

## P and SD WEEK 1: The Haman Habit

This Sunday marks the beginning of a 3-week Prayer and Self-Denial series. Gaylene has done a great job in the lead up to today, however I will spend a few moments giving you an overview of what P and SD is and what we can expect from this 3 weeks...

### **Overview of P and SD**

The mission of God is something that is in front of us and that we are engaged with all the time. But this 3-week appeal is an opportunity to join with over 100 other Baptist Churches throughout NZ and bring mission – the work of our mission partners abroad, and our place in God's mission – a little more into focus, than normal.

Just as we are hands and feet in the local church, so too are we are part a global whānau. That's why I'm grateful for the work of NZBMS (NZ Baptist Missionary Society – the Mission arm of the BCNZ) and Tranzsend (the sending arm of NZBMS) – in fact I'd encourage you to go to their website...answer great questions...

What this appeal does, is, reminds us that the work our, yes "our", global workers do abroad and I might include all involved in Mission Local as well, *matters*.

Matters enough to have this concentrated 3 weeks of prayer. Matters enough to deny ourselves and give generously to the work of Gods mission, that the gospel might spread and be heard, and those on the frontline are well supported. Nau te rourou, naku te rourou, ka ora te manuhiri | With your food basket and my food basket, the people will thrive.

This whakatauki reflects the message well: this a huge opportunity for mutual blessing when we engage in world mission, so I encourage you, across these next few weeks, to engage with this, pray even if you've not prayed before, let's deny ourselves of something important and give to this.

### **SUMMARY of next 3 weeks**

*You might ask why Esther when it comes to mission and this appeal?*

Several reasons...we are reminded, that even in a book where God is never explicitly mentioned<sup>1</sup> - the name Esther means *something hidden*<sup>2</sup> - he was very much present, at work behind the scenes, using the most unlikely of characters and situations to bring salvation and hope to entire people groups. This is intentional by the writer to heighten our awareness to the fact.

...we're encouraged to see that despite opposition and the work of a rampant enemy attack, God is for us, God can, will, and is building his church...

...we're encouraged to see that though God is at work, courage is required for us to step out, to join with God with what he's doing, because God's mission is not apart from us, it involves us. I think right here we hit on one the biggest misunderstandings in the church: that of seeing ourselves as a legitimate part of his mission. Where you are and where you go mission happens because Christ, the hope of the world is in you. The message...is ours to encourage our mission partners but is also – irrespective of age and ability – a message to us also...

Esther 4:14-16 *"For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"*

Shortly we'll be looking at...

### **The Haman Habit: identifying the "I" in idol** (Esther 5:1-14)

Following the story of Haman's plot against the Jews, this theme looks at how self can distract our focus from the mission of God. Our motivations, priorities and aspirations drive the ways we live and behave; but when we constantly put ourselves first, others miss out. So we'll be encouraged to be a people who put our love for God and others above anything else.

...next Sunday with Neville...

### **The Esther Era: Frontline Faithfulness** (Esther 4:15-16)

This theme explores the role of the church. Churches around the world are on the frontlines; having to respond to the needs of the ever-changing society around them. Like Esther, churches need to be bold and faithful to the call of God. As members of the body, we're reminded that it is part of worship to do what we can to best represent Christ on the frontlines.

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<sup>1</sup> The other book is S.O.S

<sup>2</sup> [Esther 5 - Mission Impossible \(redeeminggod.com\)](http://redeeminggod.com). NB: Xerxes is mentioned over 170 times by contrast to God, nil.

...and in week 3...**The Mordecai Movement: Going Global** (Esther 4:13-14)

This theme celebrates the importance of those in support roles. We are not all called to leave our homes and serve overseas, however we can all play a part in the growth of the Kingdom. Those who pray, give, and encourage, are just as important as those who go. I want us to see that we're very much a part of what others do abroad – our praying and support is legitimate mission – but that there is also a calling on you, on us as a church “for such a time as this”. I don't want the importance of that to be lost. Mission is not that thing that somebody else does. It's what we are called too. So we'll be urged to ask: in what ways will we allow God to use us for His mission?

Also in week 3, 30<sup>th</sup> May, there will be a celebration meal which you can sign up for...and, I'm excited to let you know TWP will join us on the 30<sup>th</sup> May, where we'll hear a brief update from Shane about their work...so do plan to join us...

