

Esther – Salvation Requires Celebration

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MAIN VERSES

[Matthew 5:48](#) • [Matthew 5](#) • [Leviticus 19](#) • [Galatians 3:29](#)

Do you ever find yourself searching for something bigger than you? For a community to be a part of? A place founded on truth and love. A place to worship the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, and the Son of God. Welcome to Founded in Truth, where we're more than just a fellowship. We're a family, so welcome home.

We can often see an agenda of the author, or maybe an agenda that we thought the author had really isn't clearly defined in the text. And Esther is a very mysterious book. It's a very vague book at times. And so I hope that at least the last two weeks have caused some of you to say, "Huh, Esther. That's interesting. Maybe I should go back and reread the book of Esther in light of this or that." And we're going to see a door start to hinge or swing in the book of Esther this week. The reversals—the reversals of honor and shame, death to life, injustice to justice, weakness to strength, et cetera.

The Call to Perfection

And it's amazing because this week I was reading through Matthew chapter 5, and [Matthew 5:48](#) has a very, very, very compelling verse. And it says that Yeshua says that we're to be perfect. He says, "Be perfect like my Father in heaven." So Yeshua's speaking in [Matthew 5](#), and he says, "You guys need to be perfect like God." Now, this is a verse that many of us have read many times, right, in [Matthew 5](#). And we read it, and we're like, "Oh, that's a good word, Yeshua," and we keep on moving. And I didn't keep on moving this week. I stopped and I said, "What? Perfect."

And shouldn't we be a bit concerned about calling ourselves a believer if we're not perfect like God? Because Yeshua said, "If you're going to be a follower of me, you've got to be perfect like God." And let me tell you something. The whole reason that God sent Yeshua was to proclaim victory over sin and death so that a perfect God could be reconciled with an imperfect people.

And I would like to tell you today that you are not God. And if that's a letdown for you, well, Xerxes, I'm sorry. That's not who you are. You are not God, nor will you ever be God. But what do we do about this verse that has this compelling weight to it?

So Zonaman Bible Background Commentary, which is a commentary I love to use—it's awesome, it's amazing. It says that translating that Greek word as "perfect" and just taking it out of context... A lot of people take it out of context. It really has to do with what Yeshua is saying in the chapter. And the verse and the word itself really means more along the lines of "whole." But the context is, of course, what he's saying in [Matthew 5](#). And he's basically describing the character of God. And he's saying, "Listen, this is what you do. You need to pursue the character of God." It reminds me of [Leviticus 19](#), along with several other places in the Torah, where Scripture tells us to be holy like God is. To be holy like your Lord is holy. Like Yah is holy.

And so, the context is that. But too many times we have pressures of this life. We have pressures in work. We have pressures in family. Some of us may have a little bit of pressure in our marriage. Maybe some of us have pressures with children. Anybody? Maybe just a little bit of pressure when you have children. And we have the pressure put upon us to be perfect. And if being perfect is your goal today, you will never achieve it, I dare say. If you're pursuing some area in your life and you're saying, "Nope, I can do this, I'm going to be perfect, I'm going to be perfect, I'm going to be perfect," you're in a long line of people who have rushed towards that pursuit and put their energy and focus in that pursuit. And it's a good pursuit, but no one's made it yet, save one person.

Grace and Shalom

And the desire of God is not that you would, through your own pursuits, be perfect, but that you would be perfected by his grace and his mercy and his love because you're supposed to be an imitator of Yeshua. And in him is the only place that you will find anything remotely close to perfection. Like I said, the Greek word is arguably better translated as "wholeness" or "shalom," if you will. Pursue this wholeness like God's character has. Learn from this, and this is your pursuit in life. It's equally intimidating when we say something like that, but I would dare say that that wholeness is found in Yeshua. That's where we find our rest. And when we stop chasing our own identity of perfection, and we start chasing the rest and the shalom that is found in Yeshua, we start chasing the wholeness that is found in Yeshua, at that point—maybe, and this may be a shocker—maybe some of us can accept the fact that Yeshua had to die because you are not perfect. And he rose to proclaim victory over the things that make us that way.

And I'm going to say a bad word because we need to say this word sometimes, especially for namas believers, big-time namas-related believers. That word is something that some of us don't like because we cannot comprehend the depths of it. And whenever we try to explain something... I was listening to a book on astrophysics the other day, and I was trying to explain the fourth dimension. And the author was like, "Yeah, I can't write out or draw a square in the fourth dimension because we live in three dimensions." But then he goes on to try to explain it. And this word is like that. It makes us kind of cringe and it makes us kind of scared to even talk about it because this word is something that is so deep and has such a mystery. It's shrouded with the mystery of the divine. And that word is grace.

Grace. You received grace. And people will sometimes say, "Well, yeah, I received grace, but..." No, no, just hold on a second. But you received grace and God loves you. Is that something we reflect on at any point in our days—when we wake up for prayer—that God gives us grace and he loves us? God loves us, and God cares about you today. And if no one's told you that recently, then I would like to be the person to tell you that today. God cares about you and he loves you very much.

