

A little town in Alabama turned a tragedy into a triumph. The major livelihood of the town was raising cotton. One year, just as it appeared that there would be a very large harvest – a bumper crop, the boll weevil invaded, and if you don't know, a boll weevil is a beetle that feeds on cotton buds and flowers. Anyway, the cotton crop was destroyed and the economy of that little town was devastated.

Well, the farmers in that town weren't ready to throw in the towel and one of them got the idea of planting peanuts instead of cotton, because boll weevils don't like peanuts. Another farmer decided to plant yet another kind of crop, and others followed suit. Before long, large harvests of peanuts and other produce began to repair the economy of this town, in fact, the town became more prosperous than it would have ever been if cotton had remained its only crop.

Interestingly, the town, which later came to be known as Enterprise, Alabama, erected a monument to the boll weevil. What had almost been the source of their destruction, in the end, became a reason of rejoicing and prosperity.

Like this little town in Alabama, the Jews in the story of Esther had come close to being destroyed by their enemy – they were facing certain death from an extermination order, but now, it would seem that God, who is working behind the scenes, has put things in reverse and circumstances have completely turned around for them.

Last Monday, after returning home from some time here at church, I was listening to a sermon by Mark Bradley who preached on **Esther 6**. Mark is an elder at Crosspointe Baptist Church, he's the Director of Gateway Seminary in Vancouver, he's a theological brainiac, and he's also a friend of mine.

When I used to attend that church, I taught a Sunday School class and Mark would join us. I always cringed when Mark would raise his hand in class with a question for me, for I had no doubt he already knew the answer to his question, he just wanted to watch me squirm with it. Anyway, I was curious as to how Mark dealt with **Esther 6**.

In his sermon entitled “Reversal of Destiny”, Mark pointed out this theme of *reversal* that ran throughout the story of Esther, which really became obvious in Chapter 6 when Haman had intended to execute Mordecai, went to the king for permission early that morning, but before he could make his case with false allegations, the king commanded Haman to parade Mordecai through the city square as a hero. It was a reversal of destiny – a reversal which marked the beginning of the end for the wicked Haman.

As I considered this theme of reversal, I thought of the other reversals in this story of Esther.

In **Esther 7**, there was a reversal of *fate*. If you recall, Haman had pulled an all-nighter to erect a 75-foot pole to have Mordecai impaled on it, and it was on the exact same night that King Ahasuerus couldn't sleep and learned that Mordecai had saved his life five years earlier but was not recognized or rewarded for his loyalty. On the day that Haman had planned to execute Mordecai, Queen Esther unloaded on him in front of the king, and when all was said and done, it was Haman who was impaled on the very pole he had erected for Mordecai.

Later in **Esther 8**, there was a great reversal of *fame* and *fortune*. If you remember, at one time Haman was the number two man in the Persian Empire and he wore the king's signet ring. On top of that, he was an extremely wealthy man – he even offered to foot the bill to exterminate all the Jews in the empire, but when the dust finally settled, it was Mordecai who had become the number two man in the empire, and he now wore the king's signet ring, and as a bonus, all of Haman's wealth was given to Mordecai.

Well, that brings us to **Esther 9**, where we will see yet another reversal – a reversal of *favor*. So, if you have your Bible, turn to Chapter 9 and we will begin with **verse 1**.

¹Now in the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar), on the thirteenth day when the king's command and edict were about to be executed, on the day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, it was turned to the contrary so that the Jews themselves gained the mastery over those who hated them. ²The Jews assembled in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm; and no one could stand before them, for the dread of them had fallen on all the peoples. ³Even all the princes of the providences, the satraps, the governors and those who were doing the king's business assisted the Jews, because the dread of Mordecai had fallen on them. ⁴Indeed, Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces; for the man Mordecai became greater and greater.

About nine months have passed between the new decree written by Mordecai and this last month of the year. It's now the **thirteenth day** of the **twelfth month** – the day that everyone had marked on their calendars. At first, it was a day that the Jews had dreaded – it was to be the day of their extermination according to the

decree written by Haman and blindly approved by the king. It was a day meant for evil – but Haman is gone and Mordecai is in his place. The decree of Haman could not be revoked according to the law – it’s in effect, so Mordecai created a new decree which gave the Jews the legal right to defend themselves against enemies who were determined to destroy them.

And, the Jews had their enemies. In our story thus far, we have been focused on one wicked man named Haman, but throughout the Persian Empire, there were thousands of people just like Haman who hated the Jews and wanted to wipe them off the face of the earth, and yet God – who is not mentioned in this story, placed courage in the hearts of the Jews and fear in the hearts of their enemies for all could see in these series of reversals that God was clearly working on behalf of His people.

