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Esther 7 "Hung on His Own Gallows"*

Proposition: Two scenes in Esther 7 illustrate God's unchanging guarantee that a man reaps what he sows.

I. In the first scene we see Esther's action (1-4).

A. Esther received another blank-check offer (1-2).

1. This is the third time.

2. In the plan of God, timing is key.

B. Esther took advantage of the offer (3-4).

1. She stated her request (3).

2. She explained her reason (4).

II. In the second scene we see Haman's downfall (5-10).

A. Haman is exposed (5-6).

B. Haman is humiliated (7).

C. Haman is incriminated (8).

D. Haman is executed (9-10).

Implications: A man reaps what he sows.

1. God established a penalty for sin.

· A holy God will deal with sin.

· We mustn't be presumptuous about His patience.

2. God provided a *remedy* for sin.

· Haman paid for his own sins.

· We don't have to...if we know Jesus.

3. God will have the final word.

· What's a problem for us is an opportunity for Him.

· We must trust Him.

I enjoy the Fall--it's my favorite time of the year. The Fall affords the opportunity to gaze at the brilliant colors of the leaves and ponder the amazing handiwork of God. The night air is crisp and invigorating. It's awe-inspiring.

Something else is true about the Fall. In the Fall we're reminded of the following, unchanging law of the Creator. *You reap what you sow*. In the Spring, the farmers put seed in the ground, and then in the Fall they harvest the produce. And it's true. A farmer reaps what he sows. If he planted corn, he harvests corn--not wheat nor soybeans. And if he planted soybeans, what he gleans is soybeans--not corn nor wheat. The farmer reaps what he sows.

What's true in agriculture is also true in daily living. Listen to Galatians 6:7-9, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his flesh, from his flesh will

reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

It's true. You reap what you sow. If you live to please the Spirit, you'll enjoy a harvest of eternal life. But if you live to please yourself, in the end you'll reap destruction.

I cannot think of a more vivid illustration of this reality than Haman. A fitting epitaph for the tombstone of Haman would be these words: *You reap what you sow.*

We've been watching Haman sow for the past several weeks. Now we're going to see him reap as we turn to Esther 7.

God gave us this story of Esther for a reason--not to entertain us but to transform us. Allow me to set the stage for today's episode.

A Jewish woman named Esther won a beauty contest in the 5th century B.C., and consequently became the wife of Xerxes, king of the vast Medo-Persian empire. Haman was Xerxes' right hand man. One day Haman noticed that Mordecai (who happened to be Esther's cousin, although Haman did not know that) refused to bow and honor him. As a result, Haman convinced the king to pass an edict which would authorize a total elimination of Mordecai's people, the Jews.

Upon learning of the predicament, Esther approached her husband and invited him and Haman to a banquet. Instead of telling the king what was on her mind, Esther simply invited the king and Haman to join her the *next* day for another banquet. We'll find out what happened at the second banquet as we consider chapter seven.

Here's where we're going. In Esther 7 two scenes illustrate God's unchanging guarantee that a man reaps what he sows.

I. In the first scene we see Esther's action (1-4).

It happened as follows...

A. Esther received another blank-check offer (1-2). "So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther, 2 and as they were drinking wine on that second day, the king again asked, 'Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.'"

You'll notice the events occurred on the "second day," that is, at the second banquet Esther hosted for Xerxes and Haman. After the first banquet, Haman left "happy and in high spirits (5:9)." He went home and boasted to his wife and friends about being the only person Esther invited to accompany the king (5:12). Haman's wife suggested that Haman build a gallows to execute Mordecai--which he did.

But that was *yesterday*. What a difference a day makes! On this day Haman went to the palace while it was still dark with an agenda--to ask the king for permission to kill Mordecai. What he didn't know was this. During the night Xerxes couldn't sleep and called for his servants to read to him. They just so "happened" to read about an event that occurred five years before when Mordecai saved the king's life by uncovering an assassination plot. Xerxes discovered he'd failed to reward Mordecai for his services.

At that moment Haman showed up. When asked, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?", Haman thought the king was talking about *him*. So he urged the king to honor that man by letting him wear his royal robe and ride his royal horse and be escorted through the city in honor. At which point the king told Haman, "Good idea! Now go and do that for *Mordecai*."

