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Haman the Agagite

Esther 3

Prayer: *Father, I just again I thank you Lord, that you are glorified in all that you do and that you give us the privilege of participating in that. And so we pray, Lord, this morning that you would be glorified in each and every part of the service, particularly in that part where we open up your word, and Lord, part of that requires the presence of your Holy Spirit. So we ask this morning that you would give us the gift of your spirit, that you would accompany us, open our eyes and ears and heart as we look into your word and make it of permanent value, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we are looking at the book of Esther which is the story of God's sovereign intervention in the lives of his people, and we pick up the story with Mordecai and Esther, they are Jews living under the radar in Persia. And although they were cousins, Mordecai was actually more of a father to Esther. And when the king winds up selecting Esther to be the new queen, well actually to be working in part of the harem at first, soon to become queen,

but at that point Mordecai continues to keep tabs on her. We pick up the story at *Esther 2:11*. It says: *And every day Mordecai walked in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and what was happening to her.* Now at this point both Esther and Mordecai are still, it's not known that they are Jews and Mordecai has risen to a place of some authority as a local official in the king's government. So Mordecai's place which is now at the king's gate gives him an opportunity to learn something that is of vital importance to the king. This is *Esther 2* starting at verse 19. It says: *Now when the virgins were gathered together the second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. Esther had not made known her kindred or her people, as Mordecai had commanded her, for Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him. In those days, as Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. And this came to the knowledge of Mordecai, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told it to the king in the name of Mordecai. When the affair was investigated and found to be so, the men were both hanged on the gallows. And it was recorded in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.*

Well, it just so happens that Mordecai is sitting at the gate, and it just so happens that two of the king's eunuchs are there

hatching a plot to kill the king, and it just so happens that Mordecai was able to tell Esther and Esther was able to tell the king. And all of this happenstance proves but one thing, and that is there's no such thing as "it just so happens." In fact it's *Romans 8:28* all over again: *For we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* See, many people dismiss the hand of God by saying, well, it was just -- it was a coincidence or maybe it was a series of coincidences, and I would gladly grant somebody the possibility that things happen by coincidence as long as we agree on what the definition of "coincidence" is. Webster's Dictionary says that is -- quote -- "the occurrence of events that happen at the same time by accident but seem to have some connection." I would venture to say that somebody else's accident is no accident with God. And I just don't get where human beings can claim the ability to see any two events as accidental only because we human beings know so little about so much. I would go one step further and say that coincidence is simply one incident taking place and another incident taking place in relationship to it. They are co-incidents. Now you may choose to see these accidental or you may choose to see them as flowing from the sovereign hand of God, but understand, God tells us categorically that nothing takes place in this world by accident. Jesus made that clear when he said that even a common sparrow can't fall to the ground apart from God's

will. In *Matthew 10:29* he said: *Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will.* So understand, there is nothing in your life and my life that happens purely by coincidence. Everything in our lives has a stated goal if you love Jesus, and that is to shape and mold you into the very image of Jesus Christ. But even that has to be understood against the backdrop of something that I speak about all the time and that is the fact that we are in the middle of a proxy war between two great kingdoms: The kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. And when we understand that we are at war with an enemy that exists way, way beyond our senses, we also have to understand that God is going to ask of us a willingness to trust him when things might not make sense from our perspective. *Hebrews 11* says: *Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* God is asking us for this conviction of things that we just can't see. He's asking us to trust him when sometimes circumstances are shouting otherwise. Understanding that we are on a war footing with another kingdom just might make understanding some of God's actions easier.

As we'll see in this next section of *Esther*, there's a history lesson that we need to address that's grounded in this war footing that I'm speaking of because it shed some light on some of the things that God commands in the Old Testament that cause people to

reject God and the Bible out of hand. So let's just get right to it. As I said, Mordecai has just foiled a plot to assassinate the king. We pick up on this at *Esther 3*, it says is this, says: *After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, and advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who were with him. And all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage. Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?" And when they spoke to him day after day he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's words would stand, for he had told them that he was a Jew. And when Haman saw that Mordecai would not bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury. But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.*

Haman becomes the second most powerful politician in all of Persia. Everybody bows down to Haman, with one singular exception, and that would be Mordecai -- quote -- *"But Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage."* It is at first glance a strange inconsistency that causes Mordecai to refuse to bow down to Haman. I mean there's no mention

whatsoever of Mordecai having any problem bowing down to the King and we've seen ample evidence that Mordecai has been willing to compromise on many different issues. I mean, the fact we've seen the contradiction inherent in Mordecai's name. He was named after Marduk, a pagan God. We've seen the contradiction of his position in the citadel in Susa and his lack of protest over his cousin Esther's joining the king's harem. Now suddenly Mordecai refuses to acknowledge a high government official named Haman. That doesn't seem to make much sense. But here's where a history lesson becomes necessary. You see, we were introduced to Haman with this statement. It says: *After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, and advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who were with him.*

