

God Protects His people

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] And we shall read again verse 6. Esther chapter 3 and verse 6.

And he thought scorned to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had showed him the people of Mordecai, wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai.

The book of Esther is unusual. It doesn't once mention the name God.

There are ten chapters, and you won't find the name of God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Ghost in any of the ten chapters.

That's unusual for a book of the Bible. And yet, at the same time, every chapter and every verse of this book has God behind it.

[1 : 20] Right throughout the book, the Lord is always assumed, and always there, present and active. And it shows us, this book, that no matter how the enemies of God's people might rage against them, no matter how they might plot, and plan, and cunningly seek to destroy, that God's people are safe and secure.

They need not worry. God's people have the Almighty on their side, and he will ensure that all things work together for good to those who love him, who are the called according to his purpose.

So God's people ought to rejoice. And this is a book which ends on a note of joy. And of course, Scripture always guides us towards that eventual note.

joy unspeakable and full of glory. When the troubles and trials and testing times and persecutions of this world are behind us, then, for those who love the Lord and trust in him, there is the never-ending joy of paradise.

First of all, today, God's people are hated. Maybe this sounds a little bit strange to you, and perhaps somewhat extreme.

[3 : 03] Yes, there have been times, you say, when certainly God's people have been hated. And we know that there were people in our own country, like George Wishart and Patrick Hamilton, who were burnt to death, tied to a pole and surrounded with sticks and then set on fire.

There were people like Richard Cameron who had their head cut off just simply because they loved the Lord.

But these are things in history long ago. friends, still today, there's persecution. There's persecution in other countries.

In places like Peru, there has been persecution there in the very recent past. Pastors, Christians, taken and killed.

A midweek meeting, the men taken out of the meeting, lined up against the wall and shot. In Sudan, there's terrific persecution against Christians still today.

[4 : 38] Tribal leaders and prominent men in the Christian south of Sudan are tortured in order to try and persuade them to become Muslims and to give up their Christian faith.

Hundreds have disappeared because they were not prepared to give up their Christian faith. What about our country? These are countries far away.

Well, I believe that even in our own country, under the surface, there is still a hatred of Christianity. I remember some years ago when I was a student having a holiday job and something went wrong in this job and the boss thought that it was my fault and was blaming me for it.

I'll never forget the torrent of abuse that was directed not really especially at me but at Christians.

Christians. Because I was studying for the ministry. I was a Christian. And all the hatred of Christians that came out. Afterwards, I think he regretted it.

[6 : 01] And he was so kind, so nice to me always after that. that it just showed what was there in his heart. Something scratched the surface and out came this torrent of hatred against Christians.

lights. Just this past week I was talking to someone and this person asked me what church I was a minister in.

And I said I was a minister in the Free Church and then he began to speak about a Church of Scotland elder who lived next door to him. And the terrible things this Church of Scotland elder did.

And I could see from the way he spoke the hatred that he had for Christians and Christianity. It's great to find an excuse for denouncing God and God's people.

That's what you see. The enmity is there in the human heart. Christ said, he that is not for me is against me. Christ himself was despised and rejected of men.

[7 : 22] He was called a Samaritan and one possessed with a devil. They said to him, it's through Beelzebub, the prince of devils, that you're committing, that you're able to perform these miracles.

The hatred that was there. to the son of God, you're devil possessed. Haman was exalted to a very prominent position.

He seems to have been raised to a place next to the king, chief amongst the nobles. and the king had made a law that people should bow to Haman.

But amongst the nobles or leading men of Shushan, there was this Jewish man by the name of Mordecai and Mordecai wouldn't bow.

Why? Why would he not bow? It would seem that it was because there was a religious significance in the bow.

[8 : 35] Just as in later times, the emperors of Rome claimed for themselves deity and demanded worship, so at this time the emperors of Persia also claimed a semi-god position.

And Ahasuerus was passing this on to Haman as well and wanted people to give a kind of worship to Haman.

And of course, Mordecai wouldn't do this. He was a Jew. He was one of the people of God. He had a sensitive conscience.

He could remember the first commandment, thou shalt have no other gods before me. He could remember too the second commandment, thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in the heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth.

Thou shalt not bow down myself to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God. Jealous. I'm jealous of anybody else getting the glory and honor that belongs to me.

[9 : 59] Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and to the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, them that do not keep my commandments, them that bow to false gods and pay reverence to man that should be given to me.

And so Mordecai will not bow and Haman finds out about it and Haman is angry, proud Haman and he disdains to destroy Mordecai alone.

He wants to destroy not just Mordecai but the whole race of the Jews, all those who along with Mordecai worship Jehovah.

You see how he puts it in verse 8 when he comes to the king and asks the king for permission to destroy all the Jews. He says there is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among 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 prophet to suffer them. They're a different sort of people and their religion is different.