Righteousness is Progress

Righteousness, I would dare say, is not about perfection. It's about progress. "Matt, come on, do you have any examples?" I'm glad you asked for examples. Cite Abraham, cite Isaac, cite Jacob, cite Moses, cite Samson, cite Noah, cite Matthew, cite John, cite Peter, cite Paul. None were perfect. The question I want to ask you today is not, "Are you perfect?" Because between you and me, I know the answer. And it's okay—I'm not perfect either. The question I want to ask is, "Are you progressing?"

Have you taken upon yourself the fact that, "Oh, I need to be perfect, but I can't be perfect. I don't know why I can't be perfect because Yeshua says I need to be perfect like God. I need to be God." And we find ourselves standing still and not worrying about anything else because we're so trapped in this condemnation of perfection that I don't see Yeshua ever putting on us. Yeshua calls us to follow. Yeshua calls us to take one step in front of the other. Yes, you might trip up a little bit. It's one of those things that we do. No, it's not an excuse for you to stand where you are, but it is a motivation for you to keep walking.

Are you putting the identity of Yeshua for the kingdom and for the mission to pursue God's reign? Are you progressing in love, kindness, patience, joy, peace, goodness, gentleness? Are you pursuing and progressing in self-control? Even baby steps? Because there's no doubt in my

mind that if that's you today, then I can't speak for God, but I find when I read the character of God throughout Scripture that he's cheering for you, and he's proud of you, and he loves you. God likes to see progress. He likes to see intention. And so don't let anyone ever try to convince you that your imperfection disqualifies you from God's love, God's mercy, his pride for you, and his grace. It is precisely because you are imperfect that God has noticed you, and God gave everything to claim you as his. And your job is to respond. Your job is to rebuke sin in your life. Your job is to admit the fruits of the Spirit. Your job is not to be perfect, but your job is to follow the one that is.

And we make the mistake of thinking keeping commandments somehow makes us perfect. But Matthew, the psalm says the Torah is perfect. I don't disagree. But if simply doing things in the Bible brought on perfection, what were the Pharisees criticized by Yeshua for? Remember the parable series? He straight up told them, "You're going to lose the temple. And the vineyard is going to be given to someone else because you're unfaithful. You are unfaithful workers." "Yeah, but we've been doing all these things perfectly." But that's not the issue. The issue isn't the things that you're doing. The issue is your heart. Torah is perfect, but the hearts of man have always been imperfect. They deceive. They cause injustice. They're selfish. They're evil. Our response to follow Yeshua is to keep the commandments. It's how we show honor and love to God, but they will all be in vain if we don't look at the progress of our heart.

Quit being distracted with perfection and the condemnation that that carries. It's a journey. It's not quite an overnight trip. Focus on progress. Where are you going, and where is God calling you to be? God's power is perfected through our weakness, so let's let it. And yeah, I'm not sure where that came from.

I wrote that last night in an outline, and I'm not sure why, but maybe it'll tie into today's message, because today we're going to see in Esther how there are imperfect people. Was Esther a perfect, righteous role model for our young girls her entire life? No, no, no, it was very imperfect. Mordecai was righteous, faithful, pious, religious Jew living in Persia, praying towards the temple three times a day, keeping Sabbath, kosher, not assimilating. No, none of that's in Esther. None of that's in the book. Imperfect people. But does God still work through imperfect people for his plan to prevail? No. And we're going to see some great reversals take place today. A hinge that swings, and essentially that's the story of the gospel, right?

Great Reversals

So the last few weeks we've gone through the first couple chapters of Esther, and we're going to start in Esther chapter 4 today. And we know what happened. Haman has essentially deceived the king a little bit, and he has decreed that all of the Judeans in the Persian Empire should be killed. And it's a very dramatic scene. And it was all prompted. This genocide was essentially prompted because of one man who refused to bow to Haman. And last week, we don't know his motivations. It could be pride. It could be religious. Almost unlikely, though. But whatever it was, we see how this revealed Haman's true heart. And the letters are sent forth, and Mordecai is lamenting, tearing his clothing, putting on sackcloth and pouring ashes over his head, and mourning. And all of the Jews in the entire empire, we can assume, are doing the same thing. Why? Because they're going to die. Why? I would be moping around a wee bit if that was the case for me.

And at this point, Mordecai sends word to Esther. And he's saying, listen, Esther, she's queen now. She entered bachelorette Persia or whatever TV show you want to call it. For a whole year, she fought for the competition. And the one night with the king, she won, right? She won. She's not a concubine anymore. She is officially the queen. Everyone else is subjected to the horrible life sitting in the harem and eating gourmet food for the rest of their life unless the king calls them. And she's along with them, but she has status. And so Mordecai sends word to Esther, and he's explaining what the decree is and what's going to happen and what he expects her to do. As a response, he expects her to go before the king and beg for his favor on behalf of him and her people. Esther, you're queen now. Go and do this. Use your influence now.

But there's one problem. And if you join me, if you BYOB'd today and brought your own Bible, Esther chapter 4, starting in verse 11. Here we go. Let's try this. There we go.

All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes before the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law to be put to death. Except the one who the king holds out his golden scepter to, he may live. But as for me, this is Esther speaking, I have not been called to the king these 30 days.

