

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

**DHW BIBLE CLASS
LESSON 5
THE BOOK OF ESTHER
CHAPTER 5**

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 ends with Esther declaring that she would put her life on the line to approach the king without being called. According to Persian law, it could mean certain death. Chapter 5 takes us to the resolution of that tension. Would King Ahasuerus receive her or would he reject and send her to be executed? Should the latter happen, either the Jews would be exterminated at the appointed time or God would intervene with a miracle to save His people. This chapter, however, is filled with irony and surprise on the part of the four protagonists: King Ahasuerus, Haman, Esther, and Mordecai.

Life is also filled with paradoxes. The way to become the chief is to become the servant of all. The Lord Jesus Christ taught this paradoxical truth to His disciples. This truth is illustrated in the events in this chapter. Haman the enemy of the Jews who was full of self-pride, seeking only to advance himself and his self-interest, was brought down whereas Esther, who was humble and who fasted and prayed to God, was raised up. Pride goes before a fall. A wicked man will be

pursued by evil itself, but the righteous and good will be accordingly rewarded. It is also sad to note that people, who have wealth and power, could enjoy nothing. This is illustrated in the life of Haman. The virtue of trusting and patiently waiting upon the LORD is seldom learned. At times, we fret because the wicked seems to be prospering in his ways. Then, all the more we need to have faith in the LORD who is the righteous Judge.

OUTLINE

1. The King Received Esther (vv 1-3);
2. Banquet Invitation from Esther (vv 4-8);
3. Mixed Emotions from Haman (vv 5:9-13);
4. Haman Constructed Gallows (v 14).

COMMENTARY

The King Received Esther – 5:1-3

Esther proceeded to the king's palace "on the third day". The Jews commonly considered a part of any day as one day. For example, when the Bible says that Christ rose from the dead on the third day, it must not be understood from our perspective as a literal three 24-hour day period which is a full 72 hours. Part of a day equals one day in the Jews' method of estimation. She "put on royalty" (literally in Hebrew and as correctly translated) means she wore her royal robes and her royal crown to meet the king.

Although the crown is not mentioned, the text suggests its inclusion. It is a part of her full royal garment. She put on her very best for she was the only one who could put on royalty, thus accepting her royal position and importance. She put her life at risk by approaching the king without invitation. Then, she observed proper protocol as she waited in the wings of the king's throne room where she could be noticed, and at the same time to see what would be the king's response.

The king saw Esther his queen. She must have surprised him as she had not been called upon for the past 30 days. He must be aware that her life was in his hand as the law of the Persians forbade anyone from approaching the king without being commanded to do so. Thank God he was pleased to see her. The Bible said that she obtained favour in the king's sight. God had moved the king to look upon Esther with favour i.e. with grace. King Ahasuerus held out his golden sceptre to Esther. This signified acceptance and that she was free to approach him. She would be spared the death sentence. In the attempt to save the Jews, she did all that was humanly possible for a queen to do even as she committed the outcome unto the LORD of Israel. Appeal by fasting and prayer for God's providence does not negate a believer's responsibility to do his best.

Esther humbly and submissively approached the king by touching the top of the sceptre. Then King Ahasuerus asked her, "What wilt thou, queen Esther? And what is thy

request? It shall be given thee to the half of the kingdom" (v.3). He called her "Queen Esther". This is the first instance in the book when King Ahasuerus addressed her as such. The king was aware that Esther had come for an urgent matter, which was important enough for her to risk her life. He was eager to please her.

He asked her what her petition was. The statement that he was willing to give half of his kingdom to her should not be taken literally, but to be understood that he was willing to give her anything he could give. The favour that the king showed her was stupendous. The first part of her mission to save the people of Israel was accomplished. God answered the first part of her prayer. The threat of death to her was removed. Esther would not die but live on!

Banquet Invitation from Esther

– 5:4-8

Esther was expected to petition for the lives of her people. This was the very purpose for risking her life in calling on the king on her own accord. The king seemed happy that day, and was very generous, being so willing to give her anything. However, she simply asked the king and Haman to come to her banquet. What a masterly stroke from Esther! Instead of directly asking the king to spare the Jews, she invited him and Haman to her banquet. Such a delicate issue must not be raised so hastily. She had to create a situation wherein it would be conducive for the king to accede to her request. Perhaps, to hold a banquet in the king's honour would be the best way to his heart.

