

Esther - Commentaries by Malachi Taylor

Gospel in the Book of Esther, Esther 4: 5. The Sentence of Death (4:1-17)

"When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry: and came even before the king's gate, for none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. And in every province withers ever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

Then call Esther for Hatach, one of the king's chamberlains, whom he had appointed to attend upon her, and gave him a commandment to Mordecai, to know what it was and why it was.... And Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, and of the sum of the money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews, to destroy them. And also he gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them, to show it unto Esther, and to declare it unto her, and to charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people.

Again Esther spoke unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai; All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden scepter, that he may live; but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days. And they told Mordecai Esther's words. Then commanded Mordecai to answer Esther, think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed; and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer, Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I, also, and my maidens will fast likewise; and so I will go in unto the king, which is not according to law; and if I perish, I perish. So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him." (Esther 4:1-3, 5, 7, 8, 10-17)

WE have seen that through the malignity of Haman, all the Jews were by decree, to be destroyed upon a certain fixed day. It made no matter as to the fact, how this was brought about; thus it was. The decree was unalterable. Of course they were perfectly helpless in themselves. But yesterday, and they still might have felt the proud distinction of being Jews; and though acknowledging certain disabilities in being out of their land, and therefore not lords of the soil, nor of themselves; still they might hope to recover themselves from this. But to-day, all was over with them. It was not certain adverse circumstances which might be endured for the time, with the hope of recovering from them. It was hopelessness now, certain death, by an unchangeable law. Sentence might not be executed speedily, but it was none the less inevitable.

Such is the condition of the sinner now. His doom is certain. It is appointed once to die, and after this the judgment. Men may acknowledge that they are not as good as they ought to be, that they do many things that they ought not to do, and have left undone things which they ought to have done, with the hope that they can recover in some way from these things. They may look for change of circumstances to give them a better chance, and think only of their actions, which may in time be amended. They may even think of forgiveness of sins with God. But this does not meet the doom that is before them. "Sin, when it is finished, brings forth death!" "The wages of sin is death!" "DEATH passed upon all men, for all have sinned." God told this out when sin first entered into the world, and the lapsing years have never witnessed its repeal. It is an attainder to which there is no reversal. The cross instead of bringing a reprieve, but confirms, illustrates and emphasizes it—DEATH BY SIN!

What gives its awful meaning to the cross, making it stand out solitary and signal, is that it tells of the judgment of God against the sinner. Christ was there made to be sin; was treated as the sinner. It gathered and concentrated all the solemn story of blood in the Jewish ritual; it explained the terrific sharpness of judgment against evil doers; the flood; the overthrow of Sodom; the drowning of Pharaoh and his hosts; the sweeping out of the Canaanites; the stoning of the Sabbath-breaker and the blasphemer. (Num. 16, Lev. 24). It stands the one assurance that God cannot look upon sin; cannot allow it on His earth or in His presence. It held His own Son, taking the sinner's standing, and there was no escape. It is left with this lesson for a time, while God proceeds no further with men, that they may accept it as His settled verdict. It is the ratification of all His declarations in regard to sin and its demerits. If God spared not the old world, spared not Sodom and Gomorrah, spared not Pharaoh and the Egyptians, nor the inhabitants of the land of Canaan; if He spared not His chosen Israel in their rebellion again and again, coming with swift judgment, after He long endured; if He spared not His Son, what can be more thoroughly established than this, as the essential order of His moral government—SIN AND DEATH?

In the case of Mordecai and the Jews in this chapter, it is accepted. Verse 1 tells us this "When Mordecai perceived all that was done." He took in the dreadful fact of what was done. Then he "rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and bitter cry."

Alas, how many hear the decree of God as to the punishment of sin, and make light of it. This decree was a reality to Mordecai and the Jews in the various provinces, when they heard of it. But even now, when "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18), the many are disposed to treat it as an idle tale. They begin to reason about God. He is too good or too merciful, or His proclamation does not mean the fearful thing the words imply. "Everlasting punishment" is neither punishment, nor everlasting. "The wicked shall be cast into hell" can all be explained away. "Things are not so bad as that; we are not lost; God will take account of sincerity, and of native goodness."

These, and a multitude of other things, are the response of men's hearts and minds to the word of God, as to the fearful scene just before them. It is the heart opposed to God, "being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts, who, being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness to work all uncleanness with greediness." Such is God's decision of those who turn away from His estimate of their condition and danger.

But Mordecai's rent clothes and the ashes tell of ruin and death. He knows it, and his wail is bitter. He goes "even before the king's gate, clothed with sackcloth." He will not conceal his nation and consequent doom; It is a time to tell out all, and take the sad consequences. There was a vast difference between the light and joy of the king's presence, and being outside the gate. His place was outside; doomed and banished by reason of his nativity. He was born a Jew.

The king would have no sign of mourning or of woe before him. In the presence of God is "fullness of joy." Nothing unclean, no death, no mourning, no sin can be before Him. The doomed goat upon which the Lord's lot fell, as the sin bearer must be burned outside the camp. It is awful to be a sinner! God means everywhere to teach that. The leper might plead that his disease was but a trifle; that it was but a pimple or rising scab, and that the recuperative powers of nature would soon overcome that; and, at any rate, he was otherwise well, and he could cover from sight the sore. But God pronounced him unclean; and outside the camp he must go, bearing his uncleanness, and there, at the approach of every one, he must announce his condition. For sin is terribly separating. It separates from God and from His people, and it separates men from one another. Each one has it in him for himself, and each one has the doom of it for himself.

