do it, you and your father's house will perish.

God will get somebody else to do it. And then God looks down from heaven. And there's something very significant that attracts his attention.

Some of his people down there are fasting for three days. I believe this is a significant turning point. It doesn't say they prayed, but it's obvious they prayed, isn't it? It's obvious that they prayed.

Esther and her maidens are praying. Mordecai is praying. And people are praying.

The people of God are praying. And prayer moves the hand of God to do things that otherwise he would not have done. And I want to tell you, I believe those three days of fasting had a real impact in the courts of heaven.

Those prayers have power with God because they came from a strong inward necessity. The best prayers that we ever pray are prayers that come from a strong inward necessity. Now, during most of the book, things seem to be going along slowly.

God is never spoken of as being in a hurry, is he? Except when that prodigal son comes home, the father runs out to meet him. I like that. He's quick in mercy.

But generally speaking, the wheels are going very slowly in this book. But God can act also when he has to act. And he will.

And now God brings influences to bear. I believe there was a great infusion of grace into the life of Esther at this time. And she says, in effect, if I perish, I perish.

And she decided to go before the king. The closest I ever get to that is when I get on a United Airlines plane. I say, if I perish, I perish.

But if it happens, I want to be in the king's business when it happens. That's all. I don't want to be in a pleasure trip to Tahiti.

But that's what she said. She said, I will go into the king, which is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.

And so God moves her to dress up in her royal robes. And I believe he just guides her to a certain position there in the court. Where she would be in a direct line with the vision of the king as he sits upon the throne.

This is all very important, isn't it? That's exactly the way it happened. It seems so casual. It seems so coincidental, doesn't it? Coincidental of all.

God guided her feet that day. She dressed up in her royal robes. And she positioned herself in the inner court where the king, sitting on his throne, couldn't help but see her.

Am I stretching it too far to say that God guided the eyes of the king? I believe he did. I believe he did. And he controlled the heart of the king as well in this particular instance.

And he moved that hand that held the scepter. Can you see the hand of the king reaching down? Reaching down and getting that scepter and holding it up. Remember, she had come against the law.

And if he didn't do it, she would have perished. And she hadn't been before him for thirty days. And she's been fasting for the last three days.

Hasn't eaten or drunk. And God works in the heart of that king. I don't doubt that God moved him to say something that he hadn't planned in advance to say.

He was in a generous state of mind and he offered her up to half of his kingdom. Pretty good. Pretty good.

She didn't want half of his kingdom, but she wanted something else. How little that king, sitting there in all his pomp and glory, realized that God in heaven is the monarch over all. And that he rules in the kingdom of men.

Okay, supposing you had been Esther then. You've been accepted before the king. The date is set for the execution of you and your people.

And now you're in the presence of the king and he says, what would you like? I'll give you up the half of my kingdom. What would you have done? Well, I think you would have come and told him. This is a problem.

She didn't do it. She didn't do it. A divine restraint came upon her that said, Esther, don't plead for your people yet.

I know that the clock is ticking and Adar 13 is getting nearer. But just stall for time and invite the king and Haman to a banquet. Isn't that wonderful? You and I would never have done that unless the spirit of God came upon us and led us to do it.

That's exactly what happened. That's exactly what happened. Strange, isn't it? Esther obeys.

And she invites Ahasuerus and Haman to a banquet. And at the banquet, he says, okay, now tell us what you want. What would you have said? What is my golden time? The world is my oyster.

Now I just have a chance to present my case before him. She didn't do it. She didn't do it.

What did she do? She invited them to another banquet. What's the matter with that girl anyway? It's terrible. The destiny of her people is in the balance.

And she misses it. She misses her golden opportunity. All she does is invite them to another banquet.

Why did she do it? Because God moved her to do it. Did she know she was doing it? I don't think she understood why she did it. Have you ever as a Christian done things which at the time you didn't understand why you were doing? I have.

And then I found out later why I did it. It's wonderful to me how God can take hold of his people and really control them in a way like that. And this doesn't negate man's free will either in any way.

She doesn't understand why she's doing this. It's really so unreasonable when the destiny of her people is at stake for her to stall and to invite them to another banquet. God is in heaven and saying, I know what I'm doing.

This has to be. It has to be this way. My ways are not man's ways.

And certain things have to happen before she can influence the king. God's timing and sequence of moves is always perfect. And it far transcends anything that you and I could ever figure out as a great strategy.

And it seems to me that at this point God is going to swing into motion in a new way and a more exciting way, if I may say so. Haman is ecstatic that he has been invited to two banquets by the queen. Everything is going his way.

Everything? Well, everything but that despised Jew who won't bow down and pay homage to him, that Jew at the king's gate. Haman is in ecstasy. Wouldn't he be surprised if he knew the queen who invited him was a Jewess? Marvelous, really, when you stop to think of it.

