

FEASTING ON THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

Faithful to Protect

The Book of Esther

Good morning church. Do I have good news for you!

REGATHERING next Sunday, May 17, in two services, 9 and 11, for those who are ready.

IF YOU ARE NOT READY, vulnerable, think it's too early, CONTINUE STREAMING OF BOTH SERVICES – LIVE!

DETAILS – sabc.org, MY LETTER, RESTART PLAN, VIDEO

Today we honor our mothers and all the mothers of our church, nation, even of the world. Ladies today I want to try to honor you, and at the same time encourage all of us with the account of God's faithfulness to a woman of courage and to all the people she had pledged her life to defend.

Of course I am talking about Esther who became a Jewish Queen of the Persian Empire. The account of God's faithful protection in her life is a story that unveils the doctrine of the Providence of God in all of its majesty.

The word providence comes from "pro" meaning "beforehand" and "video" meaning "I see." Providence means "I see beforehand," and it means that God is able to see the future.

And God saw Hadassah, a simple Jewish girl living in Shushan, Persia long before she was given the name of Esther, which meant "star" in the Persian language.

- Ancestors part of Babylonian captivity
- After Persia conquered Babylon, many Jews moved to the capitol city of Persia called Shushan, including Hadassah's family.
- There she was born.
- Sadly, however, both of Hadassah's parents died, and Hadassah was left an orphan.

Yet in this we see the first glimpse of God's faithfulness to this vulnerable girl living in a foreign land, for ...

GOD PROTECTED ESTHER WHEN HER LOVED ONES DIED.

- God tendered the heart of her older cousin Mordecai to care for Hadassah in her parent's absence.
- Mordecai was a man who loved God with all his heart, and he worked in the king's palace as a low level bureaucrat.
- He became like a father to Hadassah, and she dearly loved him.

Then came an event no one foresaw except the Almighty.

- Current king was Ahasuerus, called Xeres, just returned from conquering Egypt.
- Man filled with pride, selfishness, and cruelty.
- Known for throwing drunken parties characterized by lewdness and debauchery.
- In one of these parties, king decided to show off his wife Vashti, famous for her beauty.
- Vashti refused to be put on display before the king's drunken guests and was deposed.

To replace her, king held "Miss Persia" contest.

- Most beautiful virgins from the 127 provinces of Persia were picked by governors and sent to Shushan.
- Participation was not voluntary. Young women were held in captivity until their appointed audience with King Ahasuerus.
- To the horrific surprise of both Hadassah and Mordecai, Hadassah was chosen to be one of the contestants.
- In the mysterious providence of God, the king chose Hadassah to become his new wife, and it was the king who gave her a new name, Esther.
 - Esther must have wondered why a holy, loving God would allow her to be trapped in a marriage to such a wicked man as Ahasuerus.
 - He was a pagan, who did not know, much less love, the Lord her God.
 - She dreaded his angry outbursts and feared his mean temperament.
 - She remembered how he treated his first wife, like a trophy put on display.
 - Nor were these dreadful thoughts the product of her imagination.

- Not long after the consummation of the marriage, Esther was not even brought into the king's presence for long periods of time.
- This marriage was so very far from the one Esther had longed for as a teen, and equally far from what Mordecai had hoped for his adopted daughter.
- Why? Why would God in His sovereignty condemn her to such a thing?
- Because God knew what no one else knew. God saw what was hidden from the eyes of all men in the empire, even from the eyes of the king.
- And God purposed to faithfully protect Esther and Mordecai and many others from the things only God knew were going to happen.

But even while Esther and Mordecai were still asking "Why?" when they lay on their beds at night,

GOD PROTECTED ESTHER IN HER HORRIBLE MARRIAGE.

- Although the king remained a self-centered, wicked man, God gave Esther favor with him and with all the servants in the palace.

Esther 2:17 NKJV The king loved Esther..., and she obtained grace and favor in his sight...

Mordecai also continued his work in the palace bureaucracy.

- God caused Mordecai to overhear a plot against the life of the king. Mordecai in turn relayed the information to Queen Esther, and Esther told the king.
- The king had the matter investigated and found the accusation made by Mordecai was true.
- The two perpetrators were quickly hanged, and the whole matter was recorded in the book of the chronicles of the king.