Beloved reader! if you are unsaved, sin is your only possession. You may ignore it in your conversation and intimacies; you may speak of the dignity of your manhood; you may strut with pride, your brief hour; but you have no foundation for your boast, for your real foundation is sin. Before God it is manifest, not by occasional missteps, but as the one condition in which you do all your acting. It is kindness in God to tell you, and you are faithfully apprised of it and warned of its results, as the proclamation went out through all the provinces, in our story.

But, you may say, they were helpless to relieve themselves, and the proclamation only made known to them certain death. So it is with you! It has been exceedingly mischievous that any teaching anywhere, or any thought of your own heart has allowed the suggestion that you could do anything to set aside the judgment of God. It is final. Consider well then, that Mordecai and the Jews gave the only true answer to the proclamation of death, by the place of sorrow they took. They bowed to it. Do you bow to it? God has His own way of meeting His decree, His demand for death. You have none.

It has already been suggested that Mordecai, the man, exemplifies the acting of faith. It does here. We shall see further along, Esther's place. Faith simply accepted the ruin as a fact; it did nothing. It is not something that you are to render to God as an equivalent for your sins or for relief. It removes you from doing. It is ceasing from your own works. This lying in sackcloth and ashes was not trying to get a repeal of the decree; it was very fitting, though, as expressing the hopelessness of the case. Oh, to have you take the same place before God!

And now Esther sends to inquire the cause of this shameful conduct on the part of Mordecai. Sin ever brings into the place of shame. It will be a dreadful thing to have brought out the "what" and the "why" in your case at the judgment seat. Being exposed now, turns your beauty into ashes, and your pride into a terror. It is a solemn matter to be brought face to face with doom right in the fullness of enjoyment.

Poor Esther must learn it too, queen though she is, but lately a bride—the chosen of the king. The impending calamity includes her as well as the most obscure and remote of all the Jews. And now Mordecai would have her remember that these were her people, and that she shall go in and disclose the fact to the king. This is now to be brought to light; that the question may be left with the king, whether his love shall overbear his righteousness, whether mercy shall rejoice against judgment. She is really his; but the throne is his also. He has chosen her and exalted her according to his own heart; but he has signed and sealed and sent forth an unalterable decree.

This chapter leaves all in sorrow and uncertainty, the case being even more hopeless, for the king may not be approached except at his own pleasure! But there is no attempt to deny the full degree of misery, as many who are dead in trespasses and sins and far off from God by wicked works, as well as enemies in their nature, would seem to treat their condition. There was no indifference, no carelessness to the awful nature of all that was before them; no saying, "we are all alike, we have plenty of company;" no levity. The terrible catastrophe deepens, as we see that the king had not bidden Esther to his presence by holding out the scepter for thirty days. Is that scepter, the emblem of his righteousness and authority, for or against her? Just at the time that she has learned of her sentence, she comes to the consciousness that she has no way to reach the king!

Can anything be more appalling? Yes, your condition, dear friend, if today a sinner. Your state is unfolded in Eph. 2 as being "without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world!" What language can more graphically describe you? Is this a thing to pass over lightly? The Judge is at the door. He is ready to judge. Now is the judgment of this world. The Holy Spirit is here to demonstrate this, that you are a sinner and are under judgment. There is no hope of making yourself better, of making up for lost time, of getting God to reverse His decree. Sin must be met by death!

My friend, I compassionate you; but what can I do? I dare not ask God to make an exception in your case, and keep back the penalty of death. The thief wanted to be taken down from the cross without suffering the just penalty of his crimes; but could the Holy One who hung beside him be a party to that? Do not think you are to escape in that way, that you are to be reprieved at the last moment. Neither at the first nor the last moment, will God act unrighteously nor consent to any escaping from justice. Could you endure heaven if you were let off with all your sin? Could you endure God, thus?

The case is intensely serious; ponder it well. "The wages of sin is death."

God must find the way out of all this. He gives Christ as the solution.

Gospel in the Book of Esther, Esther 3: 4. The Enemy (3:1-13)

"After these things, did King Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him. And all the king's servants that were in the king's gate, bowed and revered Haman; for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not nor did him reverence. And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath, and he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had showed him the people of Mordecai; wherefore Haman thought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus; even the people of Mordecai.

And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, there is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom, and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws; therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those who have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries. And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman... the Jew's enemy. And the king said unto Haman, the silver is given thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee.

Then were the king's scribes called on the thirteenth day of the first month; and there was written according to all that Haman had commanded unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors that were over every province, and to the rulers of every people of every province, according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language; in the name of king Ahasuerus was it written, and sealed with the king's ring. And the letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day; even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey." (Esther 3:1, 2, 5, 6, 8-13).

THERE are two principles connected with the salvation of the sinner; one is the grace that takes him up, and the other is the righteousness that establishes him. As without strength, as lost and dead, utterly ruined in his birth, apart from God, ungodly and hopeless in his condition, the love of God is manifested in giving him life. As guilty, a sinner against 'God, an enemy by wicked words, where even 'pity could do nothing; when he must be condemned, no matter how the heart cries out for him, God finds a way to deal with man in righteousness, and display him as saved, as the rich expression of that righteousness.