[11 : 28] It's quite an uncompromising religion. Other religions you can push them this way and that way and they'll shape or form themselves into whatever mold is required.

But these people their religion is different. It's awkward. It's odd. They will not obey the king's laws. They are a strange people, a different people, an awkward people, a people that should be got rid of.

Yes, God's people are different. and the religion of God's people is different from every other religion in the world. Every other religion will bend and accommodate, but the true Christian religion will not bend in any way.

It is completely uncompromising and it claims complete exclusiveness. it is the only way of salvation.

There is no other name given under heaven among men through whom we must be saved but the name of Jesus. I am the way, the truth, and the life.

[12 : 51] No man cometh unto the Father but by me. And except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

God. Let us remember that if we are truly faithful to the Lord, the same hatred will be shown to us as was shown to Mordecai and to the Jews of his day.

They that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. That's what the scripture says. They that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

Why don't we suffer persecution? Is it not? Because we do not live godly in Christ Jesus. Are we prepared to suffer on his side?

Are we prepared to live the godly life no matter what it costs? are we not too weak and watery and compromising?

[14 : 05] Christ was hated. He was crucified. And Jesus said if they do these things in the green tree what shall be done in the dry?

There was Jesus so spotless, so pure, so holy, so godly and so good, so kind, so loving, so generous, so helpful.

There was Jesus and what did they do to him? Away with him, crucify him, he's not fit to live. And if they do these things to the green tree, the perfect one, the green wood, what will they do to the dry wood that will burn so easily?

You see it's easy for them to find faults with you and me. No problem at all. We can be easily criticized, every one of us. There are huge noops in our lives.

All of us do things wrong and if they do these things in the green tree and if Christ suffered in that way, how will we not suffer too? God's people are hated.

[15 : 16] There's nothing that the press loves more and to find an opportunity of putting down upon the church, to find something against the people of God and to make mountains out of mole hills and if possible to denigrate and to cause God's people to be despised.

The people of God are hated. We should not be surprised about that. Jesus said, In this world you shall have tribulation. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.

Rejoice and be exceeding glad for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. You're in good company if you suffer the abuse and the persecution of the world.

It's something that is natural because there is enmity and hatred in the human heart against God and therefore against the people of God.

Secondly, the place of prayer. Mordecai is faithful to God. He will not bow to Haman but things are going wrong.

[16 : 48] And not only he himself is due to suffer but all God's people are going to be annihilated. The law has gone out. The Persian empire is across the whole world.

It's this massive empire of Ahasuerus and right throughout all the kingdoms of Ahasuerus this law is being proclaimed that on a certain day every Jew is to be put to death.

The king and Haman sit down to drink wine. Oh how happy Haman is. Exalted, promoted, successful, achieving his ends.

he eats and he drinks with a king and he makes merry and he's glad. But we're told that the city of Shushan was perplexed.

There were many people who were distressed. Mordecai himself rent his clothes, put sacrifice upon him as a sign of mourning, uttered a loud and bitter cry.

[18 : 03] There he was, weeping and wailing because he loves God's people and the thought of their destruction deeply touches him. A loud and bitter cry.

But is it a cry of despair? No. There are certain things that I want you to notice with regard to Mordecai. One thing is his prayer.

He sends, he prays, yes. prays to the Lord and looks to God for help. God is always able to help. With man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

All things. Remember that. There's never a situation which is so desperate that God is not able to deliver, to help.

Amen. Amen. He prays them, he prays for help, but he does more than that. His is not prayer without action, but prayer with action, and action is also required.

[19 : 17] He sends to Esther, and he reminds his niece Esther of what she must do. Esther says, there's nothing I can do.

The king hasn't asked me in for weeks, and if I go in to meet the king, very likely I will die.

Mordecai replies, hold your peace, and deliverance will come from another angle. see the faith that he had.

Prayer, action, faith. Esther, you are in a very prominent position. Has God put you in that position for such a time as this?

Do nothing, and remember, God is looking after his cause, and God will deliver his own cause. He doesn't need you, Esther.

[20 : 26] But if you refuse to act, you will suffer for it. Deliverance will come from another angle. Who knows but that you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this.

God is so there's prayer, there's action, and there's faith. Esther replies, pray for me. For the next three days, fast and pray.

Fasting involves humbling themselves, and without distraction, with earnestness, laying aside every care, and every responsibility, and every work, in order to give themselves totally to prayer, fasting, and praying, and not just Mordecai on his own, but all the Jews that he can gather, united.

There's value in a person's prayer on their own, but there's even more value in God's people joining together with one voice to pray to the Lord.

Let us remember that God is in control. He has his plan, and he has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, and yet prayer is valuable, and prayer fits into that plan, and often God's way for working out his plan is through the prayers.

