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The End of God's Providence, 2

Esther 7-9:15

Most of you have probably heard a song or two by Randy Traywick. Some describe him as having the quintessential country singer's voice. He is known for such songs as "Forever and Ever, Amen", "Deeper Than the Holler", and "Three Wooden Crosses".

Yet one of my favorite Randy Traywick songs — or as you know him, Randy Travis — is "If You Only Knew". The first stanza and chorus go like this:

By my grandfather's bed, my mother is reading,

Psalm 62, "God is our refuge."
My grandfather stirs. Could it be, he is waking?
One final time, he has something to say:

If you only knew what lies awaiting,
If you could only see what I can see,
If you could only hear the music playing,
The angels singing sweet victory.
Oh, if you only knew, if you only knew,
How much he loves you!

One of the reasons I like this song is that it addresses a problem that everyone in this room has when it comes to God and Christ. We undervalue His goodness, His kindness, His love, and the mercy which He lavishes upon us daily!...

All of us are "performance based" when it comes to our walks with God. Our flesh is constantly "rebuilding what was once destroyed" (Galatians 2:18). Though we believe we are saved by grace, nevertheless we typically approach God on the basis of —

- The good we have done.
- The duties we have performed.
- The intentions of the heart.

We see this most poignantly when God's providence seemingly turns against us and we are left to suffer, struggle, or hurt. In such circumstances, how long is it before we appeal to God based on our conduct? *"God, haven't I been a good Christian? Haven't I been in Your word? Haven't I sought to be holy? Why are you doing this?"*

This is where God's people found themselves in the days of Esther. Times were difficult, the nation was destroyed, and God's people were left to pick up the pieces as they suffered under foreign oppression. And yet, they were under no delusion as to why they were suffering. They lived with the understanding that they had let God down- which is why they went in exile! And so, they believed that God was "far away"- removed from their daily living and daily struggles.

Yet we know, based on what we've seen thus far in Esther, that they were wrong! Their salvation was rooted NOT in their choice of God, BUT in God's character and in His choice of them. As Christ told His disciples:

John 15:16a, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you..."

Accordingly, God gave this Old Testament gospel, the book of Esther, to His people to lift their focus from the horizontal (themselves and their struggles) to the Lord. Accordingly, this book is all about God's unconditional love for His people which results

in His non-stop protection, mercy, and care!

The second to the last section of this book (Esther 7-9:15) which is an exposé of the end or telos of God's providence! And this brings us to look at God's ultimate plan for His people.

A Shocking and Unbelievably Glorious Reversal, vv. 1-2.

Esther 8:1-2, "On that day King Ahasuerus gave the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews, to Queen Esther; and Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had disclosed what he was to her.¹ And the king took off his signet ring which he had taken away from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman."

This details three massive reversals which Mordecai, Esther, and for all of God's people at the time would never have imagined. Notice that Esther received all the wealth of Haman.

Esther 8:1a, "On that day King Ahasuerus gave the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews, to Queen Esther..."

In the ancient world when a man committed a crime against the crown, his property and wealth reverted to the crown.² That is why when Jezebel sought to address King Ahab's depression over Naboth's refusal to give or sell his vineyard to the king (1 Kings 21:1-4), Jezebel brought forth false witnesses saying that Naboth cursed both God and Ahab (1 Kings 21:5-13). And after Naboth was executed for his "crime", Jezebel exhorted Ahab, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money..." (1 Kings 21:15b).

On account of Naboth's supposed treachery and upon his death, his vineyard was forfeited to Ahab! So it was with Haman's property.³ Upon his execution for his rebellion against Ahasuerus, Haman's property, wealth, business — *EVERYTHING* he had — was forfeited to the king.⁴ And what did Ahasuerus do? He gave it all to Esther!⁵

Mordecai was Given the Office that Haman Held as Prime Minister (vv. 1b-2a)

Esther 8:1b-2a, "...and Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had disclosed what he was to her. And the king took off his signet ring which he had taken away from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai..."

According to the text, after Haman was exposed as a traitor and executed, Esther explained to Ahasuerus the relationship she had with Mordecai — NOT ONLY that he was her cousin, BUT that he raised her. This news, along with that morning's

revelation that years before Mordecai had saved the king's life (Esther 6:1-2), naturally aroused in Ahasuerus the desire to meet this man. Now when Mordecai was brought before the king, what do we read? Ahasuerus took "the signet ring" which Haman possessed as Prime Minister and gave it to Mordecai!!⁶

That meant that Mordecai was promoted to Prime Minister over Persia⁷... second in command to the king!^{8,9,10,11} In other words, Mordecai received the office, status, and power of Haman!