Both are magnified in the death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God as witnessed in Rom. 5:6, 8, "When we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly;" and "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." These two have called out all His power, fulfilled His counsels and predetermination concerning them that believe in Christ Jesus, and, as they are understood, give perfect assurance to the soul.

Not only has the grace of God come out to us as lost ones, which is exceedingly blessed to, know, but God is righteous in doing this. Not only has He met His heart, but His holiness and righteousness, in saving. This establishes the believer. Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life; and this, through death.

Thus far in this precious story of grace, in this little book of God, we have had no mention of death, save as it came in incidentally in connection with Esther being an orphan. But now we are to learn something of this wonderful fact of death, as that which gives settled and permanent condition of blessing.

It was a surprising thing to take up the poor unknown girl and make her queen of the kingdoms of the world. It was grace, and the king delighted in it, as he let his heart out upon her as the object of all his love. But was her place secure? She had not told of her origin, her race, to the king. And when it does come out in his presence, it is as under sentence of death! In our case as sinners, God knew us as such from the start; but the place where He brings it out as a truth, is where His righteousness is to be unfolded. Where His grace alone is the subject, choosing and saving us as lost, our guilt and being under a righteous sentence of death is not dwelt upon. It is blessed to see death, in the salvation wrought by God in Jesus Christ.

Chapter 3 begins by stating the advancement of Haman the Agagite, an Amalekite of the family of Agag. What specially marked the Amalekites in Scripture history is, that they were, everywhere and always, the deadly enemies of God's people Israel, and so the enemies of God in malignant activity and purposed evil. Thus they stand as a representation of our great adversary, who at all times hates God and man, and who is spoken of as having the power of death—the devil.

What a sad and gloomy picture we have of the Jews at this time; poor, prisoners, helpless, out of their place of power, everything naturally against them! Surely they were without strength. And then this Amalekite advanced to be next to the king indignity and authority! But this is shown to be more disastrous, in the history which God here enters upon in detail.

In what follows, we find that Mordecai is largely associated with Esther in all the actions that were of such momentous interest to these poor helpless Jews. Where God introduces a man and a woman, thus, the man stands for the activity of faith, and the woman for the state into which one is brought by faith. Accordingly, we have a great deal of Mordecai's actions at the first. We see his care for the honor and, possibly, the life of the king, in giving information concerning the plotting of two of the king's chamberlains, through Esther to the king, by which he was preserved from damage. And this became the means which God used to advance Mordecai to honor afterwards, through the sleeplessness of the king.

A second thing in Mordecai's actions is told us, that he would pay no obeisance to the adversary, nor bow down to him. God had written of the Amalekites that there should be enmity forever between Israel and them, and their end should be total destruction. (Ex. 17, Num. 24:20). It is of great importance that we see the real enemy whom God points out Satan. And when once the soul is looking to the question of the righteousness of God, he will see that the enemy is brought forward to be discovered, and that God has a controversy with him, and a purpose to deliver from him who had the power of death. Man has become his captive and obeyed him; but when Christ came He refused to bow, to own him, though the kingdoms of the world were offered to Him. The quickened soul, under the sense of divine righteousness and holiness, will thus take sides with God.

There is a great tendency to lightness in the matter of sin and judgment; and many never have settled peace because they have not taken the matter of sin and ruin according to the true enormity and depth of them. What is called being 'anxious,' is often very shallow. It is often only the desire to be free from the judgment of sin, rather than taking that judgment; rather the desire to be happy than caring for the honor of God.

Beloved reader! sin is the most appalling and awful fact in the history of this world, and Satan introduced it. He who sins is of the devil. It is one thing to be very happy as one hears of the great love of God, but we must remember that grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life. Where the seed was sown on rocky soil, it sprung up at once because there was no depth of earth. It is the word of grace received with joy, but not dealing with the conscience.

It is a mark of the decline of truth in this day, that conscience is not brought in; that the depth of Satan and the character of sin against God, is not seen; but rather it is treated as a hindrance to the man. Hence flimsy experiences, little sense of depravity, an easy profession, an attention to religious duties, a form of godliness covering the old unjudged man, who is still a lover of self, a lover of pleasures more than of God. He has never seen God's way of looking at sin. It is of interest to notice that these two things, looking to the honor of the king, and the open treatment of Haman as an enemy, fully disclosed to faith, are not told in the first part of the book which pertained to the open proclamation of the feast and the bringing Esther into the king's presence; but to the second part, in which the question of her righteous staying there is considered. Peace is not established by thinking of the love of God, but by the righteousness of God. And while one would not lead any into a thought of experiences, or an examination of their feelings, yet a proper knowledge of God and His holiness, and the exceeding sinfulness of sin, is greatly needed on the part of those who may have been very happy at the sweet word of grace. It is a day of counterfeits, of shallowness, of trying to put God off, of easy-going religiousness, of sentimentalism, that look to perfection in the flesh; because there has really never been a sense of what we are, of what sin is, of what Satan is, and of God's own righteousness. These elements enter largely into the matter of peace. May God make you to see these according to Himself!

We next see this Amalekite, Haman, true to his nature, full of hatred and pride and vengeance, plotting for the destruction of Mordecai, and also of all his race. He goes to the king with a complaint, and gets the power of death into his hands for the time. Satan is ever the opponent of men. In Zech. 3, we see him represented as standing near where Joshua the high priest was standing before God; standing there to accuse him. And surely he could have plenty to say, as Joshua represented poor lost Israel, in filthy garments and uncrowned. So in Job 1, 2, he is ready to speak against Job, and afterwards he is named "the accuser of the brethren." His hatred is perfect, and he brought in death. He sinned from the beginning, and man sinned through him.

