

God's Hand of Providence

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[0 : 0 0] and to the book of Esther and we're going to read chapter 4 Esther chapter 4 now the opening verse of chapter 4 if we're not familiar with the preceding verses will perhaps come as a surprise when Mordecai learned of all that had been done he tore his clothes on satsangles and ashes an edict that's been passed that all of Mordecai's friends Jewish friends would be killed and so that's why we read of Mordecai he had an enemy Haman and we'll read this chapter chapter 4 when Mordecai learned of all that had been done he tore his clothes put on sackcloth and ashes and went out into the city wailing loudly bitterly but he went only as far as the king's gate because no one closing sackcloth was allowed to enter it in every province to which the edict and order of the king came there was great mourning among the news with fasting weeping and wailing many lay in sackcloth and ashes when Esther's maid

Eunot came and told her about Mordecai she was in great distress she sent clothes for him to put on instead of his backcloth but he would not accept them then Esther summoned Hathak one of the king's eunuchs inclined to attend her and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why so Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews he also gave him a copy of the text of the Egypt for their annihilation which had been published in Susa to show to Esther and to explain it to her and he told him to urge her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people

Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said then she instructed him to say to Mordecai all the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any reason man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law that he be put to death the only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold sent to season and spare his life but thirty days had passed and I was called to go to the king when Esther's words were reported to Mordecai he sent back to the king do not think that because you own the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape for if you remain silent at this time relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place but you and your father and family will carry and who knows that you have come to the royal position for such a time as this then Esther sent this to Mordecai go gather together all the Jews who are in Susa and fast for me do not eat or drink for three days night or day

I and my maid will fast as you do when this is done I will go to the king even though it is against the law and if I perish I perish so Mordecai went away and carried out all that Esther is instruction for may the Lord bless your effect leading from his word thank you so much for the encouragement you have given us in the ministry of African Bible College over this little time together we hope and pray that this will be a continuing relationship and I will just share with you about the first staff member that came to be a part of this African Bible College center the new venture in Uganda the college as I explained this morning is a four year college in which everyone receives a degree everyone who attends the college and completes the progress of the program receives a degree in biblical studies the emphasis is on biblical studies and on theology so that all the students get a very strong grounding in the word of God that can then be applied to all the different needs of an emerging Africa today but they can also take many courses in education so that they can become qualified teachers in the public school systems or private school they also can take a large number of courses in communication we have a radio station a Christian radio station that's broadcast in Malawi 17 hours a week and the students themselves design their programs we had one a few years ago who designed a special program for children and it was a very popular program she would tell children's stories and then she would have write-ins and called-ins and there was an awfully lot of wonderful interaction with the children of Malawi we have made application for a radio station permit in Uganda as well and that is the next building to be constructed we have started with two faculty houses and also for one classroom building and eventually we hope to have as many as 25 buildings on the campus we cannot begin classes until we have as many as 12 buildings because it is a residential campus we think it's very important that the students come and live with us and breathe our air with us we have a chapel every morning a 30 minute chapel from 7.30 to 8 and we start the day off then with an exposition of the word of God and prayer and the singing of the praises of the Lord and then see about the Lord's work we have quite a few

Americans on the faculty and that was proven the first year we opened in Malawi we turned out this very nice schedule about 12 years ago and the students came to us and said well this is a very nice schedule but you have no tea break we must have our tea so we instituted a tea and I've been civilized then by learning to think tea and the Malawi and the Africans had to civilize the American but the first staff member for the college came from the Lutheran church in it's not Durban Durham in England and he is a very kind young man we were attending the person in Cambridge and I met this young man and he was working in a library there in Cambridge and then he went off to earn his degree in library science in

[8 : 21] Bosco and I communicated with him and said you know we're starting this new college in Uganda and we're going to need a librarian very much and after a few weeks he mailed me back and said I would be disobedient to God if I didn't come to Africa so he wrote his thesis on how to start a library in Africa from scratch so you remember Paul Austin our first staff member he's a very fine young Christian man who's proven himself that he's willing to do anything which you need it you need people who are a little bit diversified and able to take on different responsibilities he will help us in our music program and he says he'll do anything from digging ditches to teaching music but not preaching because he doesn't feel that God has gifted him in that way so he can be understanding in that area but pray for Paul he is now beginning to collect the books you saw his name on the sheet out in the vestibule

