

Winners and Losers!

Esther 7:1-8:2

Olympics Commercial:

- The joy of victory!
- The agony of defeat!

As a Cleveland fan, I have definitely experienced more defeat than victory. My heart goes out to the ones who lose.

I feel for them.

Some would say that it would be better if everyone could win.

But that is not what I want. You cannot have a winner without a loser.

I just don't want to be the loser.

Should we all be winners? Is it OK to want to win? I think so.

One reason: Because my God wins! And his enemies lose!

To be continued...

Esther has chosen to stand with the people of God.

She has gone into the king's presence uninvited.

And she has found favor in the king's eyes.

Rather than immediately pleading for herself and her people, Esther has delayed.

She has invited the king and his right hand man, Haman, to a feast, presumably in their honor.

But still she does not plead her case. She requests that they come a second day to another feast.

During the night, the king cannot sleep and while sitting up reading the records of his accomplishments he discovers that Mordecai has not been rewarded for saving his life from an assassination plot.

Just as he is pondering what to do for Mordecai, Haman enters. And through a wonderful and ironic twist of God's providence, Haman comes up with the means of honoring Mordecai.

Mordecai is treated like a king for a day.

We have come to the time of the second feast.

Esther has made a promise to tell the king her request.

Read Esther 7:1-2.

1 So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther.

² And on the second day,
as they were drinking wine after the feast,
the king again said to Esther,
"What is your wish, Queen Esther?
It shall be granted you.
And what is your request?
Even to the half of my kingdom,
it shall be fulfilled."

This is the third time that the king has spoken this to Esther. Now is the moment of truth. Esther will delay no longer.

Read Esther 7:3-4.

³ Then Queen Esther answered,
"If I have found favor in your sight, O king,
and if it please the king,
let my life be granted me for my wish,
and my people for my request.
⁴ For we have been sold,
I and my people,
to be destroyed,
to be killed,
and to be annihilated.
If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women,
I would have been silent,
for our affliction is not to be compared with the
loss to the king."

Esther finally pleads her case, and that of her people.

Let's take a moment to analyze Esther's request.

1. If...

a. I have found favor in your sight

i. She appeals to the king's attitude towards her.

ii. Everything seems to depend upon this. Is the king happy with Esther at this moment?

iii. The king was a very erratic man.

1. "The Greek historian Herodotus describes Ahasuerus's response to the request of Pythius the Lydian that he might release the eldest of his five sons from the obligation of military service. Even though Pythius had earlier entertained him hospitably and contributed

generously toward the costs of his war with Greece, Ahasuerus was so incensed by the request that he had Pythius's son cut into two pieces and made the army pass between them. (Herodotus *Histories* 7.37-39)

- b. it please the king
 - i. She appeals to the selfish pleasures of the king.
 - ii. Notice: She does not appeal to his sense of right and wrong.
 - c. Question: Do you think that the fate of God's people "ultimately" is dependent upon the whim of one erratic and evil king?
 - i. Of course not. The Hidden Hero is in control.
 - ii. But knowing this does not make this moment any less tense for Esther.
2. Let...
- a. my life be granted me for my wish
 - i. She begins with her own life.
 - ii. Keep in mind that the king does not know that Esther is Jewish.
 - iii. He would only know that someone has threatened the queen!
How dare they!
 - b. and my people for my request
 - i. She connects her life with the life of her people.
 - ii. They are one and the same to her.
 - iii. But, at this point, the king is only thinking about Esther. His mind is not on Esther's people as we will see.

She again places her welfare with that of her people.

- There is complete identification with the people of God.
- This is one of the applications that we are to take from the book of Esther.
 - o As Christians we are ultimately to identify with Christ
 - o To identify with Christ, you must also identify with the Church.
 - o There are times when certain portions of the Church may become NOT a church.
 - o But, we must identify and become one with Christ and his people, the body.

Do not think that you can stand alone as a Christian and think that God will be pleased with you.

Esther explains why she is making such a strange request.

- For we have been sold,

I and my people,
to be destroyed,
to be killed,
and to be annihilated.

- If we had been sold
 - o merely as slaves, men and women,
I would have been silent,
for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to
the king."

Esther is masterful here!

She does NOT appeal to the sense of justice in the king.