And then death. "Sin came into the world, and death by sin." This is sin in the nature. The proclamation, was sent, to every province. "And letters were sent out by post into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill and cause to perish all Jews, both young and old, little children and women in one day." "So death passed upon all men, for all have sinned," is the irreversible decree of God, as this was by the king's proclamation, and according to the laws of the Medes and Persians, which did not change, and sealed with the king's signet.

There was no exception. To be a Jew, was to be under sentence of death. Just so, to be a man, is to be condemned to death before God. It is appointed unto men once to die.

It might have been that many could have urged that they had done nothing at that time deserving death. One man had brought it on them by becoming the object of Haman's dislike. By one man's offence, they were all delivered to condemnation. Even so, God would magnify His grace, and set our hearts and consciences at rest forever, by going back to the foundation principle in regard to man, and bringing in deliverance from that which stands against us as men. By one man's disobedience, many were made sinners and subject to death. It is our condition, helpless, hopeless in itself. "None can, by any means, redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him; for the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth forever."

Oh, dear friend! I appeal to you to take this ground of the truth before God. It is a righteous thing with Him to requite evil thus. "The wages of sin is death;" not weeping and praying and begging to be let off. If your intercourse with God has been without this depth, without seeing that you are righteously condemned to death, you can never have settled peace.

You may have thought that as you are a sinner, you ought to be sorry for what you have done, and to reform and live a correct life for the future. But I ask you, is that death? Is that the wages of sin? Is that ceasing forever before God? Do not allow yourself to be deceived concerning this awful matter. If a man commits a murder, what is the penalty? Is it not death? And will begging to be let off meet the just demand of the law? Nothing but death will do. It would have been very foolish for Mordecai, or the Jews, to have endeavored to get this law changed, or to get from under it. Even so, to be a sinner, is to be under condemnation.

There was only One that could bring in deliverance; God! He is the One for those who are without strength, and sinners. And He has commended His love to us in a very peculiar and righteous way. He has taken up this terrible judgment, this formidable weapon of death and used that. The way out of all this dire condition is through death. But that is conclusive, final, so that He can come and speak to us of never coming into judgment, of eternal life as a gift; not the natural life, not the natural things, but something bestowed, and forever! Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift!

Gospel in the Book of Esther, Esther's Feast., 3.: Esther 2 (2:1-9,15-18)

"After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti and what she had done, and what was decreed against her. Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, let there be fair young virgins sought for the king; and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan, the palace, to the house of the women, unto the custody of Hegai, the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women, and let their things for purification be given them. And let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king, and he did so: "Now in

Shushan, the palace, there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite, who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah, king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had carried away. And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother.

And the maid was fair and beautiful, whom Mordecai, when her hither and mother were dead, took for his own daughter.

So it came to pass, when the king's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan, the palace, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was brought also unto the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women. And the maiden pleased him, and he speedily gave her things for her purification, with such things as belonged to her.... and he preferred her and her maids unto the best places of the house of the women.

Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail, the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her, was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai, the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all of them that looked upon her. So Esther was taken unto King Ahasuerus, into his house royal in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight, more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti. Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast." (Esther 2:1-9, 15-18).

In the last chapter we saw something of the glory of the feast which God spreads out, and the refusal of that feast, and the cause of this refusal—the satisfaction of the sinner with himself and his condition. Vashti had a feast of her own; those invited in Luke 14 were occupied, the one with his farm, another with his merchandise, the other with his wife. Those to whom the gospel goes today, and who will not be saved, are such as refuse the ground or condition.

The precious word is, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost. They do not consent to the condition of the lost. The word says, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." The word says, "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear Him shall live." It defines the dead as those that are without God, and are far off, and enemies. But they will not take any such thought of themselves. In this chapter we see a feast also, and one at it. Indeed, it is her own.

She has her feast as had Vashti; but it is made by the king, and he is there with her. But it is so beautiful in its way, that it is called "Esther's feast."

And how did she get there? For this was a wonderful position, to take a place beside the king, as the object upon which he would lavish all the wealth of his kingdom and all the affections of his heart. She had not applied for it. There never could have risen, in her maiden imagination, the thought or the dream of such a thing. Had she been near enough to the king to have thought of entering his palace, it would be only as the lowest servant of one of his servants, never to have eaten with him, and to share his thoughts and royalty.

But there went out an invitation through all the provinces, open, public, general. It followed one that had decreed swift judgment upon her who despised the dignity and grace and glory of the king. So we learn that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and all unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness; and then a new proclamation comes through the gospel of His grace, that God's righteousness is revealed on the principle of faith to those who believe. And in order to make them believe, God shows them their utter ruin, their guilt and inability to do anything. This is found in the epistle to the Romans.