So the first thing we learn about this fellow Haman is that he was an Agagite. That's an incredibly important piece of information. This means that he was part of a line of a man named king -- or named Agag who was a king, and Agag happened to be the king of a people called the Amalekites. So we ask, okay, who were the Amalekites? Well, they were one of the people groups that God commanded to be utterly destroyed. And that begs a question. Why would God do something so primitive? Why would he do something so brutal and so final? Well for many, for many the answer is simple, I mean after all, it's the Old Testament. I mean we have to

remember that for most people, even for many Christians, they have an operating principle that there's a mean God in charge of the Old Testament, that would be God the Father, and a loving, caring, compassionate God in charge of the New Testament, that would be Jesus. Very few people recognize that they are one and the same. Jesus himself said in *John 10:30*: "*I and the Father are one.*" So then why would the Father and the Son authorize the destruction of a whole people group? Well, it's a long story but first we need to learn a history lesson about the Amalekites. We first hear about them as the Israelites are escaping from Egypt. You got to understand, this is -- they're finally leaving Egypt, they're organized, they're marching out and as they're marching out, they instantly get attacked on their rear flank by the Amalekites. It's that memorable battle where Moses holds up his hands in prayer and as he holds up his hands Israel prevails and when his hands droop, Amalek prevails. This is the story of it from *Exodus*. It says: *Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while*

Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady till the going down of the sun. And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." Well, not only did the Amalekites attack the Jews but they did it in an incredibly cowardly way. What they did was they attacked their rear flank where all the women, the children, the stragglers and the weak were to be found. So God says he's going to utterly blot out Amalek. And in Deuteronomy he kind of expands on why he's doing that. Deuteronomy 25, it says: Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came out of Egypt, how he attacked you on the way when you were faint and weary, and cut off your tail, those who were lagging behind you, and he did not fear God. Therefore when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your enemies around you, in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget.

So why was God determined to wipe out the Amalekites? Well, the answer is actually simple. You see, there's this war between the kingdoms and God's solution to the war between the kingdoms was to take on human flesh, live a perfect life, and then offer up his

life in exchange for our sinful lives on a cross. The vehicle he chose to do that through was the offspring of a man named Abraham, and that offspring was referred to as the Jews. Now the enemy in this war between the kingdoms knew enough of God's plan to know that his best chance of survival was to somehow find a way to wipe those people out before Jesus could ever arrive as their Messiah. See, the Amalekites were the enemy's chosen vehicle. The Amalekites were determined to wipe out the Jews.

The Jewish website chabad.org describes the Amalekites this way. They say:

"Amalek was an ancient Middle Eastern nation that had an inborn hatred towards Israel. The Amalekites took any opportunity to attack Jews for absolutely no reason. There was no land dispute or provocation that caused this hatred - it was an intrinsic pathological need to destroy Gd's people. Such hatred cannot be combated through diplomacy. There was no option to re-educate the Amalekites or review their school curricula. Their hatred was not taught - it was ingrained. As long as an Amalekite walked the earth, no Jew was safe. It was a clear case of kill or be killed. A Jew had to take the command to kill Amalek quite literally - his life depended on it."

Now, lest you think this is an exaggeration, you have to only look to the Old Testament at the many references there are in there to the Amalekites, and in each case, you're going to find they were there to get Israel. If you remember when the Jews were, they sent spies into Canaan, they came back with a bad report, the Jews had despaired of God's power to defeat their enemies so much so they wanted to stone Joshua and Caleb who were the only two who actually believed God when he said he would give them the power to defeat their enemies. Well, God called them on their sin and he told the Jews that they would wonder in the desert for 40 years. And when the Jews realized the impact of their sin, they foolishly decided that now they're going to attack the Canaanites. Well, guess who's right there with the Canaanites? Moses says in *Numbers 14*: "*Do not go up, for the LORD is not among you, lest you be struck down before your enemies. For there the Amalekites and the Canaanites are facing you, and you shall fall by the sword. Because you have turned back from following the LORD, the LORD will not be with you.*" But they presumed to go up to the heights of the hill country, although neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses departed out of the camp. Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and defeated them and pursued them, even to Hormah. See, God allowed the Amalekites to have victory over the Israelites because they had despaired of God's power to lead them. In fact, God repeatedly