So Mordecai says, Esther, go and save us. Petition the king. He likes you just a little bit. Chose you among everyone else. Just say, hey, can we not die? Would that be a big deal?

Esther's Hesitation

And she says, listen... I don't know if I can do that. I don't know if I can help save you, Mordecai. I don't think... my hands are tied, Mordecai. If I go in there, there's only one law, and

it's to kill me. To kill me. Look, the king hasn't even spoken to me in the last 30 days. We haven't been together. It's been a month. It's been a month.

And Mordecai hears this. This is a growing opportunity for Esther. Because you can see her hesitation. She tells Mordecai, I'm not the one. I can't do this. I'm sorry.

Mordecai hears this and he responds to Esther in verse 13. It says, Listen, Esther, I know you're hesitant and you don't want to do this. But listen, salvation is going to come one way or another. Something's going to happen. But you're probably going to die either way. So Mordecai was really blunt. We don't read it like that. That's how it's written.

Verse 15: Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai. Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also pray as you do. Then I will go before the king, though it's against the law, and if I perish, I perish.

Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered. Fine, I'll do it, but I need some help with this. Go and have everyone fast on my behalf.

The Power of Corporate Prayer

Now, this is a pivotal point in the story. And there's a lot of debate over this section of Scripture, believe it or not. Were Mordecai and the Judeans tearing their clothing for religious reasons? Were they even fasting for some religious reason? We assume so. But this practice appears in various sections of Scripture where people were doing it not for religious reasons. It was a cultural response to death. It was a time—not necessarily of devotion and prayer, but rather of "oh, Lordy, this is about to happen."

And there are some great arguments to be made for this section of Scripture and some of the resources I talked about in the first message. However, something is demonstrated here. It was really eye-opening for me to look at all the different debates about the context of the Scripture. But something's demonstrated here, and what is demonstrated here is Esther wants others to support her. That's key. Not just saying something nice like, "Our hearts and prayers are with you, Esther. We hope you do a good job and you don't die."

Esther petitions Mordecai. She says, go out and tell everybody to fast on my behalf. Do something on my behalf. Through your actions, support me. She's imploring everyone else, the people, to do something. And I agree with the majority of scholars on which side of the debate

this is. I think that Esther is imploring her people to, through action, petition God. That's through fasting—petition God, although it's not written.

And a lot of times when we read the book of Esther, how many of us have ever gone through a hard time in our life where we have to do something uncomfortable and we have to be brave? And we use Esther as the role model here. And we visualize ourselves being Esther or Mordecai. And it's like, "Okay, I'm about to go before the king. I have a conflict at work or something and you're being called to the boss's office." And—pfft. I am Esther. I'm going before them. And if I perish, I perish, right?

And we always say, "I am Esther." What about the people? How many of us have ever seen ourselves as the people in this story right here? That when someone came to them and asked for prayer or support or fasting, they responded in that way. There are a lot of heroes in this story that we just skip over. And we miss this huge lesson if we overlook that the people responded to Esther to support her.

Your Response to Others

So who is asking you for support today in your life? Maybe no one, maybe someone. How do you respond? Has anyone ever gotten an email or a message on Facebook, social media, text? "Hey, can you pray for me? We're going through a rough time." Anybody? No? Just me? Okay, a couple people.

And how many of us—you don't have to raise your hand—how many of us were like, "All right, of course I will." Dang it, I committed. Okay, what? Dear Lord, please address their problem. And I'm spending time praying for them, blessing them, and hoping everything's okay. In Jesus' name I pray, amen. And then we just forget about it and go on our day and we check it off our list because we prayed for them and they asked us to. Bam. Anybody? Anybody? Okay. Not me, of course. Never done that. Of course we've done that. We mark it off as a checklist.

Esther's not asking the people to sit down and say a 30-second prayer for her. She's saying, listen, this is something that is big and I need support to do this. This is a huge maturing point for her in the story. And she's saying, people, everybody, can you support me? Can you put the hot dog down for three days and focus on petitioning on my behalf? Putting energy on this situation. Don't just keep me in your thoughts and prayers. Give me some support through action. Fascinating.

The Significance of Three Days

How many days has she asked them to do it? I know, about to get all Sunday school here. Three days. The salvation comes in three days, and that's cool because Yeshua was in the grave for three days. It's exciting! And at the end of the three days, the stone was moved. And that's exciting.

So, and look at the reversal that's happening with Esther. At the beginning of the book, who was Esther? She doesn't even speak. She's this timid little teenage girl, right? She's told what to do. She doesn't object. And she does it. Follow directions. Go. Don't tell anyone that you're of the people of God. No. Keep that a secret, too. Go on. She doesn't even say a peep to the king. With Mordecai, she's passive, she's timid, and now she's rising up to be bold because she has to. And she's starting to realize that this is bigger than her. The fact that she just told her people to fast for her for three days says something about her character evolution here.

It says that she's about to grow. She's about to face something that she's never faced before in her life. And she wants support. And she's about to boldly enter into the king's court. And she's taken up her identity. And she's still Esther, but she's beginning to act like Hadassah.