I will say there's two sheets for you to sign up one we send a monthly email or letter to those who will commit themselves to pray for us at least once a week we felt when we were making this transfer from Malawi to Uganda that we needed prayer and so we were looking for at least a hundred people that would commit themselves to pray for us once a week and we would send them a prayer letter a prayer bulletin once a month to focus their prayers and if you're willing to make that kind of commitment please sign that particular list but if we also send an information letter out twice a year and if you would like to receive that letter as well you can sign up on that sheet so they're two separate sheets and we would love to have you join with us not just for this time but on a more permanent basis to see the wondrous things that God is doing in Africa today the scripture for this evening is from the book of Esther and that wonderful text who knows but that you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this who knows but that you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this

God's hand of covenant let us pray we come oh gracious God to thank you and praise you that your hand formed us while we were still in our mother's womb we were wonderfully knit together to be just the people that we are according to your providential purposes and plans and now here we are oh gracious God in the day in which you have appointed for us you have so many thoughts for us and they are all for our good we cannot count all the thoughts you have had and continue to have for us you are the almighty God who can take in every aspect of who we are the circumstances in which we find ourselves the disappointment the anticipations and to make of us exactly what we should be as people and to use us exactly as you would have us to be used we praise your name that as we look back over the past of our life we can see those landmark circumstances that have brought us to this hour and though in some cases we have gone through valleys of darkness and disappointment yet we have seen that you have guided us and brought us to this particular day now heavenly father give us a greater faith and confidence in your continuing purposes knowing that since you did not spare your own son but delivered him up for us all you will not withhold from us any good thing so we pray in the name of

Christ our Lord and Savior you amen somehow suggested that the book of Esther could not be God inspired how could a book be inspired of God and never one time mention the name of God it is true you can read through the whole of the book of Esther and not one time will you find God mentioned the name of God is not there well as someone has said God may not have put his signature to the book of Esther but his handwriting is on every page there is no book of the Bible that points out more clearly the way in which God orders all things for the good of his own people his own glory and the world widespread of the gospel you have in the book of

Esther the Old Testament version of Romans 8 28 you've memorized that verse Romans 8 28 we hope that some things work together for good to the no I hope you won't let me get by with that we know that some things work together for good no we know that all things work together for good to them that love God to those who are the 12 according to his purpose the very hairs of your head are numbered for your good not one sparrow falls to the ground apart from your father's perfect will nations rise and fall according to God's purposes for his people for the advancement of his kingdom and the world wide spread of the gospel in the book of Esther you see God's secret hand of providence and it's a very realistic book in the sense that you don't at least I don't think that you have

[15 : 04] God right over your shoulder whispering in your ear this is what I'm doing right now this is what you should understand is happening to you right now no you don't have that kind of experience with God but you do have God's hidden hand of providence guiding and guarding everything that occurs in life for his own glory for the good of his people and for the worldwide spread of the gospel you can understand that there is a missionary message in every part of the Bible and in the book of Esther as well as we shall see but look at these various ways in which throughout the book of Esther you can see that hidden hand of God in which he and in ways that we cannot fully comprehend it's ordering and directing the high and the mighty and the lowly as well so that his purposes are served first of all God places his people where he wishes

God places his people where he wishes God does not always place his people where they wish you will not always find yourself exactly where you would like to be or the circumstances of your life will not always be exactly the way you would have planned them for yourself but don't let your faith waver God has made you in a certain way he has given you a certain intelligence a certain physical capacity he has given you a certain circumstance in your life and all of those circumstances are because God places his people exactly where he wants them to be now that is seen first of all in the book of Esther in the fact that God made Esther queen of the land of Persia and that is quite a story in itself it seems that the king of Persia had this great idea that he was going to have a 180 day open house and he was going to display just how great was his wealth now this man ruled over the largest empire that had ever existed in human history to that point the kingdom of Persia it was sprawled across three continents