She appeals to his sense of gain or loss.

- We have been sold = she refers to Haman's purchase of the
annihilation of the Jews.
- I and my people = she wants the king to know that the decree will
mean her death.
- If we had been sold merely as slaves, I would have been silent, Why?
 - o Because as slaves we could have continued to serve the king.
 - o As it is, our destruction means that you will lose our service
forever.

I don't think Esther is really wanting her people to be slaves, but she is
appealing to what she knows matters to the king.

The Queen has played her hand.

- Except that she still has not mentioned that she is a Jew.
- She wants the king's focus to be on someone harming his queen.

How will the King respond?

Read Esther 7:5.

⁵ Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther,
"Who is he,
and where is he,
who has dared to do this?"

The Queen, by the hand of the Hidden Hero, has been successful!

The King is completely taken in.

He cannot believe that someone would work to do anything against his queen.

How dare they?

What is amazing in this is that Haman does not know that Esther is a Jew - or Mordecai's cousin for that matter.

Haman did not purposely seek to harm the queen.
And yet, by his hatred of Mordecai and the Jews, he has condemned himself.

Read Esther 7:6.

⁶ And Esther said,
 "A foe and enemy!
 This wicked Haman!"

Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

It is Haman! He is the one who has crafted the destruction of the Jews.
Esther calls him wicked, but right now the primary act of wickedness that the king is thinking about is that Haman has sought the destruction of his wife.

Haman realizes that Esther is a Jew and so he realizes that he is in trouble: He was terrified.

The providence of God continues in each little detail of the story.

Read Esther 7:7.

⁷ And the king arose in his wrath
 from the wine-drinking
 and went into the palace garden,

The king is angry.

He is processing the fact that the man that he has made second to himself, has crafted the destruction of his queen.

He is also trying to figure out how this can be reversed. He cannot simply revoke the decree that he has made.

- We might say, "Why not?"
- But that would mean the king utterly losing face in his kingdom.
- Daniel faced a similar dilemma when he was thrown to the lions.

So he goes outside in the palace garden to think for a moment.

Something that is not told us in the text but is assumed that the original readers would know, is that to be alone with the queen was forbidden. No one but the king could be alone with the queen. (And the Eunuchs who were there to serve

the queen.) One commentary I read spoke of not being nearer than seven steps from the queen.

Haman should have gone out with the king, or at least remained at the door so there would be no hint of impropriety.

But he is so distraught that he can think of nothing else than begging to Esther for his life.

but Haman stayed to beg for his life
from Queen Esther,
for he saw that harm was determined against him by the king.

Haman thinks that the mercy of Esther is his only hope.

He begs for mercy from her.

Will he get it?

Should he get it?

Read Esther 7:8.

⁸ And the king returned from the palace garden
to the place where they were drinking wine,
as Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was.

And the king said,
"Will he even assault the queen
in my presence,
in my own house?"

As the word left the mouth of the king,
they covered Haman's face.

Just as Haman is falling on the couch where Esther was seated, in walks the king.

What does he think?

He thinks that Haman is assaulting his queen.

There is some question as to whether or not the king actually thinks this or whether he now has a convenient excuse for ridding himself of Haman.

Does he really believe that Esther is being assaulted?

He may at first, but why does Esther not correct him?

She could have easily explained the truth to the king:

- He was not trying to assault me.
- He was only begging mercy from me.

This reversal foreshadows the reversal that will occur at the end of the ages, when Jesus returns.

Revelation 6:9-17

A huge part of the final judgment will relate to how people have treated God's people, God's son, Christ's body, Christ's bride.

Haman represents the spirit of the Anti-Christ in that he is bent on the destruction of God's people.

He is an Agagite. He is an Amalekite and God has determined to pour out vengeance on those who seek the destruction of his people.

This is why Haman is given no mercy. Esther is not the king of Israel. But she is the means by which God carries out his determined retribution in a time when Israel had not king. In fact, it is a pagan king who gives the order for Haman's destruction. But we all know that standing behind King Ahasuerus is the hand of God's Judgment.

Haman is receiving from God his just judgment.
The time for mercy has past.

The victory that is given to God's people IS the destruction of their enemies.

This is a common theme throughout Scripture, but it is one that we do not like to think much about.