Acting Like Hadassah

Chapter 5, verse 1. And when he saw the queen Esther standing in the court, she won favor in his sight, and he held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter, and the king said to her, What is it, queen Esther? What is your request? If it please the king, she responds, let the king and Haman come today to a feast that I've prepared for the king. So after all of this takes place, Esther wants to throw a party. People like to party in this book. What is there, nine or ten big parties in this book? I mean, just every corner.

A Party for Two

And there's going to be two exclusive guests at this party. And this is kind of awkward because you have a party. I mean, the beginning of the book was a party, a whole country, all the military, everyone, and then everybody. And Esther's having a party, and two people are invited. And the guests are King Xerxes and Haman. And then that night, she holds this party, and it is a drinking party. I'm not going to sugarcoat this. We always like to picture that it's tea time, and she's pouring tea. They were drinking. There was lots of wine involved. I'll tell you why in a minute. The king tells her again. He's like, okay, you invited me here, Esther. We're all having a good time. What is it that you want? And her response: King, I found favor in your sight.

Tomorrow, I want to have another party, and I want to host you, and I want to have an exclusive guest along with us. She turns to Haman. I want to have Haman with us again. It's just kind of odd, but okay. How do you think it makes Haman feel? Right? Wow, I was invited here by the queen and the king, and now I get to go to another one. Talk about inner circle. This is great. And that night, Haman goes away from the party full of joy, exclusive guests of royalty, right?

And then he goes out the king's gate, that big old gate, the hub of commerce that we were speaking about. And who's sitting there except for Mordecai?

The Refusal to Bow

Mordecai's sitting there at the king's gate. And what do you think Mordecai does and not do when Haman approaches, right? Now, we discussed last week that Herodotus talks about the standard protocol of saluting people and greeting people in the Persian Empire. If you were equals, you'd kiss on the mouth, right? Make you all uncomfortable, yeah, you might be equals. And if you're around the same rank, either in social business or military, you'd kiss them on the cheek. And if someone was really down low, they would prostrate, they would bow down. It's just like saluting in the military.

And so if Mordecai is working at the king's gate, it's a place of both political and business commerce. He had a high-standing position. He would have had to bow to somebody at some point in his career to get to this position. To assert that he never bowed to anybody, not even to the king, and he's hanging out at the king's gate is crazy. I mean, he just got there. He would have done this, but it was because of this one guy, this Agagite. I'm a Jew. I don't bow to Agagites, right? So it's a very interesting viewpoint. And so what does Mordecai not do? Here comes Haman. He's all just stoked. Yes, my life is awesome. And here comes Mordecai. Mordecai, good evening. Haman, what's up? Stretch my legs. All right. You could just see it.

Now, despite Mordecai's motivation here, we're starting to like Mordecai a lot. This is turning into a comedy. You're supposed to chuckle when you read that. Because Haman loses all of his joy. And I'm sure there's a sermon about that, not letting people take your joy. But anyway, what does Haman do? He runs home and he is just ticked. He covers his head. He's lamenting, and he's like, gosh, this is horrible. My joy is gone. And the first person he talks to is his wife. He laments to his wife, first about how special he is and how great his day was going, but how all of it means nothing to him because Mordecai over here won't bow down and salute him because he's second to the king. The king said everyone needs to do it, and Mordecai's over here not doing it. And his wife, in an effort to hush him up, asserts that, why don't you just build a 50-foot

gallow? Stick him on it, because that's what good wives do. And so Haman has these huge gallows built, right? For Mordecai. He's going to stick him on them.

The Invisible Hand of Providence

Remember, it's either a 50-foot stake or it's a 50-foot cross for crucifixion. It's one of the two. Persians were the ones who invented that thing, crucifixion. So now you guys know. You guys realize that the providence of God is not always visible, right? The plan of God doesn't always express itself in a visible manner. In other words, when we open up our Bible, we read things about angels and burning bushes and angels fighting in the sky, right? And, oh yeah, talking donkeys, that's in there. And then we go outside, and many of us do not see angels or burning bushes that speak. We don't see galactic or cosmic battles going on with angels fighting to deliver messages. And I've never seen a talking donkey. And I affirm that God is fully capable of producing all these things, but I also affirm that God will do all things the way that he wants to do, according to his providence, his plan.

And so sometimes God will work through his visible hand, through miracles, fireworks going off, revealing God's presence, and sometimes he works through his invisible hand of providence. And this is one of the biggest themes in this book. Although God has never been mentioned, we see his providence. We see him chasing his children, protecting his children, caring for his children, despite them not being the most obedient children. These are children in Persia, not Jerusalem. They didn't go back. They are imperfect people. And God's not going to let that get in the way of his plan.

A Sleepless Night

And so I enter into chapter 6, verse 1. On the night the king could not sleep, he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, as they were read before the king. And it was found written how Mordecai had told about Big Thana, not Little Thana, and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the threshold, who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. Remember, eunuchs were drafted servants, kind of like military, you're getting drafted in, and you're like, okay, this isn't so bad. And then they make you a eunuch. They wanted to kill the king. And the king said, I have a few questions. Why would the king be awake tonight? He can't sleep. He's a king. He probably has lots of stress and anxiety going on, right? Anyone else have a little bit of stress?