Esther Invested Mordecai with the Rule and Authority of the House of Haman (v. 2b)

Esther 8:2b, "...and Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman."

As queen of Persia, Esther would NOT have been able to oversee the affairs of Haman's business and estate. Accordingly, and quite naturally, she gave that role to Mordecai. Mordecai now was the man in charge — the CEO — of Haman's kingdom.¹²

By themselves each of these reversals is shocking. Yet taken as a whole, they are unbelievable and yet glorious! Less than twenty-four hours prior to this moment:

- Haman was using the combined wealth and resources of his household and position to inflict suffering upon the Jews.
- Esther was playing with fire as she approached the king unbidden.
- Mordecai was headed to the gallows.
- And God's people were living with the oppressive burden that in eleven months, the entire nation of Persia had the right to kill them, take their property, and enslave their families... and there was no one anywhere in power who seemed to care!

And now, *SUDDENLY*, in less than a day, all of this changed!

Last time as we began looking at this section, we considered how it was and is a picture of the Last Day. Think of Haman's sudden downfall (Esther 7).

1 Thessalonians 5:2-3: "For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape."

Is NOT Esther 7 a graphic portrayal of this?

And yet, the parallels to the Last Day do NOT end in chapter 7. For if you know your

Bible, you know that on the Last Day three glorious and amazing things are going to take place when it comes to you and me. Just like with Haman, the wealth of the nations will be brought before the Lord and be given to Him (Revelation 21:26). Speaking of the New Jerusalem and God's Shekinah Glory that illumines it we read this:

Revelation 21:24-26, "And the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it. And in the daytime (for there shall be no night there) its gates shall never be closed; and they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it."

Yet already God has told us that- just like with Esther- that wealth will be handed over to you and me. Recall what Christ promised:

Matthew 5:5, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." (ESV)

Lest you think that Christ here is merely speaking poetically, listen to the words of Paul:

2 Corinthians 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."

Truly, the "Health and Wealth Gospel" which speaks of God plan for His people to be rich is an accurate doctrine. It just has the timing all wrong! It is NOT in this life that we receive the wealth of Haman, yet the day is coming when we will receive Haman's wealth — the wealth of the nations! Think of it: in the New Heavens and Earth we'll walk on paving stones made of gold!

A second glorious and amazing thing that awaits us when Christ returns is the conferring of Kingdom stewardship to God's people. Just as Mordecai was entrusted with the stewardship given to Haman, so it will be with all in Christ. Speaking of the religious unsaved:

Matthew 25:24-29, "And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no *seed*. And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground; see, you have what is yours.' But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I scattered no *seed*. Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my *money* back with interest. [Clearly, the master was NOT harsh (that was the excuse the slave hoped his master would buy); RATHER the slave was lazy! As a result, notice what God does...] Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.' For to everyone who has shall *more* be given, and he shall have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even

what he does have shall be taken away.”

Is this NOT what happened with Haman? And is this NOT what is going to happen in eternity when all in Christ come before the Lord? NOT ONLY will we receive the wealth of the nations, BUT all positions of responsibility and authority will be handed over to the child of God! Christian, this is your future!

The third glorious and amazing thing that awaits us when Christ returns: We will be reinvested with the stewardship originally given at creation. When God made man and placed him in the garden, what was God’s charge?

Genesis 1:28, “And God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

Family of God, in eternity future such will be the charge given once again to each and everyone of us in Christ.

2 Timothy 2:12: “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him.”

The word for “reign” is *συμβασιλεύω* (*sumbasileuō*) which is the compound of *σύν* (*sun*) which means “with” and *βασιλεύω* (*basileuō*) which means “to reign/rule as a king”! When Christ returns, once again we shall rule over this earth as a king!

And is this NOT what occurred when Mordecai was given charge over Haman’s household? Mordecai became the man in charge! And so, it will be with us at Christ’s return!

I hope you see it! What we read here about Esther and Mordecai is BUT a shadow of what awaits all in Christ! So don’t miss it: “this is what is done for the man whom the King [of kings] desires to honor” (Esther 6:6)!