And so he goes home and he shares the news with the family, Haman does. And the good news that he's rich and he's second in command in the kingdom. And he enjoys the favor of the queen.

Marvelous. He was at a banquet with the king today and with the queen. And you'll go to another one tomorrow.

The bad news is that Mordecai, the Jew, still won't do him homage. At this moment, God needs a piece of equipment to accomplish his purposes. And so, prompted by Satan, Haman's wife and friends all come forth with a suggestion.

They say, no problem, Haman, just build a gallows 75 feet high. And that will take care of him once and for all. And with that settled, you can go out and go to the banquet tomorrow.

And I can hear those hammers and the saws working through the night. 75 feet tall. I mean, come on, Haman, you're really overdoing it, aren't you? Gallows don't have to be that tall.

But you know, God is sitting there and he's thinking, yes, I have set certain principles at work in my universe. They've never been repealed and you can't beat them. Pride goes before destruction.

The haughty spirit before fall. He said, I'll see that that's carried out. I'll work the checkers on the checkerboard and teach this valuable lesson.

And God watches them build the gallows there during the night. And he's saying in his heart, thank you very much. I'll have a need for that gallows in the very near future.

Really marvelous. What next? That night, the king couldn't sleep. This is wonderful, really.

I believe he slept the night before. I think he slept the night afterwards, too, don't you? Probably had a good night's rest this night. He couldn't sleep.

I'm sure he could have called the palace physician and asked for a night call or something, some pill to help him. He didn't do it. He wanted to do some reading.

So he called the librarian, asked him to go and get a book, some of the annals of the kingdom that he might read. It's wonderful. And can't you see the librarian reaching up his hand to the shelf? I want to tell you, there's another hand on his hand.

But all of those volumes in that library. And God is guiding that hand to one particular volume. How it makes me bow in adoration to the great God of Providence, who works in behalf of his people.

Not any of the books in the library will do, just one in particular. And God leads that librarian to that particular volume that has the story of how Mordecai had revealed this plot against the king and had never been rewarded. It's very important that it didn't happen back then.

It's very important that recognition wasn't paid to Mordecai that day that it happened. This is much better the way God worked it up. It's really wonderful when you start to think of it.

And we might remember that sometimes, because this same thing can happen in our lives as well. Some people will think it was an extraordinary coincidence that the librarian would go to that particular volume. But it was no coincidence at all.

It was completely designed. Things don't just happen for the people of God. They're planned.

And now it's time for the king to honor Mordecai. Get this, you won't believe it. He's really grateful that his life has been preserved.

And he's going to honor him. And God is working. And now he's controlling Haman.

He's controlling Haman's steps. To bring him into a certain position in the court that morning. And the king says to his servants, go and get somebody from the court.

I've got a little job for them to do. He didn't say, go get Haman. He said, go get someone.

Who's out there in the court? Tell them to come in. It's marvelous, isn't it? Who was there? Haman was there. Did it just happen? No, it didn't just happen.

The God of Providence was working out his purposes. What was Haman's aim at the moment? Well, his aim was to go and have Mordecai hang on the gallows that he had built. Right at that moment, you're talking about timing of moves.

Right at that moment, the king says, who's in the court? And Haman was there. He says to Haman, what shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor? Haman is ecstatic. He's exhilarated.

I mean, his joy knows no bounds at a time like that. At last, he's going to receive what he richly deserves, or so he thinks. He's bursting with pride.

And so he's going to honor the king by asking big. Kings don't like to be asked for trivial things. They like to be asked big.

That's what Alexander the Great said once, when a beggar came and asked for a dowry for his daughter and an education for his son and some gold sovereigns for himself. Just a beggar. And some of the people there in the court said to Alexander, what did you do that for? A man like that, he said, he treats me well.

He asks big. He felt it honored him as a king for that beggar to ask like that. And so that's what Haman is going to do.

And Satan prompts Haman to ask for one of the king's royal robes. He really is going to ask for everything but the throne itself. And he's going to ask him for one of the horses that the king has ridden about.

And they say that those horses would have a decoration with a crown on it. And then he's going to be paraded through the capital as the man whom the king delights to honor. He does everything, I say, but asks for the throne itself.

But he comes as close to it as he dares to do. God said, now is my time. Now is my time to bring him down.

Now is my time to burst his balloon. And the king says to him, Haman, you go. Mordecai's the man.

I can't believe it. I mean, it's a wonder that Haman didn't have a cardiac arrest at that particular moment. His whole world became shattered.

He was mortified. And he has to honor the one for whom he has built the gallows. And God is saying, I know.

I know how to abase those who walk in pride. And Haman goes home and he tells his wife. And he tells the friends there in the house.