King of the known world. And I don't know, maybe he can't sleep because he decided to marry a couple hundred women. That would cause a lot of anxiety in my life. But he can't sleep and he decides to get the Chronicles out. The Chronicles, the political book of the law and incidents in his kingdom. Let's get the law book out. And the servant just happened to turn to an incident that happened four to five years earlier involving this guy at the king's gate named Mordecai and how Mordecai saved him from assassination. Do you think this is coincidence? Coincidence is a word that we use a lot. But it's a word that the non-believing world would use to describe these colliding events, these meetings of random people for a purpose that's bigger than us, these things that happen in our lives where everything just falls in the right spot. We would say this is God's providence. This is God's doing. All good things work together and all good things come from above.

And so we continue here in verse 4. And it says this. And the king said, Who is in the court? So the king's sitting here. He's like, Have we done anything for Mordecai yet? The servant's like, No, we didn't do anything. He saved your life. He didn't do anything. You're a jerk. And so he says, Okay, well, who's out in the court? Who's outside my door right now? Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to speak to the king about having Mordecai hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for him. Everything just keeps happening. Like, what comes next?

Now, why is the king asking if anyone's outside of his door in the court? Because he wants someone to tell him what to do. He's a weak leader. We saw this in the first chapter. He's a weak leader. And he wants to be able to show off and steal the glory. But he was a weak husband to Vashti, and she stood up to him because of the dignity that she had. He was a weak leader before his young friends in how to respond to this incident. He was a weak leader in Greece.

He was a weak leader with Haman, and he's being a weak leader now. What random fellow is standing out in the courts there? I need someone to tell me how to handle this situation. Guys, it's great to ask for opinions. It's not a good attribute to not want to make a decision. And so Haman is standing there. Coincidence. And the king asks Haman, hey, Haman, I'm glad you're here. What should I do for someone that the king wishes to honor?

And Haman just smiles. Why? Why does Haman smile? The book of Esther tells us that he thinks the king's talking about him. This is getting good. So Haman starts to blow the situation up. He's like, all right, king's going to bless me now because I'm just awesome. And he says, listen, king, you should dress him in the royal robes, bring the king's horse, and have the crown or the seal set on the king's horse, and have whoever you wish to honor led through the streets, proclaiming this is the man that the king delights in. This is the man that the king delights in.

The Awkward Reversal

And in verse 10 here, chapter 6, Then the king said to Haman—we're cut up in the slides, good. The king said to Haman, hurry, take the robes and the horse, and you have said, and do so to Mordecai the Jew who sits at the king's gate, leaving out nothing that you have mentioned. And the author here just assumes that between that period and verse 11, that little 11 there, the author's like, LOL, LOL, LOL, LOL, right? So Haman took the robes and the horse, and he dressed Mordecai. I know that had to have been awkward. Come here, put this on, take off your clothes, put this on. So he dressed Mordecai and led him through the square of the city, proclaiming before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor. I'm just going to take that section of the book of Esther and stick a pin in it because it's kind of important.

What does Haman do next? In verse 12, Haman—wait, no—Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman hurried to his house mourning. This is when he covered his head and he was so ashamed of everything. My life is horrible. This is horrible. Runs home. And Haman told his wife Zeresh and his friends everything that had happened to him.

So everything is in here for a reason, right? I believe so. Irony, reversals, hidden things becoming revealed. Is Haman an arrogant person? You could say yes, I mean. Is Haman a corrupt human being? Does Haman have flaws? Does Haman have pride issues? Does Haman have forgiveness issues? Does Haman have a good marriage? Haman certainly has a better marriage than Esther and the king. Esther hasn't seen her husband for a month. Haman goes back to his house. First person he tells, his wife. He wants his wife's opinion about his day. He wants her insight. He wants to dialogue with her. He wants to say, honey, this is what happened to my day. He wants to share this with her, and he wants to hear her response back to him. He wants to create the space, and he wants to use the space between his spouse and him that is otherwise known as the space of marriage in an edifying manner. Communicate.

The Marriage Lesson

Whereas the king and Esther—Haman has an okay marriage, it seems. It's okay. It's okay. At least they're talking. At least they're communicating. At least they're telling each other how they feel. Expressing your feelings is expressing the truth of who you are to your spouse, by the way. It's a big deal.

And can you see Haman saying to himself, I'm not such a bad guy. I mean, look, I'm a great family man. I've got 10 kids. Wife I get to talk to all the time. Great husband. Being a good

family man. Being a nice guy, even. Being good in one area of your life never excuses injustice and corruption in another. Don't kid yourself like Haman. Don't kid yourself. Don't try to cover up corruption in one area you're struggling in just to uplift another one so it can be a band-aid on it.

And so, I know we're going fast. Everybody keeping up? Second day comes. That night ends. I wake up the next day, and there's a second feast. At least I can go back to the feast, right? In chapter 7, the king and Haman went to the feast with Queen Esther, 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 to you. And what is your request? Even up to half of my kingdom, it shall be yours.

How many of you ladies would at this point say, That sounds great. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. So here we go again. We have the second feast Esther holds. And what is everyone doing? Don't ignore it. They're drinking. Persians loved to drink. And if Esther has this nagging request for her husband, and he can kind of see what's up. He's like, what do you want, babe? What do you want? Anything? I love you. Up to half, maybe 49%. I'm going to majority, but up to 49%, I'll give it to you.