Now if that was NOT enough, there is more! For again, what was the state of Judaism when Esther was written? What were the main characters of this story — Esther and Mordecai- like when God initially blessed them?

What would you think about a Christian who moved his family to Hollywood and diligently worked to introduce his daughters and sons one by one to some of the greatest movie stars and pop stars in the hope that they could get married?

Think of it. I hear Johnny Depp is in the market for a wife. By the way, so is Brad Pitt. If you don’t like movie stars, I also hear Bill Gates and Tom Brady is now available! Then there’s Brittany Spears and many more.

In all honesty, what would be your estimation of a Christian who sought to marry their daughter to a non-Christian who was rich and powerful? Yet many have no problem that Mordecai and Esther worked toward this same end with a notorious sinner who at the time was married! In fact, a couple of my commentaries think in the early chapters Esther was virtuous and worthy to be emulated! Family of God, clearly, she wasn't!¹³ And neither was Mordecai.

The Old Testament children of God were called to submit to the governing authority which in this case was Haman. We understand that the Fifth Commandment speaks of honoring NOT simply father and mother, BUT all in authority. Referencing this, Charles Hodge wrote:

Civil government is a divine institution, and hence the duty of obedience to our legitimate rulers is a duty owed to God as well as to our fellow men. Some have supposed that the right or legitimate authority of human government has its foundation ultimately in 'the consent of the governed,' 'the will of the majority,' or in some imaginary 'social compact' entered into by the forefathers of the race at the origin of social life. It is self-evident, however, that the divine will is the source of all government [as is] the obligation to obey that will. (Hodge, 2019, p. 293)

This understanding was seminal as God's people lived under the kings of the Old Testament. Yet NOT SO with Mordecai. The lawful authority of Persia called upon the nation to honor Haman (Esther 3:2b, 3), and Mordecai refused (Esther 3:2a; 5:9)!

Furthermore, the Old Testament children of God were exhorted NOT to entangle themselves with the pagan cultures and people around them. Yet unlike Daniel and his friends, Mordecai's advice to Esther was to indulge/embrace the Persian system and by all means NOT to practice her Jewish religion. And she was all too happy to comply!

Now, does this make them lost sinners with no hope? No! It makes them compromised servants of God — part and parcel of Judaism at this point in Redemptive history and so the poster children of the object of God's dealings in this book!

Yet- *AND THIS IS THE POINT*- what did God do with these compromised children? Did He disown them? Did He smite them? NO! RATHER IN HIS PROVIDENCE, GOD WORKED EVERYTHING THAT OCCURRED IN THEIR LIVES FOR THEIR GOOD! And we can expect nothing less from God today in our lives!

Why? In part it is because of the end to which God is bringing you, me, and His church.

What is that end? It involves a shocking and unbelievably glorious reversal where we someday will:

- Possess the earth and its wealth.
- Be entrusted with the stewardship of this world.
- Be given the glorious call to co-reign with God for the rest of eternity!

And everything that God has ordained in your life — yesterday, today, and tomorrow — has and will serve that end!

With this, we — as well Esther’s generation — are called to live by faith, trusting God in and through all things, regardless of where God may lead us!

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End Note(s)

¹ “The Hebrew phrase is literally ‘what he was to her’ (see NKJV, NRSV), which potentially means more than just a family relationship. Mordecai has been Esther’s wise adviser, faithful protector and the one who motivates, challenges and inspires her. Xerxes cannot afford to ignore these qualities now that Haman needs replacing. It seems as if Esther and Mordecai are now perceived as a single entity consisting of complementary qualities. In sum, Esther is saying to Xerxes, ‘take us together’.” (Reid, 2008, p. 131)

² “In ancient Persia, betrayal of the king meant not only loss of life, but loss of property. According to Herodotus (Hist. 3.128–129), the property of a certain traitor named Oroetes became the property of the state. In a similar vein, Josephus wrote that Cyrus decreed that anyone who did not obey his laws concerning the Jews would be crucified, and their estates would be confiscated by the government (Ant. 1.17).” (Tomasino, 2016, p. 308)

³ We have indication that in the Persian Empire the goods and property of condemned criminals were taken over by the king (Herodotus, *History*, 3.128–29; cf. the story of Naboth’s vineyard in 1 Kgs 21:7–16. C. Moore, *Esther*, AB (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), 77).” (Breneman, 1993, p. 351)