Esther invited the king in a meek and pleading manner and not in an imposing manner. Rather, she chose to appeal to the king's heart by saying, "if it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him" (v.4). She was being compliant and polite. The surprising thing she did was to include Haman in her invitation. Did she not know that Haman was the enemy of the Jews? This is unimaginable, knowing the nature of the petition she would ultimately have to place before the king.

There is a point that is not very clear. In her invitation, she said that she had prepared the banquet "for him" (v.4b). Who is "him"? Does it refer to the king or Haman? If it was Haman, then Esther was acting wisely by playing up his ego and at the same time lulling him into a false sense of security. If it meant the king, then Esther complied with the old adage:- The best way to a man's heart is through his stomach. Perhaps Esther could have deliberately intended her answer to be vague. The king could think that it refers to him and Haman could also think that it refers to him as he had just been promoted by the King.

The king ordered his servant to summon Haman to come quickly to attend Esther's banquet. The king then asked Esther: "what is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed" (v.6). Obviously it was after they had eaten and drunk. The King happily repeated

his question and made the same offer to Esther.

Esther sprang another surprise. Instead of presenting her petition, she invited the king and Haman to a second banquet on the following day. She continued maintaining her respectful, submissive and meek demeanour, and politely and winsomely asked the king to come to this second banquet. Hoping not to try the king's impatience, she promised him that she would present her request as he so desired at this second banquet. But this delay could be dangerous. Haman was the king's most influential and dangerous official.

We cannot ascertain the real reason for Esther's delay and her request for another banquet. We can only say that she knew what she was doing as we would learn later that she successfully delivered the Jews from the wicked Haman. Of course, the LORD was behind it all but the emphasis here on human responsibility cannot be considered as incorrect.

Mixed Emotions from Haman – 5:9-13

Haman returned home that day after Esther's banquet "joyful and with a glad heart" (v.9). He had made his way past the king's gate. As he passed by, his presence was noticed and the officials at the king's gate stood up and rendered their due respect to him. However, Mordecai, who was probably no more in mourning clothes, did not stand up nor did he move for him. Haman was filled with rage against Mordecai. Haman could not stand the sight of Mordecai or his capacity as a

royal official. He was able to control his temper, showing that he was not a victim of his own emotions. Why was he able to control his anger? The text does not reveal, but there are a few suggestions. Perhaps, he realized that continued venting off his anger would not do him any good. He could have consoled himself that soon Mordecai and all his people would be killed. Or perhaps, he was eager to get to his wife and friends to boast of his good fortunes. It could be a combination of these reasons.

When Haman returned to his home, he called for his wife and friends. He told them of the great wealth that he possessed, and “the multitude of his children.” In those days, a gauge of manliness was the number of children that he had and; it goes without saying, the large number of concubines. He had been the favourite official of the king as evidenced by the fact that he had been promoted to the rank of second-in-command in the empire. Moreover, the king had ordered his subordinates to pay homage to him whenever he walked by them. Furthermore, Haman prided himself as the only person Esther invited to accompany the king to her special banquet, which she had personally prepared. Moreover, he was again invited together with the king to Esther’s second banquet to be held the following day. Nevertheless, Haman admitted that all these wealth, power, positions, possessions, and privileges were of no consequence to him as long as he kept seeing Mordecai, the Jew, sitting at the king’s gate.

How foolish of him to feel dissatisfied, angry and bitter just because of Mordecai. Haman was a person who thought only of himself and self advancement. He was full of pride and self-aggrandizement. Such a person would never be satisfied in his heart. This illustrates the fallen nature of man. Indeed, Haman’s misery, which is self-imposed, arose from his glaring vice, that is, pride. He bragged; he boasted; he gloated; he crowed! He unwittingly became a tool of Satan to do his evil bidding by fighting against God and His people.