No one considered this incident important, except God. He knew the plot that was about to unfold that would threaten the lives of all of His people living in Persia.

Esther 3:1 NKJV After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him.

Agagite means that he was an Amalekite, a people group who were the sworn enemies of the Jews.

- Haman hated the Jews, all of them, and he wanted them exterminated from the kingdom.
- His hatred was enraged all the more whenever he came near Mordecai the Jew, who would not pay him homage.
- So Haman concocted a plan to destroy all of the Jews in the Kingdom of Persia in a single day.
 - Certain people called the Jews who have their own strange laws.
 - They do not keep the laws of the king.
 - Therefore, let me dictate a law that will rid the kingdom of these misfits in a single day.

The king agreed, and the statute was written into the laws of the Medes and the Persians and stamped with the imprint of the king's ring.

Esther 4:1–3 NKJV 1 When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and ... cried out with a loud and bitter cry. ...

3 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.

- Mordecai sent a copy of the decree of death to Esther along with this message, "As the queen, you must go to the king and beg for him to spare the lives of your people."
- Esther was filled with fear and she sent word back to Mordecai, "I cannot go to the king. No one can enter his presence whom he does not summon, and I have not been called before him now in 30 days. If a person comes before him without being called, he shall die, unless the king extends to him the golden scepter."

But my friend, as I have shown you time and time again over the last number of weeks, God is faithful. And ...

GOD PROTECTED ESTHER FROM BEING CONTROLLED BY HER FEAR.

Pay special attention to this. Many in the last two months have been battling a fear that seeks to control them, fueled by multiple media reports every hour of the day.

Folks, I am not saying there is nothing to fear. The Coronavirus is powerful and threatening. We should do what we can to be careful and safe. But! ...

2 Timothy 1:7 NKJV ...God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

God desires that we trust Him to handle all the things we cannot. And God did not want Esther to be controlled by her fear. God had everything under control.

- Mordecai sent a return message to the queen, saying, “Queen Esther, make no mistake; you too are in danger like every other Jew. If you do not speak to the king, God will find another way to save His people as He has promised, though you and your father’s house will perish. But who knows if you have come into the kingdom for such a time as this?”
- God used the words of Mordecai to stir the heart of his servant. Esther sent back a message, “Gather the Jews of Shushan together to fast and pray for three days. My maids and I will do the same. Then I will go to the king; and if I perish, I perish.”
- So Esther, Mordecai, and all the Jews fell on their faces before their God and sought His protection and deliverance. They wept before the Lord with great agony of soul, and pleaded for the Almighty to spare their lives.

And folks, this is what we need to do rather than being controlled by fear. We need to get on our knees before God and plead for His protection, care, and healing in our lives and in our land.

Then we need to trust that the Lord is able to care for us and then walk and live by faith.

After three days of prayer and fasting, Esther put on her royal robes and stepped into the inner court of the king’s palace and suddenly appeared before King Ahasuerus.

- The king looked upon his wife, and held out to her the golden scepter. “What do you wish Queen Esther? I will give you whatever you want, up to half the kingdom.”
- Esther, “I have prepared a banquet for you and for Haman, and I wish you come and dine with me.”
- The king immediately summoned Haman, and together they joined the queen at the banquet she had prepared.
- The king asked again, “What is your request? You may have anything, up to half the kingdom.”
- Esther, “I want you and Haman to join me for another banquet tomorrow, then I shall make known my request.”

The king was pleased and agreed; but Haman was absolutely delighted. He alone had been invited to dine privately with the king and queen. He was sure tomorrow would be a very good day.

- Haman was so sure in fact, that he invited family and friends to celebrate. There he bragged about his closeness to the king and how he alone would be with the king and queen tomorrow in a great feast.
- But as he talked, a devilish hatred recaptured his soul for he remembered Mordecai the Jew who even that day would not bow before him.
- His wife said, “Why don’t you build a gallows in the square in front of the house, and tomorrow, you can gain the king’s permission to hang Mordecai upon it.”
- That very night the sleep of Haman’s neighbors was interrupted by the incessant cutting of the saws and the hammering of the pegs for the construction of the gallows in front of Haman’s home. By sunrise it was ready. Only a word from the king was needed to end the life of Mordecai the Jew.