[22 : 05] The fasting and the prayers of his people. When we look at the cause of God today in our own land, and in other places, particularly Western Europe, God's cause is very low.

It's weak. The churches are weak. There's much to discourage and to dishearten us. But God's people must pray, must unite in prayer, must humble themselves and fast before the Lord, and cry to the Lord for his blessing.

And God hears and answers prayer. Ask. Hitherto you have asked nothing. Ask, and you shall receive. believe. So we have there then the place of prayer.

Mordecai, Esther, the Jews, united in prayer, united in faith along with our prayer. And yes, at the same time involved in action, going to see the king.

Finally, we see God's way of salvation, of deliverance. where did it start? You could say that it started with Esther's good looks.

[23 : 24] God gave good looks to Esther with a purpose. And then there was Vashti, the queen's downfall. That too was part of God's deliverance.

And then Esther was taken into the palace. And then the chamberlain, the king's chamberlain, preferred Esther to all the other women and gave her every advantage.

And then the king fell in love with Esther and she became queen. There God's hand was working and Mordecai had said to Esther that she must not tell her people that she belonged to the Jews.

Again, that was part of God's plan and purpose. And Mordecai witnesses a plot by Big Pham and Teresh to kill the king and is able to inform on them.

And the king forgets to reward Mordecai. Again, all part of God's plan. God is working on all these things, sometimes working through our forgetting certain things in order to bring forward his own plan.

[24 : 51] The king is a sleepless night. The Lord gives us sleep and sometimes the Lord takes away sleep from us. And there's a plan in the sleep and there's a plan in the times when we cannot sleep.

And when he cannot sleep he thinks of the chronicles of the nation, of the empire, and asks that they be taken in and read to him.

And there it is read concerning Mordecai, how he saved the king's life, and there's no record of any reward given to him.

And there's that fascinating story of Haman coming into the palace to ask the king for permission to hang Mordecai.

And the king asks who is in the court of the palace. And they say Haman is there. He calls in Haman. Before Haman can speak or make his request, the king asks him, what shall be done to the man and the king delights to honour.

[26 : 01] And Haman thinks, who would the king delight to honour more than myself? And so he says, let the king's clothes, royal robes be taken and the king's crown put upon his head, and let him be placed upon the king's horse, and let the king's, one of the king's most prominent nobles take him through the city, shouting before him, thus shall be done to the man and the king delights to honour.

And the king said, well, go and do that to Mordecai. It's so ironical. And it shows how the plotting of evil men turns back upon themselves.

Silly, puny little man thinks he can fight against his maker, thinks he can destroy the people of God, but God's kingdom shall prosper whatever happens, and all the enemies of God's church shall be destroyed and made as the mire under the feet of God's people.

Esther is accepted when she goes in to the king, and the king and Haman come to her first banquet and then to her second banquet, and then Haman is found out to be plotting not only the destruction of Mordecai, but really in essence the destruction even of the queen.

And so wicked Haman is hanged on the gallows that he made for Mordecai. Mordecai is given his place, given the king's ring, writes letters of deliverance to all the countries, to the Jews, and all the nations that are part of the Persian Empire.

[27 : 54] The enemies of God's people are destroyed, and the Jews have joy, and they still to this present day celebrate Purim, the feast that commemorates this deliverance.

God is looking after his church, his kingdom. It's still the same today. God's looking after his people. There are temporary setbacks, but they're only temporary.

Prayer is heard. Faith is rewarded. Action entrusted upon the Lord is never in vain. I wonder whose side are you on today?

It's only the two sides. God's side and the devil's side. Mordecai's side and Haman's side. For Christ or against him?

Are you committed to Christ today? Are you ashamed of him? Or are you standing out openly, fearlessly, on his side, no matter what it costs, no matter what demands are made?

[29 : 04] I'm on the Lord's side. I want to be his, and I'm going to follow him and stand for him, no matter what it costs. It's more important to follow the Lord than anything else.

Or are you on the devil's side? Surely it's time you give up following Satan. He's destroyed already, and his future is hell.

Why should you follow him down to the pit? Seek the Lord, turn to him, make your peace with God, kiss ye the son, lest in his ire you perish from the way, if once his wrath begin to burn.

Blessed all that on him stay. Let us pray. We thank thee, O Lord, for thy providential care of thy people, no matter how strong their enemies are, no matter how powerful, yet it will all come to nothing.

We bless thee, O Lord, that thou art the same yesterday, today, and forever, the same in our own situation today as thou wast in the days of Mordecai and Esther, and thou wilt never leave nor forsake thy people.

[30 : 27] Help us then to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Bless us each one, and draw near unto us, and draw us near unto thy self, and help us all to forsake the paths of Satan and to follow the living God for Jesus' sake.

Amen.