Vashti's feast was unrighteousness towards the king, like men holding what God gives them apart from Him. The son who got his living from his father (Luke 15) went out from his presence to use it, and did but abuse it, and came to want. In Rom. 1 man is described as using 'his natural faculties altogether against God. Has he the capability of worshipping? But he did not worship God, but beasts and stupid idols. He worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator. And then all these passions what did he do with them, the very gifts and riches of his being? They all got out of their natural use and demonstrated what he was. And so God, having pronounced judgment upon all that man is and does, now sends out a proclamation of the richest kind to the world, as lost. The offer is His, own presence, the sharing the royalty of His own Son, to be bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh, to take a place at once and forever in the most intimate fellowship of His heart, to know the exquisite delicacy of His home-love, to have HIMSELF! The king was not seeking servants, even a Minister of state, but a bride. This is wonderful, surpassing the wildest dream of man, the highest flight of thought or longing. Can you take it in, as a true statement that God actually wants you, a lost sinner, a guilty man, to have and hold all that the Lord Jesus has acquired? This is salvation with a meaning!

You see this bride was not to seek the king. She was sought for. Besides, she was an object of deliberative counsels, just as the counsels of God have been set forth in the infinite gospel of the present time. It is the grand quest of this day, the most wonderful He has put His hand to, the gospel of the glory. It is telling out His own want; He has need. He loves because He is God. You do not have to beg for it, or do anything to secure its outflow. It is there already. He has commended His love toward sinners in the death of Christ. Now accept it.

But how? Can you, in this picture that He has given you, trace this out? Can you discover the conditions of the feast and the marriage? Vashti is banished from it, while Esther secures all. Read carefully Rom. 9:30-10:10 and you will see this matter. It is your assumed or supposed goodness that hinders, not your badness, except that it is intensely bad not to be saved for nothing as a vile sinner, when God so wants you, and when you are such. The first, the fundamental thing in all badness, is being away from God, doing without God. Do you think the son would have spent his all in riotous living, if he had staid and had it with his father? Now it is certainly set forth "for our admonition" in this beautiful chapter, that Esther did get everything, while Vashti lost all. Shall we look, then, to see what the Holy Spirit sets forth about the characteristics of Esther? No matter what she was, the proclamation included her, and the royal position awaited her. So that she seems to be a principal figure in the whole succeeding history.

First, she was a foreigner, totally estranged in life, habits and ways from the king. True, she kept from the chamberlain the knowledge of her people, who were captives, but we do not read that the king made any provision to exclude her people from the offer. And when she came to the king she was to be his kindred, "one flesh" with him. Just such were we who are saved; just such are you to-day as unsaved; enemies of

God by wicked works, far off, having no hope. The distance between God and you is infinite. The whole habit of your life has been estrangement from Him, the walk according to the course of this world, according to another ruler, the prince of this world, Satan. The king made no difficulty about the far off one, and, now, the invitation takes in all, distinctively.

Second, she was without father or mother; a true child of Abraham in this, according to God's way of dealing in grace with him, for he was to leave his country and his kindred and he cast entirely upon God who appeared to him. Surely this one has these marks as an object of grace that God delights to point out. Death had done its work in her case, and judgment too, in making her a captive. Dependent upon another's kindness, she had learned subjection, which came out so sweetly afterward in her requiring nothing at the hand of Hegai but what he suggested. She was broken by death and utter ruin, a far-off and lone one, having nothing. Now, is this your portrait? Have your kindred anything for you? is there anything in man, of life, or goodness, or native honor, or worth to which you cling? Her being all this is to teach you what position you are to take. As to God, you are there, too.

Then death has come in, in your case. You are worthy of death as a guilty one, and must justify. God in this. The death of Christ was for sin and for sinners, and if you see yourself as guilty before God, you must know that nothing but death will meet that. "Of judgment" is one of the things the Holy Spirit is to set forth now, "because the prince of this world is judged." "Now is the judgment of this world." You are not being left here to see if you can be better, but you are already under judgment.

Third, the relative of Esther, doubtless, most fully entered into all this sad condition more than she did, as his name (Mordecai) implies mourning, bitterness. But he nourished her as his own daughter. Let her own name be what it would, she learned from him. And so the reality of your condition is, doubtless, vastly lower than your conception of it. But the condition itself and not your reckoning of it is where God's proclamation of mercy meets you. It is not your-feelings, your realization, but the dread fact, standing out in all its awful proportions of horror and grief, that you are in this place and condition of bitterness. Do not play with this matter, waiting for feeling. The fact is the awful thing. You are to-day undone, lost! Believe it, and as such, hear God.

Fourth, but Esther found favor with Hegai, who 'was of the king's household, and had his mind and judgment in regard to fitness. And so she was commended to him for preparation for the king. She did not have to bring anything along for anointing or purification. Poor thing! in captivity, in poverty, in plebeian condition, what would the adorning and the cheap ornaments that she might put on, the best she could get, no doubt, do but make her disgusting to the king? It is one thing to be pleasing to the chamberlain; and another to be ready for the king and his court.

"Except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God." Without holiness no man shall see Him. It is one thing for God to go out in grace, seeking vile sinners; it is another to be taking them into His counsels and companionship, to adorn His palace of glory. It was virtually the king in the preparation, as it was the king in proclamation; but he did not see Esther officially as suited to him, till she was suited to him. As a sinner, you are just right for the Holy Spirit to bring the word to show you what you are and what you need and bring what you need. Whatever you are, naturally, you want Christ. You must be made anew in Christ Jesus. All through the ceremonies of Israel, the spices and the incense that had to do with the tabernacle, set forth the worthiness of Christ, His acceptableness to God. It is only in the name of Christ Jesus we can stand before God.