And, you know, I believe that God took care, took control of the wife's mouth at that particular, of her speech box at that time. And she said, if Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him, but will surely fall before him. And why did she say that? Did she say that through her own wisdom? I don't believe it.

I don't believe it. I believe that her speech was just as much ordered by God as that of Balaam's donkey. Or some of the wonderful prophecies that Balaam himself made.

I read those prophecies. I mean, you know, was he a true believer? You know, some of the things he said were so pure. God controlled his tongue and his speech.

Without knowing it, she was echoing God's words to Abraham. I will curse him who curses you. And so, with his wife's cheerless prophecy ringing in his ears, he hurries off to the queen's second banquet.

I tell you, it's really wonderful to see how God is bringing it all together. Not very long ago, things were in chaos. It looked like as if God was dead.

And prayer was useless. Things are changing now. And the threads of God's weaving are beginning to make sense, aren't they? Right up until now, a lot of them just seemed like a tangled mass of skein.

Tangled skein. But I tell you, the pattern is coming into view now. And at the second banquet, the king repeats his offer.

Up to half of his kingdom. What do you want? Up to half of my kingdom. You can have it.

God says, Esther, the time has come now. It would not have done if she had brought this forth sooner than this. Mordecai had to be honored the way he was honored.

And change the mind of the king so he would be kindly disposed toward her. It was really her golden moment. And she threw aside all reserve.

And she revealed that she was Jewish. The shock that must have reverberated through that palace. Nobody had ever suspected.

Somebody said to me at the table today, couldn't you have told by looking at her that she was Jewish? Well, not always. A lot of Middle Eastern people look alike. You can't always distinguish people who are of Arabic descent and people of Jewish.

After all, they're cousins. Don't tell them that. But they aren't.

Anyway, it was a bomb. It was really a bomb. And don't miss the significance of it.

Here is the queen telling the people that she's and that that edict that was passed. That law of the Medes and the Persians, it couldn't be changed. Affected her.

Affected the king's own wife. Up until now, Haman had no idea that the queen was a Jewess and that she was included in the fateful decree. And it has where the king says, who would dare to do such a thing as that? To plot the exterminate.

He had been snuggled into signing the decree himself. And now he says, who would dare to do such a thing? She says that wicked Haman. Tell you, the sky is falling in on Haman.

The king is furious, absolutely furious. And and he seems to forget his own part in negotiating that agreement, doesn't he? He seems to be quite ignorant of the fact that he was a party to it. And he's so mad that he's got to get out in the fresh air.

So he goes out to the garden for a while to cool off. Is this just happening at random? It's all arranged by the Lord. All arranged by the Lord.

And while he's out there in the garden, Haman goes to the queen to plead first life. And when the king comes back in, he finds Haman in what looks like a compromising position. Actually, it wasn't.

Actually, it wasn't. As far as I was concerned, he was innocent of any wrongdoing as far as he was not going to assault the queen at all. The way of the transgressors heart, isn't it? The way of the transgressors heart, be sure your sins will find you out.

And the king comes back and he said, oh, this is it. Not satisfied with what you've done. Now you're going to assault the queen.

And they say the orders given cover his face with a cloth. Well, you know what that meant. It meant curtains.

It meant the end of his life had come. And, you know, there was a guy there at the time, kind of stargazing and looking around. And when he hears that, covering his face with a cloth, he said, oh.

He said, there's a gallows there, 75 feet high. And they said the very thing will use that. Isn't that amazing? It was all prepared.

It wasn't prepared for Haman. It was prepared by God for him. But that wasn't his plan.

What does the scripture say? He made a pit and dug it out and has fallen into the ditch which he made. His trouble shall return on his own head and his violent dealing shall come down on his own crown. The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.

I tell you, the word of God is wonderful, isn't it? How it describes it. And so he's hanged on the gallows he made for Mordecai. The tables are turned.

God is an expert at turning tables when his people's welfare is at stake. Haman's property is turned over to Esther and she appoints Mordecai to be the manager in charge of it. And Mordecai, of course, is introduced as her cousin, the one who raised her.

And what happens? He's given the signet king, the signet ring of the king. My, that's tremendous, really. He's getting the place that Haman had had.

And he received all the authority that goes with that signet ring. And now the Lord moves Esther. And she asked the king that that decree might be canceled.

Of course, it couldn't be canceled. Not even the king could cancel it. It was the law of the Medes and the Persians.

And it was irrevocable. It couldn't be changed at all. As we said yesterday, I think last night, God is greater than any decree that man makes, isn't he? And so it was arranged that another decree would be made in which the Jewish people would be allowed to defend themselves.

Who would have ever thought it? I never thought of that. I probably would have skulked into a corner and just sorrowed. The case is hopeless.

There's nothing to be done. Nothing could be more hopeless. It wasn't hopeless.