Haman was humiliated. After completing his assignment he went home in shame and shared his grief with his wife and friends. And then the escort showed up to take him to the second banquet.

Does God have anything to do with sleepless nights, self-absorbed bosses, and conversations over business meals? Indeed He does!

It was while the king, Haman, and Esther were wining and dining that Esther received another blank check offer (2): "Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted."

Sound familiar? Have we heard those words before? Yes...

1. *This is the third time.* The first was when Esther risked her life to approach the king without an invitation (5:3). The second was at the first banquet (5:6). When she received the first blank-check offer, Esther invited the king and Haman to a banquet. Then came the second offer: "Esther, what do you want? Name it, and it's yours--up to half the kingdom." To which Esther said, "My request is...come tomorrow to another banquet, and then I'll tell you!"

Twice Esther has received blank-check offers, and twice she's chosen to defer stating her case. Here's the third offer, and this time Esther's going to cash the check!

How do you explain Esther's actions? Why did she keep postponing the offer? We're not told. I personally think her hesitance was due to faith not fear. She was giving the Lord time to work. The truth is...

2. *In the plan of God, timing is key.* So much of the Christian life involves *waiting* on the Lord. Instead of forcing situations, the Lord invites us to follow Him and allow Him to orchestrate His plan.

So Esther waited. And waited. And when the time was right she took action.

B. Esther took advantage of the offer (3-4). "Then Queen Esther answered, 'If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life -- this is my petition. And spare my people - this is my request. 4 For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king.'"

Notice two things about Esther's reply. First...

1. *She stated her request (3).* She speaks with great courtesy and respect, "If I've found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty." Esther doesn't presume upon the king's favor. Next she proceeds to lay on the table her twofold request: "Grant my life, and spare my people. That's my petition." Then after stating her request...

2. *She explained her reason (4).* "I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation." In the Hebrew those are the exact words that appear in Haman's edict (as recorded in 3:13).

Then Esther offers an interesting disclaimer: "If my people were just going to be sold as slaves, I would have kept quiet. That problem wouldn't have warranted bothering the king." Esther seems to be implying that if the Jews were merely going to be enslaved, it wouldn't hurt the king. But if they were killed, even the king would suffer loss--the loss of manpower in his kingdom, and namely, the loss of queen.

I'm impressed by how gracious, gentle, and selfless Esther is in her response. God used her response to diffuse a very volatile situation. She practiced Proverbs 15:1, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh

word stirs up anger." And Proverbs 25:15, "Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone."

So there's scene #1--Esther took action. She's risked her life by informing the king of something she'd never told him before. She is a *Jew*. The ball is now in the king's court.

II. In the second scene we see Haman's downfall (5-10).

Give a proud man enough rope and eventually he'll hang himself. Haman's day has come. In scene #2 we'll notice four stages in his downfall.

A. Haman is exposed (5-6). "King Xerxes [KJV "Ahasuerus"] asked Queen Esther, 'Who is he? Where is the man who has dared to do such a thing?'" The king is ticked. One commentator suggests that the abruptness of the Hebrew reveals the agitated state of mind of the king: "Who--he--this one?--and--where?--this one--he--who--he to fill--his heart--to do--thus?"

Xerxes would see a plot to kill his wife as a direct attack on him. So quite naturally he's irritated and wants to know who the culprit is.

I get the sense that Xerxes is surprised. He seems oblivious to what Esther is saying. But had he not given his signet ring to Haman, approved of his proposal to destroy the Jews, and even drank a toast with Haman after the edict was announced?

He had. This whole account reiterates what little regard this leader had for human life. McGee comments (113), "If you read the secular account of Xerxes' campaign which he made into Europe against Greece, you will find that he threw men about as if they all were expendable. He lost thousands and thousands of men in that campaign, but he was not disturbed one bit. Human life was very cheap in that day."

By the way, a careful reading of chapter 3 shows that Haman had not mentioned the Jews by name. Did Xerxes not know the identity of the people whose destruction he authorized? Or had he merely forgotten? Either would fit Xerxes' track-record as a self-serving man who loves power and uses people.