Therefore start not that she could not at once go before the king. As she was, she was fit for his officer, and therefore was in the king's hands. Henceforth, as before, she had nothing to do, but let him do all. So the Holy Spirit brings the only One that can make us fit for God. Washed in the precious blood of Christ, there is no spot upon us; found in Christ, we are as fit as He for God. We are a savor of Christ unto God, then. The cleansing, the adorning must be His. Oh, take it; see, the provision is made! For what else is the Holy Spirit here, but to take of the things of Christ? If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you will have the fitness for God, for heaven, and can give thanks unto the Father who hath made you meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. No matter how brightly the light shines there, you will not be put to shame.

What had Esther but her native condition for Hegai? Ah, yes, her beauty. You may say that she had something in herself, that she was fair to look upon. But beauty is a relative thing, and depends on the eye that looks upon it. What you and I might esteem beautiful, might not be so to another. It is not said that she esteemed herself beautiful, but she was fair to Hegai, and then afterwards to the king. O Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it." He saw a beauty that the world does not see in it. Its native condition was what attracted Him. To be yourself is your beauty; not to put anything on, not religiousness nor any morality or reputation.

Fifth, but I hasten, with but a word, to the last thing.

Esther is taken to the king, and at once made his own, joined forever to him, losing her own individuality through marriage, and yet so characterizing all things, that the feast becomes hers, and she seems to have the heart of the king and his enactments in her own hands.

Beloved soul, God will be known henceforth in redemption—not creation—glory. The second Man, not the first, shall characterize all His ways and display. And is not that for you? Not what you have of goodness or are by nature, but what you get in Christ, gives meaning to all that is to come. The world to come whereof we speak, is set up under man redeemed in Christ and with Him.

Oh, what a step, from captivity to ruling; from poverty to the palace; from the poor 'unknown thing of no rank, below all ranks of the kingdom, despised by the lowest, to the settled dignity of the queen, the delight of the heart of the king, as well as his official consort! And God puts such stories as these in His book, that you and I may know the riches of His grace more fully, and take it all. The king and queen together at the feast, she happy in the unmixed kindness that lifted her there, and he joyful in her beauty and the value he has put upon her! Oh, will you go to this feast?

Gospel in the Book of Esther, Esther 1: 2. The Feast Rejected. (1:9-22)

"Also Vashti, the queen, made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to King Ahasuerus. On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king, to bring Vashti, the queen, before the king with the crown royal, to show the people and the princes her beauty, for she was fair to look upon. But the queen refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains. Therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him. Then the king said to the wise men which knew the times.... what shall we do unto the Queen Vashti according to the law, because she hath not performed the commandment of the King Ahasuerus by the chamberlains? And Memucan answered before the king and princes, Vashti, the queen, hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes and to all the people that are in the provinces of the King Ahasuerus.... If it pleases the king let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and Medes, that it be not altered, that Vashti come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she...And the saying pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan; for he sent letters into all the provinces, into every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language" (Esther 1:9-22).

In the feast which Ahasuerus, the king, made, which the Holy Spirit has set forth in a few sentences, as provided with such splendor and glory, we have opened to our gaze the riches of God's grace. It was for the display of the glory of His kingdom; and this is the meaning of God's waiting now, and the purpose is to bless those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Him, to the praise of the glory of His grace. (Eph. 1:3-6).

What a wonderful dignity and grandeur of meaning does this give to the gospel which He takes such pains to send forth to all! The scene of the glory is nothing less than heaven, the measure of it nothing short of His own fullness and joy; and this for nothing! He wants His glory, His happiness, His love, His Son, Himself, seen and known and enjoyed thoroughly! They who have entered in and dwelt with Him in these joys, even while here on earth, are wont to say, "We rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of the glory," (1 Peter 1:8). "We have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God; and not only so, but we glory in tribulations also. And not only so, but we joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation!" (Rom. 5:2, 3, 11).

In the spirit of the queen of Sheba, who came from the uttermost parts of the earth to see and hear the wisdom of Solomon, they having been with the greater than Solomon, are accustomed to cry out, "The half was not told me." And it never can be told. God has put forth all His wisdom and power and love, reserved till He should raise up His well-beloved Son, in the preparation of this feast, which shall endure as long as He endures; for in His presence is fullness of joy; at His right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psa. 16:11).

And the invitation and welcome are as cordial as the feast is rich. In the great supper of Luke 14:16-24, the last word we hear from the servants sent is, "Yet there is room!" and the responsive word of the lord of the feast is, "That my house may be full!" This tells it all. God has a place in His heart to be filled, a place that none can fill but the lost sinner! What a deception has Satan practiced on poor lost men in making them think God is unkind and grudging in His offers, that He is exacting from them instead of giving freely, to display His own riches!

This was the nature of the invitation to Vashti, to come and grace the feast; "to show the people and the princes her beauty." So we read in Eph. 2:7, "That in the ages to come He (God) might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus." The redeemed are to take that place by reason of the beauty which He bestows, the wonders of His own grace.

But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command. And we learn the same thing in Luke 14:18-20. They that were laden refused! It is a sad comment upon man's hardness of heart and obduracy of will, that none came, and none ever come now to partake of salvation simply because they are bidden. They will not accept the invitation of God. "There is none that seeketh after God; they are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is no fear of God before their eyes." (Rom. 3 it, 12, 18). The Scriptures testify of ME, said Christ, "And ye will not come unto me that ye might have life" (John 5:40). How well He knows our hearts!