## Overview of Esther

I'll take a couple of minutes to set the series in biblical context for us, some brief comments about Esther and the lead up to today's text, Esther 5:10-14

The book of Esther is based in the Persian empire, 127 provinces that covers what is today Libya in Africa across to Pakistan in Asia. An empire then ruled by King Xerxes (Ahasuerus – Grandson of Cyrus<sup>3</sup>). Dates are 400-500 B.C, and as best as I can determine this period was about midway between the rebuild of the temple in Jerusalem (516 B.C.) and the rebuild of the wall (450 B.C.).<sup>4</sup> The Persian empire was the biggest, most expansive, and most powerful empire of the time, populated by around 50 million people. We can't be certain who wrote Esther, 2 possibilities are Mordecai or Nehemiah. It doesn't matter, it's a story about God!

In the earlier chapters of Esther, King Xerxes banishes Queen Vashti when she boldly refuses to come to his drunken party - *He was known for his drinking, lavish banquets, harsh temper, and sexual appetite.*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Persian ruler who decreed that the Jews could go back to their land after 70 years of captivity.

<sup>4</sup> So Esther's account is of Jews who had yet not returned to Jerusalem from their original exile, or who had settled there.

<sup>5</sup> [Who was Xerxes in the Bible? | GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

He then looks for a new wife to take her place as Queen. Esther, in the care of Mordecai, her uncle, is chosen as the new Queen. Now she's a Jew, a minority in Persia at the time, but she manages to keep that a secret. Evil Haman becomes the King's trusted advisor, and when Mordecai (also a Jew) refuses to bow to him (3:5, 6), Haman engineers a cunning plan to wipe out all the Jews, King Xerxes ordains it. Mordecai then seeks Esther's help (*"such a time as this..."*) She asks that all the Jews gather to pray and fast for 3 days. Esther then risks her life by asking to speak to the King without being summoned.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day she meets the king who accepts Esther's request for him and Haman to attend a banquet, she then insists on a 2<sup>nd</sup> banquet, all the while leaving the king's question of what she requests<sup>6</sup>, unanswered... read in chapter 7 what her request was and the consequences of *Haman's cunning plan*...let's get that (plan)

READ Esther 5: 10-14

*Calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials. "And that's not all," Haman added. "I'm the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me along with the king tomorrow. But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate." His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Have a pole set up, reaching to a height of fifty cubits, and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai impaled on it. Then go with the king to the banquet and enjoy yourself." This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the pole set up.*

There are all sorts of directions we could go with these few verses: when we think of the story of Esther we think of Esther and Mordecai's courage against Haman's ill-fated ego. His plan was to completely wipe out the Jews. We could look at how God would use such means at his disposal and how he utilises – at times – such extreme and extraordinary circumstances for his will to be done. There is a theme here of trusting God, even when there is no immediate visible demonstration of his hand present.

But very briefly, I want to give you 2 points from the scripture that are lessons from Haman and Esther. Talk about *Haman's "I" trouble* and, *a new vision of our place in God's mission*...that's what I get from these verse....

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<sup>6</sup> 7:3 Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king

## Haman's "I" Trouble (*Lessons from Haman*)

14 examples in 5 verses! Haman, Haman, Haman...my mind immediately goes to Isa. 54:17, *"no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and this is their vindication from me," declares the LORD.*<sup>7</sup>

Haman's example in the scripture, though at the extreme end, serves as a reminder we can hold similar attitudes, have a high view of ourselves, hold opinions of others to bring about an agenda that serves our purposes but not necessarily the purposes of God's mission. It's a reminder we can be easily offended or threatened – when it's *my* (not necessarily God's) reputation at stake. And you'll notice it wasn't enough for Haman to keep his thoughts, opinions and attitudes to himself, it was important to him, that he rally those around him – his wife, his friends and initially the king – to boost his ego!

Let's take a snapshot look at our passage again, I've underlined all the words that highlight what I've just mentioned...

...his friends...his wife ...boasted...his vast wealth...honored him... elevated ... above the ... "And that's not all," ... only person ... invited me ...me no satisfaction...I see ... enjoy yourself." This suggestion delighted Haman, ...he had the pole set up.

There are certainly other things that can draw our attention, and I might say our love and devotion away from God and his mission. We could spend all day listing off those things. The account of Haman however shows us idolatry is not just reserved for things outside of ourselves, Haman's example shows us that our self, can be the idol. Me, myself and "I". If we have made an idol of other things it is first, that we have made ourselves, first. Haman, had "I" trouble! Paul wrote to a group of people at Corinth about "I" trouble: *The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"* (1 Cor. 12:21)

Prov. 16:17-19 *The highway of the upright avoids evil; those who guard their ways preserve their lives. Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be lowly in spirit along with the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.*

God is constantly at work for good, even when we can't see it.

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<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in Rom. 8:31 *What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*

When our world is facing unprecedented times such as this, it is easy to become self-preserving and self-focussed, rather than have a continuous awareness that God's mission isn't about me.