And not only that, but they had almost a year to get ready for it. God is not checkmated by human laws. And so God arranges for Mordecai to prepare another decree that allows the Jews to defend themselves.

And this decree is distributed with tremendous speed throughout the kingdom. I think that's one of the most thrilling parts of the story. The speed with which these animals and men carry that decree.

Well, it was a matter of life and death, and people had to prepare for what was coming. I think it was less than nine months now for the decree to reach the utmost limits of the kingdom before D-Day. And now Mordecai is robed in purple garments, royal apparel, and he's wearing a great turban of gold, a garment of fine linen, and farewell to sackcloth and ashes.

My, marvelous. Rejoicing breaks out in Shushan, and the Jews have gladness, joy, and honor. And it says some of the Gentiles even became so impressed that they became Jews.

I really think that's why Rahab became a proselyte of Judaism. She saw this army coming up from the desert, and everywhere they went it was victory for them. And she said, their God must be the true God, and I'm going to identify myself with Him.

And I think we're going to worship Him. And then, of course, the fateful day came, and the Jewish people were allowed to defend themselves. When you read chapter nine, it almost sounds as if it was kind of a massacre.

Actually, they acted with real reserve. They killed those who assaulted them, and the record emphasizes that they didn't take any of the booty. In other words, they weren't in it in a wicked way at all, but they did defend themselves.

And after it was all over, the king said, is there anything else you want, Esther? And she said, well, we really could use one more day, just as a mopping up operation. There's still a little resistance there. And the decree was granted, and the operation took place.

What does it mean? It means the righteous is delivered from trouble, and it comes to the wicked instead. The psalmist said, I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a native green tree. Yet he passed away, and behold, he was no more.

Indeed, I sought for him, and he could not be found. Marvelous, isn't it? And God is looking down, and somebody is saying on earth, is it righteous for God to allow that warfare? And the answer is yes, it was righteous, perfectly righteous for him to permit the warfare. It's a righteous thing to recompense tribulation to those who trouble God's people.

God has the right to do that. And then an interesting thing happens. The book started with a feast, and it's going to end with a feast, too.

The Feast of Purim. And, of course, that comes from the word for lots, doesn't it? That's so interesting to me. They would take, let's say, dice.

I don't know what it was. Let's say dice. They would take dice, which were rolled and which were to mean their destruction.

And they were to name a feast after it. It makes me think of the cross. Doesn't it make you think of the cross? The cross is a symbol of shame.

That upon which criminals were executed. And how the Lord Jesus had taken the cross and just transfigured it so that it's an emblem of all that's beautiful and all that's noble and all that's sacrificial. So that we have the Red Cross caring for humanity's woes.

We have the Iron Cross and the Bronze Cross given in times of war. Always the cross, you know. And, of course, you have St. Andrew's Cross and I don't know how many other crosses as well.

It's marvelous how the Lord Jesus takes something like that and makes it really beautiful. And that's what you have here with regard to the Feast of Purim. The jubilant Jews institute this.

It isn't one of the Feast of Jehovah, but the Lord allowed them in their joy to institute it. A legitimate celebration of a glorious display of the providence of God. I think it's an acknowledgement that God controlled the lot.

Brought victory to his people. And then, of course, the book closes with Mordecai's promotion. And the Lord's going to honor him.

He allowed Mordecai to impose tribute on a vast area of territory and on the islands of the sea. And notice the closing thing it says about Mordecai. God rewards him by causing his greatness to be recorded in the royal archives.

We're back in the library again, aren't we? It's going to be recorded in the royal archives. He's going to be elevated to be second in command. Given great favor among his people.

And God honored him with this eulogy. He sought the good of his people and spoke peace to all his kindred. That's beautiful, isn't it? He sought the good of his people and spoke peace to all his kindred.

What a wonderful story. Tomorrow night, Lord willing, we're going to start through the book again and draw out some spiritual lessons. Some additional spiritual lessons from it.

These two nights, I just wanted to picture God there working it all out. Controlling the minds of his people. Controlling the actions of non-people.

People who weren't his. And providing this wonderful deliverance for the Jews. And the wonderful thing, he's doing that.

Some of you have come here from the mission field with problems that you think are too great to bear. God is working tonight. God is working.

You don't see it. He's working. He'll bring it to a joyful end.

He will indeed. So tomorrow night, we'll just start over again and just draw some spiritual lessons from this wonderful book. I hope the book will live in our hearts.

Perhaps it has never before. Shall we pray? Our Father, we acknowledge you tonight as the great God. You are greatly to be praised.

And your greatness is unsearchable. And we thank you that when all seems dark with us, it really isn't dark. It's light.

That we can trust you. That no one has ever trusted you in vain. In all the changing circumstances of life, in the trials and testings, tribulations that come to us, in the mysteries of life, we thank you that you are there and you do all things well.

We give our thanks in the Savior's name. Amen.

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