The Persian Way of Making Decisions

This makes sense. See, in Persia we have writings where it speaks about how they would make political decisions, like when to go to war and who to establish as governors, and these big political decisions. Whenever you had to make a big decision, even on a local level, do you know how they would try to make a good decision? They would get drunk because they felt like because your inhibitions were lower, then you could think clearly on what the best decision was to make. Yeah, that sounds like a great. You get smarter when you get drunk is what they thought in Persia.

So if we take Herodotus' account of the king holding this massive feast, King Xerxes, before he goes to Greece, where that was a blunder. And we take the first chapter of Esther, maybe that's why everybody was getting schnockered for six months and seven days, because they were making these political decisions. Yeah, we're going there. And I hear about these Spartans. We can take out those Spartans. No big deal. We'll take them all out. It'll be great. It makes sense. They're sitting around. Decisions are being made. Haman and the king. What do you think we should do now? Taxes? Let's raise them. I mean, just go drinking. It's a drinking party. Esther is not a G-rated book. And yeah, so it makes sense. So they're getting toasted to make big political

decisions. And we have Haman and Esther and the king all sitting around engaging in this atmosphere.

And the king asks Esther once again, what can I give you? I know there's something. I'm ready to make a decision. What can I give you? Up to half of everything. And this is what Queen Esther says. And 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.

The Power of Respect

Look how patient she is in orchestrating this entire. She could have said this back at the courts. It wasn't the right time. It wasn't the right environment. She was very wise. She's maturing here. And is Esther respectful to her unrespectable husband right now? Is she being respectful? Is she being respectful? See, the Bible talks a lot about respecting your spouse. And many times in the Bible, it specifically talks about the wife respecting her husband.

Despite what modern commentaries would tell you on the topic, this is not so the wife can have a weakness or simply be pushed around or be seen as like this weak vessel that she's pushed around and you better submit. No, I would assert that this is so the wife can be made to have power, power over circumstances and situations involving her husband even. And look at the power that comes with her respect. Watch how wise she is when she has become in her boldness and wisdom. Look at this. The king's first wife acted disrespectfully to her husband, at least from his point of view. And Esther doesn't want to be the center of this issue. She wants to make the king focus on the actual issue. Not her bringing the issue, not this being about herself—this isn't a me, me, me thing. No, this is the issue. This is the issue right here.

And the lesson that we learn from this in this 25-year-old document is respect always diminishes offense. In other words, if there's a conflict, if there's ever a conflict between you and a co-worker, you and a boss, you and a spouse, you and whoever—a member of the fellowship—if you're truly wanting the change that the situation calls for, respect will facilitate that change. And respect will diminish offense from growing beyond the point it already is. And it takes humility to deploy this tool in a conflict resolution. It takes wisdom to deploy this tool. But if you can humble yourself and show respect in a situation where gross conflict is occurring, you're almost immune to someone lashing out to you in offense. You guys see that? Anyone ever been through a situation like that where maybe they didn't deploy this tool?

And so I want you to hear her tone here. And if I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleased the king, men—if your wife came to you every single time she needed anything, she

needed you to fix the toilet, she needed you to move the car, she needed you to find the remote, and she said that, how would you respond? Oh, my king, if I found favor in your sight, anything up to half my kingdom, whatever it is, can you make dinner tonight? Can you go get the kids? Can you go deal with this situation in the bathroom that your son or daughter left or whatever? Anything for you. You see the power that's behind this.

Offense is diminished. It's like a vaccine, right? Power. So this is her tone to the king. Oh king, if it please the king, let me and my people not be murdered via this brutal death. It's exactly what she says. Please. And then she gets to the kicker. She says this: if we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have just been silent. For our affliction is not to be compared with the loss of the king. That's rich. Look at this. This is awesome. King, if me and my people were to be sold in slavery and just purchased away, I wouldn't have even bothered you. Do you think his ears perked up a little bit? What?

Esther's Transformation

Esther's like a whole new woman here from the beginning of the book. King, I have an important request. So was this moment important in Esther's life? This is kind of like the moment in Esther's life, right? And some of us sometimes ask ourselves, man, I don't think I'm ever going to have a moment quite like this where I'm standing in front of a king and trying to find the right words and praying for the right wisdom to orchestrate or to speak the right words to convince the king to not genocide all my people and so on and so forth. Probably not. You probably will never be in that situation, per se. Right? But God's providential plan is still being laid out in every single person's life in this room and online right now. Right now. And he gives every one of us opportunities to engage in his plan through acts of love, acts of mercy, forgiveness, service. Every single thing that we do in his name. And if we're too self-absorbed with our own interests, you will miss the needs of others for the wants of yourself.

Remember, Esther didn't want to help at the beginning. I'll say it. Hey, listen, Mordecai, I can't do that. I'm going to die. Sorry. It's essentially... She had excuses. She might die. It took Mordecai reminding her what was truly at stake. Do you know what's truly at stake as believers? Heaven being manifest here and now on earth. God's reign being furthered here and now. The new creation overtaking the corrupt creation right now. Here and now. That's what's at stake. That's our vocation as the image bearers who are also the ambassadors of the king. It's our job. Don't think that, oh, God's never going to use you. He may be trying to use you right now. What are you focused on?