Here comes the dramatic moment, the punch line, the statement that will make or break the situation. Verse 6, "Esther said, 'The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman.' Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen."

Remember, until the previous, sleepless night Haman had been Xerxes' #2 man, his closest confidant. This was Xerxes' drinking buddy and the man he personally had elevated to a position of honor higher than all other nobles (3:1). We're talking about a man before whom the king himself had commanded all subjects to bow (3:2).

If Esther had made this accusation one day earlier, my hunch is that Xerxes' first response would have been to defend Haman. In the very least, the smooth-talking-politician-of-a-man, Haman, would have back-peddled and tried to talk his way out: "Excuse me, sir, but this is all a misunderstanding. The queen is simply mixed up on her facts. She's just being emotional."

But not today. On this day Haman is trapped in his own web. He is exposed, so much so that the text says he is "terrified" before the king and queen. His downfall led to stage #2...

B. Haman is humiliated (7). "The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life."

The king was furious, so much so that he left his wine and went out into the garden. This must be something big to cause *this* king to leave his wine (remember 1:8)!

Haman didn't go after him. He'd seen *that* look before and knew it meant trouble. Haman had been caught red-handed trying to use the king for self-serving purposes. He knew he'd had it. Remember what this same king did to Bigthana and Teresh (2:23)?

No, if there's any hope for Haman it will have to come from the queen. Maybe he can patch things up with her and convince her to plead his case. So he begs Esther for his life.

Isn't that ironical? Haman had instigated Esther's death warrant, and now he wants her to protect him!

Now there's a new look for Haman. Until now we've seen him boasting and gloating, or sulking when things don't go his way. But now he's quaking and begging for his life.

It's interesting to observe what it takes to get people's attention, isn't it? As sinners we are born with a self-focused bent, and we coast through life naively thinking we're invincible, or at least that we're self-sufficient. We refuse to (as the saying goes) "wake up and smell the coffee." And apart from the gracious working of the Holy Spirit, not one of us would ever admit our utter need for the Lord.

It's amazing what it takes to get our attention. In Haman's case, by the time he finally "woke up," it was too late. He reaped what he sowed.

What about you? Is God trying to get your attention? What will it take? Oh, He will get it. One day every knee will bow. But will you *give* it to Him today? That's the question.

Haman's downfall went like this. First he's exposed. Then he's humiliated. Third...

C. Haman is incriminated (8). "Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining."

Talk about timing! The angry king walks into the room and sees Haman laying on the couch where the queen is reclining. It would do no good to say, "It's not what you think, King. I slipped!" Haman's going downhill fast--like a semi with brake failure on the West Virginia turnpike! It's just a matter of time before he crashes.

By the way, that's been true all of Haman's life--he just didn't admit it. It was just a matter of time before he crashed. He wasn't "getting away" with anything. God says, "Be sure that your sin will find you out (Num. 32:23)." Be sure. Be sure. Be sure.

Dear friend, if you are not living in submission to God and obedience to His Word, it's just a matter of time before you crash. It's not a question of *if* but *when*.

May I say a word to those of you who are suffering abuse from Haman-like people? Perhaps you have an abusive boss, or spouse, or parent, or child, or neighbor. If you do, don't develop a "victim's mindset." Be like Jesus. Entrust yourself to God knowing that He will deal with the person who's hurting you.

That's the counsel God gives us in 1 Peter 2:20-23: "If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, *he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*"

So rather than seeing yourself as a victim, do what Jesus did. Entrust yourself to the One who judges justly.

God knows how to deal with the Haman's in our lives.

When the king saw Haman on the couch next to his wife, he exclaimed (8b), "Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?" In other words, "I can't trust what this guy does behind my back! I've just discovered he's schemed to kill my wife, and now he's trying to molest her."

Verse 8 concludes, "As soon as the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face." The king's servants didn't even need an order. They knew the king's intent. Which brings us to the final stage in Haman's downfall.

D. Haman is executed (9-10). "Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king [note: he's one of the servants who was sent to fetch Vashti back in 1:10], said, 'A gallows seventy-five feet high stands by Haman's house. He had it made for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king.'"

The next four words from Xerxes sealed Haman's fate (9b-10): "The king said, 'Hang him on it!' 10 So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided."