Haman epitomised the saying absolute power corrupts absolutely. He was the ANE version of the corporate bully. Haman had "I" trouble. So entrenched was Haman's pride the gallows he'd 'ordered for Mordecai – because he was so infuriated that Mordecai didn't acknowledge him – was 75 feet (23m) high. So that's at least 10 times my height.

That seems completely unnecessary right. That's what happens when sinful vengeance gets out-of-control. The gallows match the ego, match the level of anger and make a statement!<sup>8</sup>

He, and his self-serving agenda were idols. And in terms of his character and spirit, represented everything that is contrary to the fruit of the Spirit. Now we – unlike Haman was able to do – must resist a blind spot in such areas of our lives. That is, denying we have such idols and issues and attitudes.<sup>9</sup> That's a big thing to admit, the self is an idol. For some reason we prefer to preserve our dignity, in pride than to 'go low' and put our issues right. Consider the Pharisee in Luke 18...

*Luke 18:11b-14 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' (Jesus said) "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

*"Selfishness has never been admired" -C.S. Lewis*

God calls us to take stock of our hearts and the idols we have built there. It is a hard thing to break through pridefulness, but through repentance and God's grace there can be breakthrough and freedom.

God's heart is for all people, and God generously invites us to be a part of the redemptive work He is doing. Breakdown the "I" and we'll see that. When we consider Haman and Esther, we might ask what God can do when the heart of Christians is fully predisposed to serving him and serving others.

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<sup>8</sup> [Esther 5 Sermon \(explainingthebook.com\)](https://www.explainingthebook.com)

<sup>9</sup> We must be slow to justify our actions and quick to repent of them.

## **A New Vision of Our Place in Gods Mission – *Lessons from Esther***

A self-serving agenda, poor attitudes toward others – particularly if this has reckless motivations – gathering others around a plan or pattern of thought that is unbiblical, when our primary focus is ourselves at the expense of the welfare of others and the spread of the gospel, such things are counter the mission of God for us.

We can't wholeheartedly participate in this work with Him when our hearts are distracted and thrown off course with idols. In Haman's case, the idol was himself. Whenever Haman was honoured, he boasted to his friends. Whenever Haman was dishonoured, he sulked and made excuses. Haman was unable to see the hand of God working for good, and his life reaches an ironic end: Haman needed to publicly honour Mordecai, the man he is scheming to kill, and he is then impaled on the very spear he built for Mordecai. *Those who exalt themselves will be humbled!*

In their characters Esther and Mordecai are in stark contrast to Haman. Haman is all about self, Esther is all about *total risk of self* for the deliverance of her people, and Mordecai is right there cheering her on! We see in Esther, faith and tenacity and vision for what God can do, when we're prepared to put ourselves out there. Esther *owned* the responsibility to go to the King. What does a vision for mission like that of Esther, and Mordecai's look like, where we have \*secured breakthrough of our "I" troubles and where we are available for God?

...Ownership of our heart issues before God and getting our vision and perspective right

Ownership, love, care and prayer support for our mission partners abroad, doing the work of Gods mission in hard places, *it is giving our fully fledged support to the likes of this campaign*

...Ownership of where God has called us and what God has called us here, to do. We can be assured that God is 100% present at work in the places our mission partners are working, but also right here in Kirikiriroa!

God is calling us not to build lives that look attractive, but to give our lives away. To have an altar in our hearts that is only for Him and His will. Any other idols in our hearts but the Lord, will only weigh us down and be

difficult to carry. Let us trust in Him and have faith in His promises, even when we can't see the outcome.

What Mordecai said to Esther is timeless, and relevant for today. These are words the Holy Spirit is quickening to us and inspiring us with today, *"And who knows but that you have come to your...position – Netherville, Sare Cres, Flagstaff, Fairfield, Kirikiriroa... for such a time as this?"*.

We've talked today about the character of Haman and how, seen through him, we must be conscious of our *self* being an idol, our *selfish wants* and *attitudes* being an idol and how such things are a hindrance to God's mission. That being said. Even Haman was subject to the sovereignty of God. Perhaps there's no other book of the bible we see this great paradox of no mention, yet all majesty, of God.

That there is no mention of God is I believe intentional. An intentional strategy by whoever wrote Esther to draw attention to the presence of the power and providence of God. Even with this there are lessons for us, faith and trust lessons.<sup>10</sup> It is better that we be a willing partner with God than unwilling, working with him, not against him...*not because we must but because we are willing. Let's join him!*

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<sup>10</sup> When we can't see him, we "see" him, can't hear him, we "hear" him...