And what was the cause of Vashti's refusal? She had a feast of her own! She was occupied apart from her king, and so, disobedient to his command. It is the commandment of God that we should be saved. "This commandment have I received from my Father," said Christ, when speaking of laying down His life for us. And then the message of love going out to men lost and blind and willful, is coupled with the command to repent, that is, know and take our condition as needy and ruined in God's sight, and accept His provision. So wonderful is His desire for our salvation, that to be saved is the only obedience the sinner can render; not doing some great service, but having all done for him.

The sad spectacle is exhibited every day, of men letting that which is connected with their own social arrangements imperil their salvation. God is put off with civility and what seems reasonable! "I pray thee have me excused, I have bought a piece of ground, or a yoke of oxen," or "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come;"—the course of this world and the circumstances in connection with it Man's willfulness is shown by his every day life; he leaves out God. All is taken up apart from Him, as if God had made the earth and was to have no part in it! As if He had meant man to occupy it away from Him! That God is not in all his thoughts is fearfully manifest. Is God to arrange the world for blessing in His own way, or shall man who has become vile and gone out from the presence of God (Gen. 4:7), improve it by his powers? As long as man stands to the latter, anything, however innocent it may seem, becomes a hindrance to his entering into the feast and having God's joy. It is a sad thing that to be as we are, as men in sin, and to go on, is to refuse salvation. In Eph. 2:1, the Gentile condition spiritually is spoken of as "walking according to the course of this world." There we are dead in trespasses and sins, enemies in our minds, having no hope, without God in the world.

All that is sweet and gracious, and rich and glorious in God is now offered man, including pardon, life Sonship, joy in God and communion with Him forever; and is refused on the ground of man's satisfaction with himself. The "field" and the "oxen" were the things that pertained to Israel in their land, the very token of their blessings, and these kept them from God and His salvation. So does the religion of man interfere with his salvation; for he will not take the ground of need as a lost sinner. Just so Vashti lost all by having a feast of her own, a something apart from him.

And oh, beloved reader, the dreadful delusion of your own heart is, that you have enough without God. Think of it. Are you looking to go to heaven? and is your heaven to be without God? This is the meaning of your rejection of His offers.

Now, ponder this, that the rejected offer is met by banishment. An unalterable decree settled the case forever for poor Vashti. The word of the Lord of the feast (Luke 14) was "none of those men who were bidden shall taste of my supper!" And the word to you is, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish; for I work a work in your day which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you" (Acts 13:41). Yes, He is doing this wondrous work now, saving the vile for nothing, saving on His own account and for His Son's sake all who believe. But he that believeth not shall be judged—condemned! The loss is imminent in your case. Let me give you the solemn word of God on this matter in 2 Thess. 1:7-9, "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power." Then read 2 Thess. 2:12, "That they might all be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

Let not the word of invitation, backed by its fearful warning, be unheeded. In this book, doubtless, the message sent to Vashti, and the refusal, are a figure of the offer to the Jews, first, of the grace of God through Jesus Christ, and so with those who were invited in Luke 14, the rejection of them leaving room for the greater display of the exceeding riches of God's grace towards the outcast, the lost, the Gentiles.

And this we may consider next.

Gospel in the Book of Esther, Esther 1: 1. The Feast. (1:1-8)

"Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this is Ahasuerus which reigned from India even unto Ethiopia over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces), and in those days when the King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace, in the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces being before him; when he chewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honor of his excellent majesty many days, even an hundred and fourscore days. And when these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace; where were white, green and blue hangings fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble. And they gave them drink in vessels of gold (the vessels being diverse from one another) and royal wine in abundance according to the state of the king. And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel; for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure." (Esther 1:1-8).

It has sometimes been thought that the book of Esther ought not to have a place in the Scriptures, chiefly because ' it does not have the name of God once in it. But it has all the external evidences that the other books of Scripture have, of a right to its place, and has always been received by the godly Jews as of the canon.

But, to one acquainted with the peculiar grace of God, it gives token everywhere of being His, for it tells the story of His heart. It is His manner alone. None other could counterfeit His style, for none had the glory of His Son before him always. There is a peculiar cleanness, and a blending of righteousness and grace, that show Him throughout as Light and Love, as rising in the resources of His own wisdom and grace, above everything that hinders, in man. Some of these things may be made apparent as the Lord in grace opens these chapters to us; the desire here being to illustrate by the beautiful pictures in this book the wonderful gospel of the grace of God to lost sinners.

The first thing brought to our notice is a great feast held by one whose kingdom was universal, which came in the third year of his reign. This was to show the "riches of his glorious kingdom, and the honor of his excellent majesty."

God is meaning to show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus, taking up poor lost men that are dead in trespasses and sins, for the praise of the glory of His grace. In the Epistle to the Ephesians we get all this set forth with clearness. And it is because He has raised up Jesus from the dead and seated Him upon the throne at His right hand. This corresponds to the "third year of the reign," God having marked off the "third day" as the expression of resurrection. It is to the risen Christ we are called and for His sake, and resurrection gives the character of our blessing. It is not to enjoy anything in our old nature, but in the new, and we become a new creation in Christ Jesus. He is now calling out a special company, "partakers of the heavenly calling," "fellows" with His own Son, themselves sons of glory; and to these He would make known all His counsels and purposes concerning the future glory of Christ, which is here prefigured. These are the "nobles and princes," those who shall reign with Him, and share in all that pertains to Him as the head of the kingdom. What a wonderful thought for wretched and vile ones, far off from God by their own ways!