⁴ “The same law operated with regard to Haman’s house, a word which in Genesis 39:4 is synonymous with ‘all that he had’. So here Haman’s total estate is meant. This the king bestows on Queen Esther by way of compensation and as a token of good will.” (Baldwin, 1985, p. 94)

⁵ “So with Haman dead, the ownership of his estate would have been transferred to Xerxes, who could dispose of it however he saw fit. In a rare case of personal initiative, the king decides to bestow it on Esther, either to compensate her for her grief or to demonstrate his royal favor.” (Tomasino, 2016, p. 308)

⁶ “The act also draws another parallel between Mordecai and Joseph, a parallel noted earlier in the honors granted Mordecai in chapter 6 (see commentary on 6:9). In Gen 41, when Pharaoh named Joseph second-in-command over Egypt, he immediately ‘took the signet ring from his hand, and put it on the hand of Joseph’ (Genesis 41:42). The narrator of Esther, by placing the transfer of the signet immediately upon Mordecai’s investiture, is likely making another allusion to Joseph. The audience has been somewhat primed to recognize this allusion by the previous allusions that appeared in chapter 6. The broader parallels between the two figures are obvious: both are Israelites residing in a foreign land as “exiles”; both are threatened by the authorities; both are promoted to second-in-command; both use their authority to secure the salvation of their people (Joseph by saving his father and brothers from the famine in Canaan; Genesis 45:4–11). We might note, however, that Mordecai’s character pales in comparison to Joseph: Joseph was imprisoned because of his refusal to compromise his high morals; he achieved his office because of the supernatural gifts bestowed on him by God; and he carefully gave credit to God for his abilities (Genesis 41:16). Mordecai will indeed rescue his people, but it was through Esther’s beauty and cleverness that the deliverance was made possible.” (Tomasino, 2016, p. 309)

⁷ “...according to Herodotus, Hist. 9.107, a certain Xenagoras, apparently not a particularly illustrious man, was made governor of all Cilicia as a reward for saving the life of the king’s brother during a brawl. Perhaps becoming the vizier for saving the king’s life would not be out of proportion.” (Tomasino, 2016, p. 310)

⁸ “The bestowal of the signet ring conveyed legal authority to act on the king’s behalf (cf. 3:10).” (Baldwin, 1985, p. 94)

⁹ “‘The king took off his signet ring ... and presented it to Mordecai.’ Thus he placed Mordecai in the position of grand vizier, the position that Haman had held previously.” (Breneman, 1993, p. 352)

¹⁰ “The transfer of the signet ring is somewhat different in this episode than in the case of Haman. Haman had not received the ring when installed in office, but only when the king commissioned him to write the edict concerning the Jews (Esther 3:10). Here, however, the signet ring is transferred as a sign of office. Haman, it seems, came into his authority more incrementally than Mordecai. All the power granted to Haman with the signet is immediately placed at Mordecai’s disposal, empowering him to do what is necessary to overturn Haman’s edict.” (Tomasino, 2016, p. 309)

¹¹ “By this act Mordochai was advanced to the post of first minister of the king; comp. Genesis 41:42, 1 Macc. 6:15. The king’s seal gave the force of law to royal edicts, the seal taking the place of the signature.” (Keil & Delitzsch, 2006, p. 230; Volume 4)

¹² “Esther placed her kinsman in charge of Haman’s estate. Haman’s wealth, title, and power now belonged to his enemy Mordecai.” (Huey, 1988, p. 4828)

¹³ “...Esther finally came completely out of the closet about her ethnicity and her relationship to Mordecai. Far from being disturbed by the revelation that Esther was Jewish, the king’s response to the news was to promote Mordecai into Haman’s former position as vizier over the empire. This fact should make us wonder once again about the wisdom of Esther’s entire chameleon strategy. Not only was it morally dubious (to say the least) for Esther to hide her Jewishness, since it required her to live as a practical

pagan for five years, but now it turns out that even pragmatically it may have been a mistake. Perhaps if Esther had revealed her Jewishness and her connection to Mordecai back in chapter 2, the whole threat to the Jewish community might have been circumvented... Far from bringing about the desired result of safety, then, Esther's hiddenness may have been what unwittingly opened the door to danger for her whole people." (Duguid, 2005, pp. 99-100)