Haman Constructed Gallows – 5:14

Seeing Haman’s pathetic emotional state, his wife Zeresh and his friends tried to console him. They told him to erect a gallows fifty cubits high (one cubit is about 1.5 feet), and to ask for the king’s permission to hang Mordecai. He could then rejoice and be able to enjoy himself with the king at Esther’s second banquet. The idea pleased Haman. He ordered the gallows to be erected that night. Obviously, he could not wait for Mordecai to be killed. He would be present to see the carpenters build the gallows. Why so high? Fifty cubits is about seventy-five feet.

It was very high. It is clear that he wanted all the inhabitants of Shushan to witness the hanging. What kind of wife and friends did Haman have? They, especially his wife, would have done him a better favour if they had warned him of the danger and the consequences of his wounded pride.

PRACTICAL VALUE

There are a number of lessons we can learn from the main characters in this chapter. Divine providence does not negate human responsibility. Many Christians may have the idea that since they have prayed to God, there is no need to observe cultural norms and practices. Although Esther had called the Jews to fast and pray for her, she put on the right clothes to approach the king. This is a right move. God sees both the heart and the external appearance. One should always be appropriately attired for any social functions or gatherings. Every Sunday, we should be wearing our Sunday best to worship the LORD. If our heart is truly right, we would express it in our appearance. The notion that a Christian maybe careless in his/her dressing and yet be beautiful and worshipful in his/her heart is baseless. Many of us would take much thought and trouble to wear appropriately and presentably when applying for a job or attending an important function! Why should Christians practise a sub-standard behaviour in this regard when approaching God?

Esther was humble, meek and intelligent. In contrast, Haman was proud, boastful and foolish. She got what she wanted—the king's grace and mercy. She teaches us the right way to relate with others. Haman's pride attracts friends who were no good at all for they placated or pleased him when they should have counselled him to do the right thing. Are you a friend who would say things to another in order to please him so that you are always in

his favour? May it never be so! How many people have suffered because of such behaviour!

The king's business must be done in haste. This may not necessarily be good all the time. The king's business must be conducted in a proper and timely manner. Esther's delay in presenting her petition to the king is not a bad tactic though risky. But the risk of presenting her petition without being fully assured in her mind and heart that she would get a positive response from the king is greater. Suppose she had made known her petition at the very first meeting with the king in the presence of Haman, he could have time to dissuade the king from consenting to it. Esther's wisdom was God-given. Her steps were ordered by the Lord. So, we should never rush into doing things without praying and careful consideration. However, this must not be an excuse for procrastination.

The next lesson all of us ought to learn is about the destructive power of bitterness and anger. This is illustrated by Haman. In spite of the riches, power and the many good things he had been blessed with, he was unduly plagued with anger and bitterness over a man who refused to bow to him. It made him unhappy and unable to enjoy all the blessings that he had. This anger and bitterness was gradually eating him up. We should ask the Lord to remove such sinful feelings from our hearts. As Christians, we should have the mind of Christ. Such matters must be committed to the Lord who is the righteous Judge, and as He

said (Romans 12:19): "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Esther 5:1-8; Proverbs 21:1; James 4:6.

TUESDAY: Esther 5:9-14; Proverbs 13:21; 16:18.

WEDNESDAY: Esther 5:1-14.

THURSDAY: Esther 5:1-14.

FRIDAY: Esther 5:1-14.

Discussion Questions

1. "God sees the heart and not the outward appearance." Is this statement true? Esther depended on God for she told the Jews to fast and pray for her. Should Esther wear her royal apparel to approach the king? Was she still dependent on God or on herself?

2. What enabled Esther to put her life at risk by approaching the king without being called?

3. What character change did Esther experience between chapter 4 and chapter 5? At what point did this change begin to happen?

4. What character traits of Esther emerge in chapter 5?

5. What did the king do when he saw Esther in the inner court of his palace? What was the significance of his action?

6. What personal qualities of Esther can we emulate?

7. Why did she delay in presenting her petition to the king?

8. What do we learn about the kind of person Haman was in vv. 9-14?

9. What were the things Haman boasted about himself?

10. Why was Haman not happy in spite of all his wealth and power?

11. How did Haman's family and friends help fuel his arrogance?

14. Do you know of any Haman today? Can you cite example/s in your life without naming him/ them?

12. What should Haman's wife and friends counsel him?

15. What tensions have been built up involving the main characters by the end of this chapter?

13. Had God been providential in this chapter? Cite the instance(s)?