Africa Europe Asia and he wanted to display just how great was his glory at the end of that time he was having a little drinking party with some of his closest friends and so he got this right idea that he would display his most treasured trophy which was his wife and he ordered Vashti to come in and display her beauty before the drunken or half-drunken friends of his and we don't know much about Vashti we don't know whether she was a believer in the one true living God but she was a woman with some spunk and she sent back a one-word answer to the king's command no I am not coming to display my beauty before you well the king was enraged he was perplexed he didn't know exactly how to respond and there were his friends in front of him so he asked their counsel and advice and they gave them very direct advice to the king they said almighty king if our wife hears it

Queen Vashti did not do what the king told her to do then our wives will not do what we tell them to do and there will be no end of distress and trouble in your empire so you must remove this woman from being the queen of Persia teach the whole kingdom a lesson well that's what the king did but then there was a search then for a new queen to take the place of Vashti and out of the 127 provinces over the whole of the known world at that time Africa Europe and Asia the most beautiful women were brought before the king they were given a full year's training in beauty schools and how to use perfumes and oils and then they would be presented to the king and you can imagine the expense that was poured into this endeavor the king had to have just the right person and after all that process the king's eyes fell on a little

Jewish orphan girl named Esther a little girl whose grandparents had been dragged away into the kingdom of Persia with chains about their necks a little girl who had not been raised by father or mother but by an uncle and Esther then was placed as queen of the land of this massive empire of Persia now does God place his people where he wishes does God order even the twisted circumstances of human politics to do what he wishes yes God makes no mistake God placed Esther as queen of the land of Persia now we see also in the early chapters of the book of Esther that God placed Mordecai the uncle who had raised Esther as a little girl God placed Mordecai at the gate at one of the gates in the city now we need to recognize and keep up the male ego a little bit gatekeeper obviously is not the equivalent to queen but it was a position of some prominence at the gate the decisions were made at the gate court was held and Mordecai was a man of some significance but God did not only place

[21 : 12] Mordecai at the gate he placed him at a certain gate on a particular day a specific distance from two men who were plotting assassination these two men were plotting to assassinate the king Mordecai overheard their plot reported the plot to Esther Esther told the king the king investigated the matter found it to be true and the two men were hung now why is it that Mordecai was not at a different gate why is it that he was not off on a tea break at that particular time why is it that he was that these two men plotting a fascination didn't have enough sense to get out of earshot of one of the faithful servants of the king because God places his people where he wishes for advancement of his kingdom for his own glory for the welfare of his own people

God places his people where he wishes smaller graves now where are you today are you queen are you gatekeeper are you rich are you poor have you are you married are you single have you no children or nine children be sure of this fact God makes no mistakes God places his people where he wishes and God has put you exactly where he wants you to be exercise your faith believe that no matter how disappointing your life may have been to you at this point to this level in your life God has not made a mistake yet God will not make a mistake God is ordering your life how are you responding to that ordering that's the important thing Mordecai was faithful in the responsibilities that were given to him as the gatekeeper are you responsible and responding in a way of obedience to what God would have you to do and be where you are to say and to do what you ought to do as a confessor of the Lord

Jesus Christ today as a missionary of the cross wherever you are are you willing to risk your life your career and you need to recognize that later on Esther had to say if I perish I perish but who knows but that you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this God has appointed every one of you into a particular role to fulfill for the advancement of his kingdom and for his glory we should rejoice in the fact that whether our task or small array are great it is not so much what we accomplish in the eyes of men it is what we become as the servants of our Lord Jesus Christ those who are willing to die to ourselves and our own ambitions in life and to joyfully serve Christ wherever he places us by being his faithful servants some of you are in business and some days in business you will hear of conversations with respect to your boss some deals that you wish you didn't know anything about and they may cause you to do certain things that you wish you did not have to do but remember

Christ has placed you there he put you in the gate and he has made no mistakes now secondly we see in the book of Esther that God restrains his enemies God by his singular hand of providence by his ordering all things as Jesus said not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from your father's will and anything greater than a sparrow certainly you are worth far more than many sparrows God is not going to let you fall to the ground not one hair of your head is going to be cut apart from his good purposes for you and for the spread of his kingdom but you need to recognize that there are indeed enemies of God in this world today there is according to the teaching of scripture a seed of Satan a seed of Satan within humanity you brood of vipers says John the Baptist who warned you to flee from the wrath that is to come