Another reason for fear was the knowledge that the Jews now had friends in very high places – King Ahasuerus, Queen Esther, and Mordecai. Everyone knew where these three stood in this matter of the Jews, in fact, we are told that Mordecai the Jew had become so powerful, that the other officials throughout the empire felt compelled to take the side of the Jews out of fear of what Mordecai might do to them if they didn’t.

For the Jews, they were once the fearful, but now, the tables have turned and they are the feared. They now have the position of favor and power, and on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month they mustered together to defend themselves against anyone who wanted to attack and destroy them.

So, let’s see what they did with all that favor and power beginning with **verse 5**.

⁵ Thus the Jews struck all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying; and they did what they pleased to those who hated them. ⁶ At the citadel in Susa the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men, ⁷ and Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, ⁸ Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, ⁹ Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Vaizatha, ¹⁰ the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Jews’ enemy; but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

This passage gives us a summary of what happened in the capitol city of **Susa**, where the king’s palace was located. On that day, 500 men – men whose hatred was greater than their fear, came against the Jews and were killed for it, to include the **ten sons of Haman** who probably sought revenge for their father’s execution.

They all got what's coming to them, but notice the last part of **verse 10**, **“but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.”** The Jews had the legal right in Mordecai's decree to take the spoils from those they killed – but they did not do it. It was a common practice for victors to take what had once belonged to their defeated foes, but apparently, the Jews had come to some kind of agreement amongst themselves to leave the plunder alone. They defended themselves, but they exercised self-control and did not plunder their enemies. We are not told why they did not exercise that right, but maybe the Jews wanted everyone to know that their motive for battle was not for profit but only for protection and there was no need to take it any further than that.

Now, there's also another possibility which I favor. If you recall in the decree, the Jews were also given the legal right to kill the women and children of their enemies, but there is nothing recorded in the account to suggest they exercised that right. A possible reason for not taking the plunder may have been an act of compassion and mercy for the women and children, for if the Jews had taken the plunder, then the families of the dead men would have nothing to live on. For the Jews, just because they had a legal right to do something didn't mean it was right to exercise that right. The Jews had the legal right to take the plunder and kill the women and children of their enemies, but instead, they showed restraint and demonstrated compassion and mercy to others.

As Charles Swindoll says, *“Not only did the Jews gain mastery over their enemies, they gained mastery over themselves.”*

So, there was a lot going on in the city of Susa where the king resides and he hears about it. Let's continue on beginning with **verse 11**.

¹¹ On that day the number of those who were killed at the citadel in Susa was reported to the king. ¹² The king said to Queen Esther, “The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and the ten sons of Haman at the citadel in Susa. What then have they done in the rest of the king's provinces! Now what is your petition? It shall even be granted you. And what is your further request? It shall also be done.” ¹³ Then said Esther, “If it pleases the king, let tomorrow also be granted to the Jews who are in Susa to do according to the edict of today; and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows.” ¹⁴ So the king commanded that it should be done so; and an edict was issued in Susa, and Haman's ten sons were hanged. ¹⁵ The Jews who were in Susa assembled also on the fourteenth day of the month Adar and killed three hundred men in Susa, but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

The king gets a casualty report of how many men were killed by the Jews in Susa and he shares this information with Queen Esther. Just in Susa alone, 500 men had been killed by the Jews, and who knows what was occurring throughout the rest of the empire, but apparently, the king wants to make sure she his wife is happy – you know “*happy wife, happy life*” and instead of telling her “*Esther, enough is enough*” he asks her if there is anything else she would like.

Esther asks for two things. First, for the Jews specifically in **Susa**, she asks that the decree from Mordecai be extended one more day so the Jews could finish off their enemies who may have escaped and gone into hiding. The king granted her request and we are told another 300 more men were killed in Susa on the following day. So, 800 men – men who dared to attack the Jews in the king’s own city of Susa, where both Queen Esther and Mordecai lived, were killed in two days.

Secondly, Esther asked that the **ten sons** of Haman – sons who have already been killed, be impaled. **So, what’s up with that?** The sons are already dead. **What purpose could that serve?** At first glance that seems a little vindictive on the part of Esther, but apparently this was a common practice in that day in the Persian Empire. The bodies of certain criminals would be impaled on public display as a warning to anyone else who might consider further attacks against the Jews.

So, that’s what was happening just in Susa, **but what was going on in the rest of the empire?** Well, we are told beginning with **verse 16**.