used the Amalekites as a tool to discipline Israel whenever she disobeyed. *Judges 3* says: *And the people of the Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the LORD. He gathered to himself the Ammonites and the Amalekites, and went and defeated Israel. And they took possession of the city of palms.* See, whenever God needed a hammer or a cudgel or a whip to punish the Israelites, he could count on the Amalekites who were always there and always willing to attack the Jews. Even a cursory glance at the Old Testament reveals their hatred and attacks. *Judges 6:3* says: *For whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them.* *Judges 7:12* says: *And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the East lay along the valley like locusts in abundance, and their camels were without number, as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance.* In *Judges 10:12* it says: *The Sidonians also, and the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, and you cried out to me, and I saved you out of their hand.*

Well, when Israel demands a king, God decides to give them Saul. And one of the main tasks that he gives to Saul was to once and for all eliminate the Amalekites. This is *1 Samuel 15*. It says: *And Samuel said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you king over his*

people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'" Well, if you follow the story, you know that Saul disobeyed God and decided on his own that he would take up all of the spoil but he would spare King Agag, despite the fact that God said to spare none. It proved to be such a blatant disobedience of a direct order that God from that point forward was finished with Saul. 1 Samuel 15, it says: *And Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt. And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive and devoted to destruction all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction. The word of the LORD came to Samuel: "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments."* And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the LORD all night.

Samuel knew that this final act of disobedience on the part of Saul

was the end of Saul's kingship over Israel and really the beginning of his complete and utter destruction. Samuel told Saul that he was finished as king for his complete and utter disregard, and then Samuel does something that 21st century readers find pretty repulsive. This is *1 Samuel 15*: *Then Samuel said, "Bring here to me Agag the king of the Amalekites." And Agag came to him cheerfully. Agag said, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." And Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women." And Samuel hacked Agag to pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.* Some folks really struggle with passages such as these and, hey, well they should. I mean Saul is dismissed for not killing everybody, and Samuel, God's prophet, hacks Agag to pieces, apparently with God's approval. Here's God unequivocally ordering the destruction not just of an individual or group but of an entire people and God is demanding no mercy whatsoever, man and woman, child and infant along with all of the animals. God is clearly calling for the complete and utter destruction of the entire line of Amalek. So how does this God of the Old Testament square with the Jesus of the New Testament who's loving and caring and kind and compassionate? Can I tell you again, they are one and the same God. Jesus said in *John 14:9*: *"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me."* I'll be the first one to agree that these words in the Old Testament are not easy words to

digest, but I would suggest to you that you and I will never fully understand what God is doing here for two reasons. I mean the first reason is simple, the first reason is obvious. It's that we are not God. God says repeatedly that his ways are not our ways. He even says in the Psalms that we make the mistake of thinking that we are just like him, which we are not. God doesn't think like us, he doesn't act like us, he doesn't respond like us and we make a huge and deadly mistake when we start thinking that he does. I once tried to explain this by telling a story, imagining if there was a group of chipmunks who lived right in front of my house in the woodpile that's there. And among all of those chipmunks was a really brilliant chipmunk who had the rapt attention of all the other chipmunks because he alone could explain to them what the car parked outside of my house was all about. And he did it by using his chipmunk powers of understanding. So he would observe all of the human activity and with his brilliant chipmunk brain, he would explain to the rest of the chipmunks that a car coming up the driveway was actually a live creature who lived in that area. I mean he knew it was a live creature because every time it came up the driveway he could feel its warmth, and he knew this much, that live chipmunks are warm and dead chipmunks are cold, and this creature must have been alive because it was warm. He would see the car doors open and people get into the car and so he would tell all the other chipmunks what made perfect sense to them, and that

was that this creature had two mouths which opened on its side and every once in a while it would open its mouth and eat some people. And for some reason these people would willingly let themselves get swallowed up whole and eaten and then the creature would go away and sometimes later, sometimes in the middle of the night with glowing eyes it would rush up the driveway, stop, and vomit out from one of its mouths the very people it had just eaten. The other chipmunks would be astounded at how brilliant this chipmunk was, how impeccable his logic was, how completely and fully he understood the creature that lived in the driveway by the woodpile. And we would look at that chipmunk and do just what we're doing, we would laugh. And we would laugh at how badly he misunderstood a car picking up passengers and dropping them off. But then again we would say, well that's understandable because after all, he's a chipmunk and we're people. And when a chipmunk applies his chipmunk understanding to try to understand a creature like us who is light years higher and greater than a chipmunk, well, the best you could hope for is to come up with something that's ridiculously off. I mean, like thinking a car is a creature and passengers are being eaten by that creature. Well, this imaginary chipmunk is doing what any creature would do, he's observing us and he's drawing conclusions based on his ability as a chipmunk to understand us as humans. And we know that it's ludicrous to imagine this even as a fairy tale. But here's the interesting part