Abraham is not your father says Jesus the devil is your father you are of your father the devil and the works of your father you will do there is within humanity and sometimes it looks as though there is a much greater seed of Satan than a seed of God within humanity and this seed of Satan is set against God and against his purposes and many times this seed of Satan seems to have massive control as we have seen in Africa in the rise of Idi Amin who devastated the church of the Lord Jesus Christ and yet the church is much stronger than it is to date and it would have been if there never had been an Idi Amin but one of these enemies was a man named Haman Haman hated God's people Haman despised the people of God and Haman would do anything he could to destroy the people of God it makes me think of the beginning of the church of Uganda again a missionary from Scotland came down to this part of Africa a little over a hundred years ago and he began to work of all things among the pages the young boys 12, 13, 14 years of age that were in the king's court

[27 : 32] Uganda had a king at that time and many of these young pages were converted to Jesus Christ and the king thought that was fine but the king's son began to hate these young pages as far as I can tell it was because of the moral standard that they were upholding and the king's son felt he was being criticized by the moral standards of these young pages within the palace of the king and so with the authority that was given to him he called these pages before him and demanded that they deny Jesus Christ and these boys 12, 13, 14 years of age refused to deny Christ and so the son of the king took reed mats and soaked them in water and then wrapped these young pages and tied them in these reed mats and then lowered them into flames to try to force them to deny

Christ not a single one of the pages denied Christ but the missionary came home at the end of that experience and said it's all over certainly no one would dare confess Christ after this experience the next morning a knock at the door another one of the pages sir you must tell me about your Jesus he said don't you understand didn't you see don't you know what it could cost you to confess Jesus as the Christ sir if Jesus could hold my friend the way he did I must know this Jesus and today we have in Uganda a church of 8.3 million people out of 20 million people in the country of Uganda but they are these enemies who set themselves against the Lord and against his Christ and against his people and Haman got one of these decrees for the destruction of all of the believers of Christ over three continents

Africa Europe and Asia and on a particular day they were all going to be annihilated but God had Haman on the leash because Haman was a religious man Haman went into the presence of his God and he wanted to know the exact perfect day for the destruction of the Jews and if you look at the book of Esther chapter 3 verse 7 you will see the consequence of his seeking the will of the gods for the destruction of the Jews chapter 3 verse 7 in the lot in the first month the month of Nisan they cast the purr that is the lot have you heard of the feast of Purim the Jews still celebrate the feast of Purim they read the whole book of Esther in the feast of Purim and it's celebrating the purr that is the lot that was cast by Haman now why would they celebrate the casting of the lot well notice he cast the purr in the presence of Haman to select the day and month and the lot fell on the twelfth month so they had twelve lots as we could imagine it's the first month of the year and he cast the lot and it didn't say the second month the third month the fifth month but the twelfth month just a little breather just a little time for God to work now who is it to determine the casting of the lot not Haman's

God but the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who orders all things for the good of his people for his own glory and the worldwide spread of the gospel God had Haman even though he was his enemy on a leash and God was going to make even Haman's wicked determination for annihilation of God's people to be a cause of the advancement of the true gospel now there's one other little date to notice that is often overlooked in the book of Esther look at chapter 3 verses 12 and 13 the lot was cast in the first month but then on the 13th day of the first month this is chapter 3 verse 12 the royal secretaries were summoned on the 13th day of the first month they wrote out in the script of each province and in the language of each people all Haman's orders to the king say perhaps the governors of the various provinces and the nobles of the various people these were written in the name of king

Xerxes himself and sealed with his own ring dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with order to destroy kill and annihilate all the Jews so what so what's significant about the 13th day of the first month does that ring any bells to anyone if I said to you what's significant about the 24th day of the 12th month would you know what that's about that's Christmas Eve right so what's the significance of the 13th day of the first month that's Passover Eve Passover Eve on the 10th day of the first month the Passover lamb was chosen on the 14th day of the first month the Passover lamb was sacrificed the 13th day of the first month was