Jesus is the king. And he has a right to destroy all of his enemies. We are usually fine with the fact that he will crush Satan under his feet. But when we start to think that this judgment will also include other men and women, we are not so sure.

But the Bible is not so squeamish. Salvation will involve Jesus crushing all who opposed him in this life.

King David was a foreshadow of King Jesus. Listen to how David writes of the salvation of the LORD.

2 Samuel 22:28 - 23:1 ²⁸ You save a humble people, but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them down. ²⁹ For you are my lamp, O LORD, and my God lightens my darkness. ³⁰ For by you I can run against a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall. ³¹ This God- his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him. ³² "For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God? ³³ This God is my

strong refuge and has made my way blameless. ³⁴ He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights. ³⁵ He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. ³⁶ You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your gentleness made me great. ³⁷ You gave a wide place for my steps under me, and my feet did not slip; ³⁸ I pursued my enemies and destroyed them, and did not turn back until they were consumed. ³⁹ I consumed them; I thrust them through, so that they did not rise; they fell under my feet. ⁴⁰ For you equipped me with strength for the battle; you made those who rise against me sink under me. ⁴¹ You made my enemies turn their backs to me, those who hated me, and I destroyed them. ⁴² They looked, but there was none to save; they cried to the LORD, but he did not answer them. ⁴³ I beat them fine as the dust of the earth; I crushed them and stamped them down like the mire of the streets. ⁴⁴ "You delivered me from strife with my people; you kept me as the head of the nations; people whom I had not known served me. ⁴⁵ Foreigners came cringing to me; as soon as they heard of me, they obeyed me. ⁴⁶ Foreigners lost heart and came trembling out of their fortresses. ⁴⁷ **"The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be my God, the rock of my salvation,** ⁴⁸ the God who gave me vengeance and brought down peoples under me, ⁴⁹ who brought me out from my enemies; you exalted me above those who rose against me; you delivered me from men of violence. ⁵⁰ "For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing praises to your name. ⁵¹ Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever."

Much of 2 Samuel 22 is quoted in Psalm 18.

This is important because the personal song of David, was not simply for him alone.

God's people were supposed to join in with David in praising God not only for their own salvation, but also for the destruction of all of the enemies of God.

This is challenging to me.

Some of whom Jesus will crush, I know personally.

I have passed them on the street and met them in the community.

Some I have been related to.

I have played with them on sport's teams.

I have worked with them.

You understand what I mean.

It is not easy for me to think of their destruction.

This is a tension of Scripture. On the one hand their destruction is supposed to make me cringe. I am called to do all that I can in prayer and proclamation to call them to repentance and faith. I will even be judged if I fail to warn the lost of their destiny apart from Christ.

But on the other hand, their destruction is something I will praise God for on the judgment day. Their judgment is not something that is a blotch on the character of God.

The judgment will bring about the destruction of evil in this world.

- Many judge God in our world as not being good, because he allows there to be evil in this world. They use the fact of evil to somehow argue against God. At least that the God of the Bible, a good and sovereign deity, is a reality.
- Evil exists in this world for a time, according to God's purposes and even under his sovereign control. But it will not exist eternally. God will crush all evil.
- By the way, this is what occurred at the cross. God, in his Son, crushed the evil that was yours.
 - God's holy wrath that should have been directed at you, was poured out upon Christ.
 - And God's wrath abated.
 - But what is more, in principle, sin has already been crushed in you.
 - If you are in Christ, you have already been crushed. Your old man has been crucified with Christ.
 - You have already gone through the judgment. You are a new creation, the old has gone and the new has come.
 - Now, you are ready to press on each day in your struggle against sin and evil. You are united with Christ and with his Holy Spirit and evil will lose in your heart.
 - It is a done deal. You will be made holy in Christ.

Philippians 3:7-14 ⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith-¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But

one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

But if you are not in Christ...

If your sin has not been crushed in Him...

Then you are still in your sins.

You must repent of your sin and cast yourself upon the mercy that is in Christ today. Because on that day, mercy will not be extended. Only the righteous judgment of God. And it is a judgment that every true believer in Christ will praise him for!

We are not to have mercy on Haman.

We are to rejoice that God has delivered us from Haman.

And we are to praise God for the working out of his just judgment upon Haman!
(Luke 19:27)