¹⁶ Now the rest of the Jews who were in the king’s provinces assembled, to defend their lives and rid themselves of their enemies, and kill 75,000 of those who hated them; but they did not lay their hands on the plunder. ¹⁷ This was done on the thirteenth day of the month Adar, and on the fourteenth day they rested and made it a day of feasting and rejoicing. ¹⁸ But the Jews who were in Susa assembled on the thirteenth and the fourteenth of the same month, and they rested on the fifteenth day and made it a day of feasting and rejoicing. ¹⁹ Therefore the Jews of the rural areas, who live in the rural towns, make the fourteenth day of the month Adar a holiday for rejoicing and feasting and sending portions of food to one another.

We are told that 75,000 men, from India to Ethiopia were killed throughout the rest of the Persian Empire and remember the Jews were not the aggressors here. Those who were killed were the ones who hated and sought to murder the Jews, and just like we previously read, the Jews exercised restraint and self-control. They did not

plunder the possessions and property belonging to their enemies and there is no mention that women and children were killed.

Now, in the rest of this passage, we are told about the days of feasting and rejoicing that followed the fighting – a holiday which follows this reversal of favor for the Jews, and we will get into that in depth next Sunday.

For the rest of my time this morning, I want to explore this theme of reversal a little further. We have seen several reversals in the story of Esther, but I want to steer us to another reversal – a reversal so great that it impacts each and every one of us. It's a reversal of the *fall*.

Some seven hundred years before the birth of Christ, the prophet Isaiah describes this great reversal. We are told in **Isaiah 53** beginning with **verse 3**,

³ He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. ⁴ Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. ⁵ But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. ⁶ All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.

⁷ He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. ⁸ By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due? ⁹ His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

¹⁰ But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand.

¹¹ As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,

and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.

This is a passage that describes the life and ministry and death of Jesus. He was the King of kings and yet He was born in a cave, a stable, and placed in a feeding trough. He was born in poverty in Bethlehem and grew up as a carpenter's son in the despised town of Nazareth. In His ministry, Jesus did miraculous works and spoke amazing words. He attracted great crowds of people who were nothing like Him, and yet He was rejected by the very people who were supposed to represent a loving God.

And then, Jesus gave up His rights. Without making a defense, He was falsely accused and arrested, tried in a kangaroo court, stripped and beaten to a pulp, mocked, spat upon, and hung on a Roman cross to die between two criminals. After His death, Jesus was buried in a rich man's tomb, and that was to be the end of the story. It would seem the enemies of God had won – the powers of darkness had finally triumphed over the light – it's all over but the crying – or so they thought.

It wasn't over – rather, it was just the beginning. It was a well-planned reversal where Jesus took the fall for the fallen. It was God's plan that His own Son be crushed for us. He planned that His Son would suffer grief and sorrow for us. God planned that His own Son would be made a sin offering for us – for our guilt, and from His death on the cross – would come everlasting life for us. It was a great reversal – for what He did, He did for us.

I like this quote from John Stott. He says, *“The essence of sin is we human beings substituting ourselves for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting Himself for us. We...put ourselves where only God deserves to be; God...puts Himself where we deserve to be.”*

That's the Gospel in a nutshell, it's the good news, it's the great reversal, and that truth should change us from the inside out and lead to reversals in our own lives. In light of what Jesus did for us – maybe there are some things that need to be reversed in our lives. I know there were in mine.

Beginning at the age of 17, I had absolutely no love or respect or forgiveness for my father. In my eyes he was a failure sitting in a federal prison. My mother, with her three children, me being the oldest, were left high and dry trying to make ends

meet. As soon as I graduated high school, I had to get away, and I joined the Coast Guard.

At the age of 20, a pastor shared the truth of the Gospel with me, and I received Jesus as my Savior and Lord. I knew the Heavenly Father loved me and yet, I did not love my earthly father.

I prayed that God would help me and one day – and it's hard to explain, God gave me a peek into my father's heart. My father had suffered with frequent bouts of severe depression – he too saw himself as a complete failure in virtually every aspect of life, and in his heart, when offered a short cut to make things better, when presented with a quick way for some easy money – my father took it.

My father went to prison and that's where he needed to be. You reap what you sow. He did the wrong thing, but in a weird way, his heart was in the right place for he truly wanted to provide for his family. He was thinking about his family all along.

From that moment on, I saw my father in a different light for there was a reversal in my own heart – and that can only happen in light of the Gospel.

When we see Jesus as He is, when we see how loved we truly are, when we see how forgiven we are, when we see what He has done for us, when we see what He endured for us – it changes us, it renews us, and it transforms us.

I could easily focus on my father's failures, in fact, I could spend that time focusing on my own failures – and there are many, but instead, it's so much better to dwell on the One who succeeded for me. It's a great reversal.

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