[34 : 09] Passover Eve preparation all being made for the sacrifice of the Passover lamb and that was the day that the decree went forth it was Israel's Gethsemane Gethsemane it was Israel's Gethsemane it was on the 13th day of the first month that Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane now can anything good come out of Gethsemane of course you can see how God on the 13th day of the first month had the preparations made for the sacrifice that brought Israel out of

Egypt and in Gethsemane our Lord Christ was prepared to offer himself as a sacrifice to bring us out of captivity so praise the Lord even for our Gethsemane for even in our Gethsemane God is restraining his enemy ordering all things for the good of his own people for his own glory and worldwide spread of the gospel well sometimes you think that God has let things go too far a fatal disease for one of your loved ones a loss of your job failure of your business and you say it's too much God this time you've let things go too far and that's exactly what the disciples thought on the way to

Emmaus we had thought we had hoped we had expected that this was the one but God was restraining his enemies even in the deepest time of sorrow Haman almost danced out of the presence of the king that day he was going to be rid of the Jews he had his sovereign irrevocable decree the law of the Medes and the Persians did your mom ever speak about the law of the Medes and the Persians to you my mom used to on Tuesday morning the trash had to be out in front of the house this was the law of the Medes and the Persians and no one could remove that law and in the law of Persia once the law of the Medes and the Persians had gone forth once the king had signed a decree even the king himself could not reverse that decree it was in concrete it could not be violated and this decree went forth that every one of God's people scattered across three continents were to be annihilated on a certain day now you tell me how anything like that could be for the good of

God's people you understand why there was weeping and wailing pouring of sackcloth of ashes on the head and going into sackcloth whenever this decree went throughout the whole of the Persian Empire because it looked like an absolutely hopeless situation but God has his enemy on a leash Haman went home that day and in typical fashion he gathered together his friends and some of his drinking cronies and in his humble spirit he began to tell them about all his great accomplishments all his sons and the fact that he had even been invited to a special dinner with the king the queen and no one else wouldn't you have enjoyed being in Haman's house well but says Haman none of that does me any good as long as that man Mordecai is still alive I cannot wait 12 months to have him annihilated what should

I do well say his friend the king would not deny you anything why don't you go in first thing in the morning and ask for a special decree for the destruction of Mordecai a great idea says Haman let's get busy and that night they built a gallows 75 feet high so that when Haman so when Mordecai hung all of the city of Susa would be able to see how Haman's enemies finally ended up but God had his enemies on the leaf now the third thing that we see in the book of Esther is that God orders even the smallest events of life for the good of his people for his own glory and for the world widespread of the gospel look at chapter 6 of Esther beginning to read at verse 1 don't ever overlook even the small words of scripture right Esther chapter 6 verse 1 how does it begin that night that night the king could not sleep what night well the night that Haman and his friends were busily building a gallows for the hanging of

[39 : 56] Mordecai that night some new cook in the royal kitchen had put too much hot pepper sauce in the kidney pie and the king got indigestion he could rule over three continents but he couldn't rule over his own constitution so he tossed and turned on his bed and finally sat up and in his gruffest voice he said turn on the lights the servants came trembling because they knew one misstep would mean their head almighty king would you like a little midnight snack don't mention food to me well almighty king what about a little chamber music or perhaps we could read something to you maybe a book of military adventures you never know when you might need another battle plan no says the king bring me the chronicles of the kings of Persia the chronicles of the kings of Persia how boring well perhaps that will put the king to sleep well almighty king you have 127 provinces from which of these provinces would you have us read well let's say province number 87 well almighty king there are several scrolls that record the history of province number 87 from which of these scrolls would you have us read well let's say scroll number 13 well almighty king it's a rather long scroll with many events would you like us to start at the beginning or somewhere in the it doesn't matter says the king just start reading so on that night the scribe read about a man named

