

"HAMAN IS CAUGHT IN HIS OWN SNARE"

I. Introduction

- A. I would imagine that one of the things that people in our culture find most objectionable about orthodox Christianity is the doctrine of the final judgment.
1. Secular people are willing to tolerate belief in some forms of deity, but not in a God who would send people to hell.
 2. The irony here is that these people have no qualms about making their own moral judgments upon select evils.
 3. Our society has no sympathy for racists or child molesters or those who run Ponzi schemes.
 4. There is even an increasing tendency to demonize those of us who believe that homosexual behavior is sinful.
 5. This just goes to show that all people have an innate sense of right and wrong, even though that sense is easily distorted by sin.
 6. When we believe that something is evil, we want to see it censured and punished.
- B. This thirst for justice is satisfied here in Esther 7.
1. "This wicked Haman" is finally exposed.
 2. He is brought down from his high and lofty position as the king's right hand man and is lifted up to another, undesired, high and lofty position -- the top of the 75 foot gallows that he built for Mordecai.
 3. There is a great sense of poetic justice in this chapter.
 4. Haman gets exactly what he deserves.

II. The Queen's Request

- A. The passage begins by setting the stage for what is about to transpire.
1. Haman and the king go to the feast that has been prepared for them by Esther.
 2. As we noted in our study of chapter 5, Esther has been quite shrewd in carrying out her plan to try to save her people.
 3. Instead of making her request known to the king right away, she has carefully maneuvered him into a position from which it will be difficult for him to deny her request.
 4. And so, as the king sits there with a full stomach, enjoying a nice glass of wine, he asks, "What is your wish, Queen Esther?"
- B. Now, I want us to look closely at how Esther answers the king here.
1. She begins by saying, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king..."
 2. This was proper court etiquette.
 3. It was the right way to address the king of Persia.
 4. Even though Esther knows that her life is on the line, she is careful and deliberate in the way she speaks.
 5. She does all that she can to avoid giving unnecessary offense to the king.
 6. This stands in sharp contrast to the way that Haman addressed the king in the previous chapter.

7. When the king asked Haman's advice on what should be done for the man the king delights to honor, Haman blurted out the first thoughts that came into his arrogant mind.
 8. He dispensed with the formalities and expressed what was in his greedy heart.
 9. Don't you think that the king would have noticed the difference between the way Haman addressed him and the way Esther addressed him?
 10. I suspect that Esther's careful observance of the proper formalities helped the king to see Haman in a clearer light.
- C. Another thing to note about how Esther presents her request is that she uses the phrase "found favor."
1. You may remember that earlier in the book a similar phrase was used to describe how Esther conducted herself at court.
 2. She "won favor" with others by being compliant and eager to please.
 3. That phrase underscored the fact that it was her actions that made the difference.
 4. But here she uses the phrase "found favor," a phrase that is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe those upon whom God graciously bestows his favor.
 5. This indicates that Esther is no longer relying upon her own ability to curry favor with the king.
 6. She is trusting in the Lord.
- D. We should also note that it was by no means a sure thing that the king would side with Esther against Haman in this matter.
1. Other ancient sources tell us that Ahasuerus was a dangerously unstable man.

2. The Greek historian Herodotus relates this in the story of an official who had shown considerable hospitality to Ahasuerus and who had contributed large sums of money in support of the king's war with Greece.
 3. Herodotus tells us that when this official asked that the eldest of his five sons be exempted from military service, Ahasuerus responded by having that son cut in half and then making his soldiers pass between the pieces.
 4. Make no mistake, this was a king who was only interested in his own interests.
- E. This is why Esther makes her request in the way that she does.
1. She does not appeal to the king's sense of justice.
 2. She does not begin by pointing at Haman and calling him a monster because of his genocidal plot.
 3. Instead, she appeals to the king's commitment to what is in his best interests.
 4. She says that she wouldn't even have bothered him if this were merely a matter of her people being sold as slaves.
 5. That would have been to the king's profit.
 6. But she has noticed that the king seems to like her, and she is concerned about the loss that he will suffer if Haman's plot is carried out.
- F. Here is Esther's moment of truth.
1. After all these years of keeping her identity as secret, she finally aligns herself with her people.
 2. She pleads with the king for "my life" and the life of "my people."