Perhaps it was the sound of construction in the distance that robbed King Ahasuerus of sleep that night. Perhaps the Spirit of God simply stirred his soul and caused slumber to flee. We do not know.

- All we know is that the king could not sleep. And when the king does not sleep, nobody in the palace sleeps.
- His servants were called to read to him from the records of the chronicles of the king,
- Servants read about the plot that Mordecai had discovered and exposed, saving the king’s life.
- The king asked, “What did we ever do to thank and honor Mordecai for saving my life?” They answered, “Nothing, my king.”

The sun was rising and Haman was entering the palace. He was eager for this day that held so much promise. The king said, “Bring Haman here.”

- But before Haman could seek the approval for Mordecai’s death, the king asked Haman, “What should be done for a man whom the king wants to honor?”
- Haman, thinking surely the king wanted to honor him replied, “Let the king give him one of the king’s own robes to wear and set him on the king’s horse with the king’s crest. And let one of the noble princes lead him around on the horse throughout the city saying, ‘Here is what the king does for the man he wants to honor.’”
- And king Ahasuerus said, “That is what I want you to do for Mordecai the Jew who saved my life.”

Haman’s soul fell from the exhilaration of the mountain top to the very pits of hell, but he could not risk defying the king.

- With every step one of excruciating agony, and every word like bile in his throat, Haman proclaimed the honor of the king upon Mordecai the Jew throughout the streets of Shushan.
- He had no more finished and returned to his home, his gallows still unused, and bemoaning what great tragedy and humiliation had befallen him that morning, when the servants of the king arrived to escort him to the banquet with Queen Esther.
- Haman had not reason to dread the event. Neither he nor the king knew that Esther was a Jew. Perhaps his private audience with royalty would turn the day around after all.
- At the meal, the king asked Esther, "Now what is your request?" Esther replied, "I ask for my life to be spared and the lives of all of my people. For the plan has been laid to destroy, to annihilate us all."
- King Ahasuerus said, "Who would dare to do such a thing?" And Esther said, "This wicked Haman!"
- The king exploded in anger, and rose to walk outside the banquet hall in the garden.
- Haman was rightfully terrified and dropped to his knees to beg the queen for his life. In desperation he fell across her lap as the king reentered the room. Ahasuerus exclaimed, "Will you also assault the queen?"
- The servants immediately grabbed Haman, and one of them volunteered, "Haman had a gallows built so that he could hang Mordecai the Jew, the one who saved the life of the king." King Ahasuerus said, "Hang him on it."

Folks, do you see? God in His faithfulness

- Not only protected Esther when her loved ones died,
- Not only protected her when she was forced into a terrible marriage,
- Not only protected her from being controlled by fear,

GOD PROTECTED ESTHER'S BELOVED UNCLE FROM CERTAIN DEATH. And

GOD PROTECTED ESTHER AND HER PEOPLE FROM A MURDEROUS ENEMY.

The king gave Mordecai the position of Haman and to Esther all of Haman's vast wealth and possessions.

And because a law of the Medes and the Persians could not be revoked, the king authorized another decree that on the day that the Jews were to be attacked by their

enemies, they could defend themselves and attack those enemies so that the lives of men, women, and children might be spared.

And my dear ladies, let me say to you that what God did in, through, and around Esther He is still doing through in the lives of women today who love and trust Him.

- Your kingdom may not be as large as the empire of Persia in the eyes of men but it is no less critical in the eyes of God.
- Your kingdom may be your home, your kid's school, which is now your living room, your workplace, your neighborhood, your city, whatever domain the Lord has placed you in.
- But understand this: He has brought you into your kingdom for such a time as this.

The place that God has put you may not be one of your own choosing.

- You may have wondered, "Why did God put me here?" So it was with Esther. She did not want to become the wife of a pagan, drunken king.
- But God is ever faithful to protect and care for all who put their trust and faith in Him.

Men and women, God is faithful, trust Him, walk with Him through this time of trial.

Those who do not yet know Him, wouldn't you like to trust a God like that?