Esther Points to Haman

Esther speaks up in verse 6. She says, a foe and an enemy, that wicked Haman. She points to him. This is it. Right now it comes to this. King, it's that guy. It's Haman. And then Haman was terrified before the king and queen. Now at this moment, Haman's put in a very scary place. And the king's decision is unsure. We don't know what the king's going to do at this point. The king likes Haman. This is like his best bud. Like they're getting along. They love the same jokes. Yada, yada, yada. Esther has shown who she is. She is Hadassah right now. And she's asking for the list of all the names of her people, Mordecai, everyone who is going to be killed and slaughtered. And she says, I'm putting my name on the bottom of this list right now. King, will you do something?

And the king arose in his wrath and from the wine drinking... He's trying to do something to him. He's ticked. It's just the emphasis. It was everywhere. And the king said, will he even assault the queen in my presence in my own house? As that word left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face. Then Horbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance of the king, said, moreover, the gallows that Haman had prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, is standing in Haman's house, 50 cubits high. And the king said, go hang him on it.

Irony and Reversal

So remember how I said irony was woven intentionally throughout this entire book? Even in situations—why would the author do that? So look at this. The king, after he hears this about Haman, he stands up and instead of throwing a bottle of wine at Haman, picking up a chair, doing some WWF—boom—he goes for a stroll in the garden. Has anyone else read that and been like, where are you going? You just left your wife there with the dude.

Haman was not the only one whose idea or who was a part of orchestrating the murder of all of the Jews. It was the king's decree. The king had it. It was his. It was him. He got through deception. He was deceived into killing all of the Jews. The king was a part of it. And the king goes for a walk. Because imagine what are you going to do about this? I done messed up. Because the king's considered a god, little G. The king doesn't make mistakes. The decrees that he makes last forever. How's he going to fix this? His wife's right here. He's a little slow in the brain right now due to grapes. And he's wondering. And he comes back, and there's Haman begging for mercy—essentially on Esther's feet, just on the couch, just in her personal space. Please, please, please.

And then the king accuses him: You're sexually assaulting my wife! How dare you? In my own house?! And as soon as the words left his mouth, it was as if what was supposed to happen to Esther when she entered—had the king not done anything—the guards took him, shrouded his head, and dragged him off.

I would assert that in this story right here, Haman did not die because he wanted to kill the Jews. He died because he assaulted the king's wife. Was he really assaulting the king's wife? No. Were the Jews really this evil people that wanted to overtake the kingdom? No. Haman, through deception of the king, tried to kill the Jews. The king, through slight deception here, kills Haman. It's a reversal. It's irony. And he doesn't have to address the fact that he just ordered genocide. He can kind of move on with that. I don't know. It's an assertion. You guys can read the book, and if you have a different opinion, that's fine. But the story continues. It's not over yet.

Restoration Through Reversal

Mordecai is given the ring that the king gave Haman. Mordecai is now in the same position as Haman. Irony and reversals all through the story. And there are some fantastic resources that argue that this isn't actually a good thing, but I'll let you be the judge. And Esther, once again, goes before the king, and she says, my king... we still have this issue of all the Jews dying because you kind of decreed this thing. Is there a resolution to this? And the king can't go back on his decree. He's a god. He can't. That would mean that he made the wrong choice. He never makes the wrong choice. No. There's no take-backs. And so the king allows a decree to be written that would allow the Jews on the day that they were supposed to die to defend themselves. And the decree that Mordecai writes is almost identical to Haman's original decree, but a reversal. It even says kill men, women, and children, just like Haman's did. It's a complete reversal. It's fascinating when you reread this stuff.

Salvation Requires Celebration

In verse 20 here—Mordecai recorded these things. That's all it says. It never talks about we should celebrate this day because Esther saved us. We should celebrate this day because I, Mordecai, didn't bow to that Agagite. Huh. It doesn't say that. We should celebrate these two days, Purim, because the Jews got relief from their enemies. There was salvation that happened. And of the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday, that they should make them days of feasting and gladness and joy and days of sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor. Salvation requires celebration as a

response. That is the required response. When salvation is seen and felt and experienced. And Purim exists as a testimony of that fact. That's the expected response.

And in this story, we see so many different elements... We see imperfect people of God, sinners, corruptness, apathy towards God. We see poor leadership. We see those who stand for dignity to be rejected and cast out. We see the covenant people of God enter into a realm of complete assimilation. We see wickedness. We see bold, righteous, godly maturity. We see an identity crisis resolved. We see God's providential plan unfold before our eyes. This is a story about salvation. That's why this book is written to give to us. And what's the response at the end? Chapter 9 is just a recap of the whole book, the whole story. Footnotes right there. What's the point? We celebrate because of salvation.