Notice the repetition here. Haman is executed on what gallows? Not just any gallows, but on the gallows he made "for Mordecai." J. Vernon McGee puts it this way (117), "Here was a man who went to a dinner and found out it was a necktie party."

The irony is this. Haman's evil plot backfired and in the end cost him his life. He was hung on his own gallows!

And the king's fury subsided. That's the same Hebrew verb used in Genesis 8:1 to describe the waters of the flood receding. Justice is served.

What's the point of this story? The bottom line is this...

Implications: A man reaps what he sows.

God will not be mocked. He says, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay (Rom. 12:19)." In practical terms, Esther 7 reveals three very important truths about God.

1. *God established a penalty for sin.* Sin is like a boomerang--it comes back to haunt us. "For the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23)." "The soul that sins shall die (Ezek. 18:4)." "If you live according to the flesh you will die (Rom. 8:13)." Know this about God...

· A holy God will deal with sin. True, He may postpone His judgment, but He never excuses sin. For that reason...

· We mustn't be presumptuous about His patience. Haman sinned and got away with it so many times he thought he was untouchable. He presumed upon the patience of God.

Remember Ahab? Elijah told that wicked man that right where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth, whom he brutally murdered, there the dogs would lick *his* blood (1 Kgs. 21:19). Ahab no doubt mocked the prediction. Then one day he went into battle, and was mortally wounded. The record says that his chariot and armor were washed in the pool of Samaria where the dogs licked up his blood (1 Kgs. 22:38; McGee, 115-6). A man reaps what he sows.

I'm reminded of Achan in Joshua 7. He blatantly disobeyed God's command and took some of the forbidden plunder--a beautiful robe and some gold. Not a big sin. And nobody even saw it. Wrong. Achan's sin cost him his life, not to mention the lives of his family members and thirty-six of his fellow Israelites.

A holy God will deal with sin. May I encourage you to take inventory? Is there any known sin in your life? Please don't minimize it--no matter how big or small you consider it to be. God is the Judge and He says, "Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it (James 2:10)." God established a penalty for sin.

The question becomes, "Since sin is so serious, how should I deal with it?" The answer is *you can't*. You can't remove your sins. The common notion is that if the good in my life outweighs the bad God will simply overlook my sin. That's not what the Bible teaches. According to the Bible, there is a *penalty* for sin. It must be paid. It will be paid. But here's the good news--truth #2...

2. *God provided a remedy for sin.* Jesus Christ came to be the sin-bearer. He took the penalty of sin in behalf of all who will believe on Him.

Listen to Galatians 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us." Ponder that, beloved. Christ took the curse we deserved so we don't have to. "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man *to be a sin offering* (Rom. 8:1, 3)."

Think about Haman's predicament. What was true of Haman? This...

- Haman paid for his own sins. Haman died on the gallows because there was no one to die for him. He sinned and he paid the penalty for his sins. Is that the way it is for us, too? Must we pay for our sins? Here's the good news, indeed the *greatest* news imaginable...

- We don't have to...if we know Jesus. "The Son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28)."

The fact is, as sinners you and I stand guilty before a holy God. We deserve exactly the same condemnation as Haman. "But I never did anything as bad as Haman did," you may object. I hope not, but you have the same human nature that he had--and so do I--one that is in rebellion against God.

In that state, while you were dead in your trespasses and sins, Christ died for you and took your place on the cross. That cross was my cross and your cross if you'll trust Him. Yes, Christ died in our stead. We don't have to pay for our sins *if* we know Jesus.

Dear friend, do you want to experience God's forgiveness and pardon today? Then look to the One God provided for you. If you believe in Him God will forgive you. If you don't, you will pay the penalty for your own sins.

Before we leave Esther 7 allow me to highlight one final truth about God I see demonstrated in this story. It's this...

3. *God will have the final word.* He will deal with the Haman's of the world. So be encouraged. We belong to the true and living God, the One who has the power to turn terrible situations around. Indeed...

- What's a problem for us is an opportunity for Him. An opportunity to demonstrate His greatness and goodness--just like He did in Esther. We can be sure that He will have the final word. Our response?

- We must trust Him. Would you affirm your trust in Him right now?