Mordecai who had uncovered an assassination plot stop this reading says the king has this man been honored for his faithful service in saving my life well no mighty king somehow there must have been an oversight well the dawn is breaking who's in the court no one could be in the court at this early hour except ah I hear the sharp heels of Haman coming in for an early audience with the king ah says the king Haman just you're just the man I'm looking for there's someone whom I wish to honor for his faithful service in my kingdom what would you suggest according to the scripture Haman being the modest man that he was could only conclude that he was the one to be rewarded so he says almighty king let me suggest that you bring one of you on royal steed's forward and one of you on royal robes that you're not wearing and then let someone of some dignity be chosen to run before this steed through all the streets of Susa saying so shall the king honor those who serve him faithfully an excellent idea says the king

Mordecai is the man I wish to honor and please if you will Haman you be the man to run before his horse and to shout his praises we don't think we don't hope we know do we not we know that all things work together for good to them that love God to those who are called according to his purpose we know that God is ordering everything for your life that he has many thoughts about you that's what the psalmist says so many are your thoughts about me that I can't comprehend them all and they're all for my good you have faith to believe in God's hidden hand of providence you have faith to believe that

God has ordered your life to this point and that he will continue to order it for your good for his glory and for the world widespread and the gospel it's time for us as Christians to rise up beyond and beyond our doubts and our levels of uncertainty and be assured and step forward in confidence and to do what God would have us do with the opportunities that God has given to us and to speak to his glory without fear of what man might do to us because we know that God has called us to be his servants in his kingdom and by our faithful service his glory will be advanced and we will be protected and honored in his service so finally we see in the book of Esther that God climaxes all history for his glory for our good and for the worldwide spread of the gospel he places his people where he wishes he restrains his enemies by his hidden hand of providence as he wishes the decree has gone forth but he restrains it he orders even the smallest event for our good finally he climaxes history you've seen a poodle that is being washed they are all puffed up and then they shrink into almost nothing well that was

Haman that day he had run through the streets of Susa and shouted the glories of Mordecai to the point that he was so hoarse that he could hardly speak he comes in the front door and his wife says ah no time now don't you remember that this is that special day where you're to have dinner with the king the queen no one else but you three and the royal chariot is here waiting for you to take you to the palace and so we have the king on his dining couch the queen queen Esther on her dining couch and Haman the king speaks oh my beloved queen you have brought us here together what is it that you wish up to one half of my kingdom it is yours do you wish Africa it's yours Europe it's yours whatever you wish oh my beloved king there is someone in your kingdom that is seeking my life and the life of all my people what someone seeking the life of my beloved queen who is it it's this vile

[46 : 55] Haman the king rises from his dining couch and storms out of the room Haman realizes that his life is dangling on a string he stretches himself along the couch of queen Esther and begins to plead for his life the king returns with his soldiers what now he's going to force my wife in my own house let him never see the light of day again drape that black cloth over his head I understand a new gallows has been delivered to the palace let him hang and as for his vacancy let that faithful servant Mordecai be brought up into his position fine isn't it everything's worked out great but you forgot something what have you forgot you forgot the law of the needs and the purge already the decree is gone forth including

Mordecai and Esther who are to be annihilated on the given day and even the king cannot reverse that decree he cannot call it back no but he can issue another decree and so he removes his signet ring and turns it over to his new prime minister Mordecai and he says write whatever decree you wish and so Mordecai writes a decree that contrary to the policy of the Medes and the Persians the people of God scattered across three continents may arm themselves and if anyone should dare attempt to assault a Jew on that given day he is to be killed all his family and his goods are to be confiscated his children are to be sold into slavery and look at the way in which the outcome of the book comes

Esther chapter 8 verse 17 in every province and in every city wherever the edict of the king went there was joy and gladness among the Jews with feasting and celebrating and many people of other nationalities became Jews because the fear of the Jews had seized them you see it is a missionary book isn't it many people of other nationalities on three continents were suddenly converted to believe in the God of Israel many became Jews you know you remember Abraham was as a matter of fact a Jew a Gentile when he started off it was only by the call of God in the response of faith that he became a Jew and so many

Gentiles scattered across Africa Europe and Asia became Jews on that occasion they became a part of the Israel of God for the fear of the Jews had seized them if there had been no first decree for the annihilation of the Jews there would have been no second decree which caused the conversion of many Gentiles the conversion