3. She says, "I and my people" have been sold.
 4. Though she could have continued to hide who she was, she binds her fate to the fate of God's covenant people.
 5. If the king refuses to grant her request, Haman's decree will call for her to be killed along with her fellow Jews.
 6. This shows us Esther's faith.
 7. It shows us that she is more willing to lose not only her position as queen, but even her life, than to lose her inheritance among God's people.
 8. When she weighs her life in this world against the promise of life in the world to come, she sees that this life cannot even begin to compare to the blessings that await us in God's kingdom.
- G. Upon hearing Esther's request, the king demands to be told who did such a thing.
1. Esther has masterfully presented this matter before the king with the wisdom that she has been given by God.
 2. Ahasuerus is outraged that someone would dare to threaten the life of his queen -- a queen who is so much better than Vashti, a queen who never forgets her proper place, a queen who is always looking out for his best interests.
 3. All Esther has to do in response to the king is point to the man next to him and say, "A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!", and she knows that the game is up.
 4. It is hard to imagine that there would have been much blood left in Haman's face when Esther spoke those words.

III. Haman's Fall

- A. The writer tells us that the king responded to this revelation by arising in his wrath from the wine-drinking and going out into the palace garden.
1. We should not think that the king did this because he was afraid of acting too impulsively here.
 2. It was not that he wanted to compose himself and collect his thoughts so that he could make a good decision.
 3. Esther's news presented the king with a dilemma.
 4. He was the one who had told Haman to issue the decree under the royal seal.
 5. As much as he would like to revoke it, how can he do so without losing face?
 6. This is the matter that the king is pondering as he stands outside in the palace garden.
- B. Meanwhile, back inside, Haman is still there with Esther.
1. He knows that the king's wrath is about to fall upon him, and he is terrified.
 2. So he tries the only thing that he can think of to get himself out of this mess: he pleads with Esther for his life.
 3. This might seem like a good option, especially in light of the influence that Esther appears to have with the king.
 4. Perhaps he can flatter her enough to get her on his side.
- C. The problem with Haman's tactic, however, is that it was a serious breach of court etiquette.
1. Officials were not permitted to have direct conversation with members of the king's harem.

2. Once the king left the room, Haman should have realized that it was improper for him to be alone with the queen.
3. But in his panic he groveled before her, pleading for his life.
4. As a result, when the king re-enters, he sees Haman "falling on the couch where Esther was."
5. And in a moment of inspiration, Ahasuerus sees the solution to his dilemma.
6. He seizes the opportunity that Haman has given him, interpreting the scene in the worst possible light.
7. He says, "Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?"

D. Notice also the significance of the phrase "was falling."

1. This fulfills what Haman's wise men and his wife had said to him back in chapter 6: "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him." (v. 13)
2. Haman's fall is now complete.
3. And as we noted earlier, there is a strong sense of poetic justice to this.
4. As Iain Duguid observes: "Ironically, the one who wanted to kill a Jew for not falling down before him was ultimately executed on a charge of falling down inappropriately before a Jew!" [Duguid, 90]

IV. Conclusion

- A. This passage teaches us the importance of evaluating things in light of their end.
 1. For a while, Haman was on top of the world.

2. But he eventually met his end, and when he did he was hung from the very gallows he had built for his mortal enemy.
- B. When we look around the world today, we see many forces that are aligned against Christ's church.
1. These forces have great power, great influence, and great appeal.
 2. It can be puzzling to us that God would permit his enemies to prosper in such ways.
 3. The writer of Psalm 73 expressed the same thoughts when he wrote, "I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind. Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth." (vv. 3-9)
 4. But a little later in the psalm, he says this: "when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end. Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors!" (vv. 16-19)
 5. That is a good description of what happened to Haman.
 6. He was riding high for awhile, but in the end he fell to ruin.
 7. As we make our pilgrimage through this world, we always need to keep the end in view.

8. In the words of Martyn Lloyd-Jones: “The importance of ‘the end’ is something which is constantly emphasized in the Bible. Our Lord has put it once and for ever in the Sermon on the Mount. ‘Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat; because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it’ (Matt. 7:13-14) You see what He is saying? Look at the broad way, how marvelous it seems. You can go in with the crowd, you can do what everybody else is doing, and they are all smiling and joking. Wide and broad are the gate and the way. What is the matter with them? They do not look at the end. ‘Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction.’ ‘Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way’, but -- and that is the end -- it ‘leadeth unto life.’ The end of the one is destruction, of the other, life. The trouble in life today is that people look only at the beginning.” [Lloyd-Jones, *Faith on Trial*, 72-73]
9. In the story of Haman, the Lord has given us a picture of the end that awaits all who are opposed to his church.
10. Remind yourself of this the next time you are tempted to envy those who are on top in the world today.
11. When we keep the end in view, we will realize that there is nothing to envy about those whose downfall is certain.