of this fairy tale. We do the exact same thing when we try to reason our way up to God, and chipmunks are far closer to us than we are to God. In fact you could argue that chipmunks are far more likely to get us right than we are to get God right. The imaginary chipmunk was doing with us what we do with God, and God says in *Psalm 50: These things you have done, and I kept silent; you thought that I was altogether like you; but I will rebuke you, and set them in order before your eyes.* The fact is we are not even remotely -- quote -- "*altogether like God.*" God is spirit and we are flesh. Our senses tell us nothing about God. And because we can't see, hear, feel, taste, or touch him, we are forced to rely on God's revelation of himself in scripture or our own understanding usually guided by our hearts. And God tells us that that is a disaster just waiting to happen. He says: *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick. Who can understand it?*

So God gives us one primary charge when it comes to rationally trying to understand him. God says: *Trust in the Lord with all of your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.* God is saying first and foremost you have to trust me and not your heart, your experience, your insight or your understanding. God says categorically they are not to be trusted, because we're just

chipmunks trying to figure out how a car works. God says instead of relying on your own understanding, acknowledge me in every aspect of your life and I will straighten your pathway through life.

You see, here is the problem. There are parts of the Bible that are very, very hard to take, parts that may offend our sense of justice and rightness. God says over and over again that we see through a glass darkly, that is that we only have a tiny fraction of the big picture, and thus we have to trust him. So when we begin to rely on our own understanding, we can easily be put in a position of having to reject parts of the Bible that we don't understand as being unfair or unjust or in some other way simply unacceptable. But when we do that, we have, consciously or unconsciously, elevated our understanding to the point where God is no longer the final arbiter of what truth is because we now, with our little chipmunk brains, have become that final arbiter. I mean, let's say you give up trusting in God on hard passages that have to do with the Old Testament slaughter of people groups and that you can no longer accept them because they're primitive and unjust. The question looms: Where does your unacceptance stop? Who draws that line? I mean, does it stop at the slaughter of people groups or does it continue on to some other uncomfortable areas? I mean suppose awhile later you're approached by a group who tells you that all of the scriptures describing homosexuality

as sinful, well they're primitive, in fact they're unjust. Oh, being as you've already opened the door to your understanding being the final judge, what possible means do you have of defending those scriptures that are now considered by most hateful and bigoted? See, once you've opened that door, why can't I approach you and say you find the slaughter of the Amalekites primitive and unjust, I find the resurrection primitive and ridiculous. What are you going to say? You're going to say well, the slaughter of the Amalekites was just primitive nonsense but the resurrection is absolute truth. Based on what? Based on my understanding? Do you see why understanding God in scripture is a package deal, why it's all or nothing? I mean the reason why I believe the whole Bible even with its hard parts is because Jesus did. He said in *Matthew 5:18*: "*For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all was fulfilled.*" A jot and a tittle was simply Jesus' way to say the tiniest little detail of the law is not going pass away until it's all fulfilled. And as soon as you start picking apart which parts of the law you're going to agree with and which parts you're going to reject, you're doing exactly what God told us not to do. You're leaning on your own understanding. You've made yourself the final arbiter of truth and now anything and everything in the Bible is subject to your editorial input. And again, what does God say about that? He says: *Trust in the LORD with all of your heart,*

and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

But what are we supposed to do with passages that say wipe out whole people groups, men and women and children and animals, I mean, are we supposed to swallow that wholesale and chalk it up to God knowing what he's doing? Is it simply our inability to understand it? Well, here's where the second reason might come into play. See, the first reason is we can't possibly begin to understand the God who created us. The second reason is that the same God who created us tells us over and over and over that we are at war. He says in *Ephesians 6*: *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.* See, the second reason has to do with the fact that we are still, even now today as we were back then, on a complete war footing with another kingdom. We're at war with the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of darkness wants nothing more than to utterly defeat and destroy everything that Jesus loves, and that's including you and me. Satan always has been determined to thwart God's plan to rescue and ransom us by going to the cross. And as we read the scripture, sometimes we see that the attack is blatant and sometimes it's subtle. I mean it was blatant when Herod determined he was going

to slaughter all the babies in Bethlehem. Herod had no idea he was doing the work of the devil. He was desperately trying to kill Jesus before he could even get established as a child. That's blatant. Other times we see the devil acting very subtly, like when he moved Peter to rebuke Jesus' intention to go to the cross. And Jesus, who knows that this is war, who knows exactly how the devil operates, responds in a way that is absolutely astounding to his hearers. This is the incident as described in *Matthew 16*:

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me" -- who? "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

See, unless you understand that there's warfare going on, a lot of what God is doing will not make sense. I mean this brings us all the way from the prophet Samuel hacking King Agag to pieces hundreds of years later back to the book of Esther. God said to the nation of Israel, you must completely and utterly destroy the Amalekites. He didn't say it to be mean or nasty or unjust, he said it because he knew completely that the Amalekites were an

absolutely existential threat to the nation of Israel. They were a nation conscripted by Satan himself to prevent Israel from ever getting to the point where a Messiah would be born. And time and again God told Israel to destroy the Amalekites, and time and again, whether through Saul or through incompetence or rebellion or indifference, they just refused. So now in the book of Esther we're introduced to a man named Haman who just happens to be a living descendent of the people that God told Israel to destroy. And what do we find? We find a man whose intent is not just to destroy Mordecai, but all of Mordecai's people as well. *Esther 3:5* says: *And when Haman saw that Mordecai did no bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury. But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.*

Now I suspect the reason why Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman was that he knew that he was a son of King Agag, that he was an Amalekite who had nothing but hatred from the beginning for Israel and her people. Israel had disobeyed God and refused to eliminate the Amalekites and here they were once again determined to do what? Quote -- *"Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai."* I mean, now my human brain would have been much more satisfied if hundreds of years earlier God had said to Saul, you

got to destroy all of the Amalekites because you got to understand, they've been conscripted by Satan as a people group determined to eliminate my people Israel and if you don't eliminate every single one of them, they're going to rise up and destroy you. Saul certainly didn't do what God told him, and sure enough, a distant relative of King Agag, that is Haman himself, did rise up with one intent and that was to destroy the people of Israel. I mean to my way of thinking, if God had made that clear in the beginning, he wouldn't have had this problem. But once again, I find myself a chipmunk trying to explain how a car works. And God is telling me over and over again, you thought you were just like me. The fact is we may have the privilege of bearing the image of God but that doesn't mean at this point in our existence that we think like God or reason like God or act like God. And God says that he's going to continue the process of us growing more and more like him throughout eternity. He says in *2 Corinthians 3: And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.* Now we are being transformed doesn't mean that we have been transformed, and until we're fully transformed, we are ill-advised to start thinking we think like God. And it's unwise when we refuse to recognize that we are at war because some of the decisions that God makes are basically combat decisions that require a level of faith and trust. I mean there have been dozens

of times in my life where I could have easily let myself be convinced that God was uncaring and unloving and unthinking and unkind and even unaware of how difficult my circumstances were. That was a lie from the enemy. Mordecai and Esther's story is one of a God who never stops working behind the scenes. And much of what he did in their lives seemed pointless and as we'll find out, it's only when the story completely unfolds do we see God's hand at work. And the point is the story of Mordecai and Esther is our story as well, and God's handiwork oftentimes takes a lifetime to unfold. And during that lifetime, we may find times where it's incredibly difficult to figure God out. My advice is don't even try. God's answer to achieving a level of faith and trust is simple: *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.* See, when you think about it, the only thing that we have that's of any value to God is our ability to trust him, our ability to put our faith in his goodness, and the primary evidence we have of that is overwhelming. It's the cross. I'd be the first one to say that it's not easy to reconcile a God demanding the destruction of every man, woman and child with a God saying, *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do,"* as he's being nailed to a cross, but they are one and the same God. And God isn't asking us to figure this all out. Instead he's asking us to give him our trust. That's what God wants more than

anything from us and that's why God says: *Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, the young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.* Let's pray.

Father, I just again, I thank you for who you are. I thank you for what you have given to us. You have given us your word as the final revelation of who you are. And Lord, I know how tempted I am over and over again to try and kind of chipmunk my way to who you are. I recognize how easy that can become a disaster. And Lord, I think it's a temptation for each and every one of us. Father, I pray that you would give us the ability to trust you in each and every area of our lives and to lean not on our own understanding. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.