We Are Part of This History

Matt, why is it important for us to celebrate Purim, to recognize Purim? We believe in Yeshua, and it's 2018. And besides, this is truly a Jewish holiday. It's not even something God commanded in [Leviticus 23](#). Why do we got to celebrate for him? It's a true story. All these things are true. The reason is because as we look through the long history of the people of God and realize the fact that we're a part of that great line, from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob to Israel to the Judeans to the disciples of Yeshua, whether we read about Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, or Persia, wherever we see God bringing salvation, we are part of that history. [Galatians 3.29](#), we are part of this history. Their salvation is our salvation. Their God is our God. Their celebration is our celebration. Why? Because this is the king we serve. And we celebrate the salvation that our God brings. And this is our history, if we are the people of God. If we are in Christ, we are Abraham's seed. This is our history, too.

More Than Individual Salvation

This is our family, too. And some people go crazy for Greek mindset stuff, right? You've heard that a lot. Oh, a Greek mindset and a Hebrew mindset, and maybe that's a topic for a different time. We can dissect that whole assertion another time, but I would like to assert, if we're going to talk about those types of labels, I would like to assert that we are people in 2018 Western individualistic society mindset. It doesn't have quite the same ring, does it? It's not quite as enticing to label ourselves with.

The Bible was not written to people who simply wanted salvation for themselves. It was written about a God that cared about everybody, not simply you. It wasn't about you. The Bible was not

simply about you as an individual. In other words, when you read the Bible and you accept Yeshua and you say, "Yay, thank you God that I'm saved and I have you and you're my God. This is my salvation and you're mine." And you go off and you live your life without engaging the world that God told you to go out and engage to further his kingdom, you're failing the vocation and the context of the scriptures.

Written to a Community

The Bible was not written to an individualistic culture. It was written to a community. It was written to a people. It was written to a family. It was written to a tribe. And it was meant to be read in that context. You are not an individual that fills out the scope of God's kingdom. You are one within God's kingdom. And hopefully, the people to your left and right are co-workers in that kingdom. We are a body. Thank you, Yeshua. Thank you, Yeshua, that we are part of God's people.

Understanding Chiastic Structure

And so, you guys ever heard of chiasms in literature? Or chiastic structures? So it's a way that you can look at a book and in a lot of biblical narrative you can see different parallels. Where the beginning of the book might meet with the end of the book, and somewhere else in the book might meet with another. They may reflect each other, perhaps in reversal. And the idea is, if you follow this chiasmic pattern to the very center, it will show you the pivotal point of the book—the entire point of the story, what the author has set up to show you and give to you. And Esther has chiasms. Go ahead and look at it.

The Chiastic Structure of Esther

Here we go. And so I want you guys to look at the very top. I know you can't see that, but the very first chiasm I want to show you guys. Oh no. Did it cut out? I guess it did. Darn. I had everything bolded and everything. Maybe hit the right arrow one time. I don't know. At the very top, if you can see, A, we have them outlined here. And this is, I did not organize this. I got this off of Tim Mackey's website. Professor Tim Mackey. He has a doctorate in ancient languages, and he is amazing as a professor and a teacher. The Bible Project is his pet project that he does a lot of illustrations through. So this is off his website. The Splendor, thank you. The first one. Let's do it once. No? Okay then. We killed it. Hey, there we go. All right, let's just not touch it. This is important. This is really cool.

So the book starts off with the splendor of the Persian king and two banquets, right? How does the book end? Two banquets and the splendor of Mordecai. You see how this works? It's like, okay, well, that's kind of cool. It's a reversal. Esther becomes queen. Mordecai saves the king. Second element in the end of the book, going backwards. Queen Esther and Mordecai save the whole Jewish people. Okay, there's a salvation there. Third down, Haman elevated to power. Third up, Mordecai elevated to power. It's a reversal. It's a continual reversal. Haman's decree to destroy the Jewish people. Mordecai's counter decree to save the Jewish people. You see, they're all moving towards the center point. Esther and Mordecai's plan to reverse the decree. Starting to do it. Getting there. Esther's first banquet, and Esther chapters 5 through 8 and 9 through 14. Plus Haman plans Mordecai's execution. Esther's second banquet. And Haman is executed instead of Mordecai.

And all of these points are reversals. And they're building up to one central pivot in the story where the reversal truly hinges and unfolds. And that is when Haman is humiliated and Mordecai is exalted. The story truly is about reversals. Reversals in relationships, reversals in life, reversals in characters.

The God of Reversals and Salvation

This is a story about a God that, despite imperfect people, he will not turn his back on his plan and he will continue to be an Abba and a Father to them, which is encouraging and amazing. This is the king that we serve. Our God is the God of reversals and salvation. And I hope this gives you at least a little bit of interest so you can go home and read through Esther.

A Great Book, Short Read

I want you guys to go. We ran through it today, skipped over a lot. Go home and read it. It's awesome. It's amazing. It's a great book. Short read. And there's a lot to discuss with your family about everything from the moral ambiguity of the characters—were Esther and Mordecai good people, bad people, neutral people—all the way to what reversals they can find, where God can be seen, and the providential plan unfolding here. Most of all, I hope you're getting excited because this story is 2,500 years old. Just let that sink in. Very old, very old story.

The Joy of Purim

And on Thursday night, we're going to join a long line of God's people in celebrating God's salvation by coming together in the joy of Purim. And I'm excited, excited to join you guys in

that. Amen.

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