But this feast was extended to more than the nobles. "When these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both into great and small, seven days " Here is Owl's perfect number, seven, looking to the complete telling out of His love. And who are the objects of this love? All, great and small. It would seem He cannot have His joy alone.

He has found one object of delight, the perfect One who is all the glory of heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ; and He would have all to know Him. The character of all is perfection. While we have nothing but imperfection and ruin and vileness and sin, all is beauty and grace and glory that He provides.

It was "in the, court of the garden of the king's palace" where the feast was held. Man was driven out of the garden into which God first placed him, to make his own home and joy. But from the paradise of God, the wonderful garden of infinite blessing which God provides and which Christ says He went away to prepare for His own, there will be no more going out. The description given in Rev. 22:1-3 of the heavenly city, tells of the tree of life given back to those who enter there, bearing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit every month. It is the full, rich, infinite enjoyment of the new life, the life in Christ, in the gladness of His own presence.

"The hangings" which were "white and green and blue," tell of the perfect purity and spring-like freshness, and the heavenly, gracious character of the whole scene where God is, and to which the needy are invited, while the cords of fine linen and purple, and the silver rings

and pillars of marble point out in typical language the righteousness and majesty established in redemption.

In the precious things of Christ there are ever freshness and newness. You may see no beauty in Him that you should desire Him, but God discloses ever new wonders to those who listen to Him. In Heb. 1 There is a rich cluster of glories pointed out; that He is the express image of God's own person, the One whom He has appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds, and who upholds all things by the word of His power. Are there not ever fresh surprises in these? But these would be nothing to us were it not for the statement that follows, "When He had purged our sins." That is what brings these brilliant qualities before us, and gives us a right to behold them. And then we learn that as the Sin-Purger He is raised up to the right hand of the Majesty on high; and there lie sat down. The glory of Christ in heaven is connected with, and follows His work on the cross for lost sinners! Just as you see these splendid hangings had their place, were held up by the silver rings. How needful the rings! How solid the pillars reflecting on their richly polished surface the beauty of the rings and the hangings!

And what is that price but the precious blood of Christ? "Ye are bought with a price," is the condition of the redeemed. Surely this has a voice for you, beloved friend, who may be thinking of your condition as a sinner. God will tell out His reason for each one's presence in the glory of heaven, in the blood of the Lamb slain. Your claim upon God, your warrant for an interest in Christ, is your state as a sinner. All that God has, all that Christ is, is offered to you freely, without price. They who have part with Him must be redeemed, and the redeemed must have been sinners.

But we have still another mention of silver. The couches upon which they reclined at the feast were of gold and silver. Thus, you see, that gold, which was that of which all the vessels that suited God, that were divine in their: use, were made; and silver, which is redemption; here go together. What a place to rest upon! How well the guests might feel secure in their places, with the solid foundation of alabaster, and marble of varied glories and preciousness of value. Firm and secure; and only to recline there and enjoy! Will you not say—

But we find another element of great delight. In vessels of gold there was proffered in abundance royal wine, according to the state of the king. Now, in Judg. 9:13, we find that wine "cheereth God and man.", While the hangings and the couches tell us of the glory and excellence and righteousness of the presence of God, and the solid resting place for the soul, the thorough settlement of the whole question of sin and sins; the wine tells of joy. But the blessedness of it is, that it is a joy that God can have with the guest. Now man would fain have his joy alone, away from the presence of God, a guilty joy. But God accomplishes a work by which He can bring us to His own presence, and Himself find delight in us. This goes beyond all things; that He should not only receive sinners, but rejoice in them. This is a righteous, a holy cheering, God's wine, that He sets forth.

"According to the state of the king" is the measure and the style of pouring forth the wine. Now look at 1 Peter 1:3,4, and read, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance in. corruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." Here we have the abundance according to the state of the king and the unfading freshness of all—the green hangings, again.

Do not all these things of, this feast rebuke and deny all your thoughts, of God and salvation? Turn to Matt. 22:10, and Luke 14:16-24, and you will see mention made A the great feast that God is preparing, and you will find that He does, all the preparing. "All things are ready," it, the announcement the servants are to make, and He longs a have His table filled. Oh how His heart goes out after 'on, dear soul, waiting and longing for you. All that is needful to enjoy a feast is to be hungry for it. And are you not hungry and empty of all joy, needing all things?

In this feast of Ahasuerus, there was no law about drinking; each was to drink according to his own pleasure. So this sweetly sets forth the richer feast of heaven. The measure—the law of it all—is the capacity of the vessel. Some love much, for they have much forgiven. Some may say, with Paul, "of whom I am a chief," when they think of their sins. But they shall know the excellency of the power, and the glory of the Person, according to their capacity to hold. But all shall be satisfied. The pardon is abundant, the grace is His exceeding riches, the joy is unspeakable, the rest is God's own, the life is everlasting, the liberty is that of sons, the fellowship is with the Father and His Son. All things are ready, and ready for you as a sinner. Will you take your place then, as such, and receive of the fullness of God's own heart and hand?

Ah! if you only knew, if you only would believe that heaven and Christ are just adapted to the sinner, as the father's house was just fitted to the prodigal coming back in ruin! It had all the things necessary for him, not according to his expectation, for he was thinking only of the "bread enough" and a servant's place; but according to the father's heart. And now be reminded that that house stands ready, waiting-waiting for the lost ones, for you. Come, for all things are ready!

clickbible.org