

Esther 8 "The Amazing Providence of God"

Proposition: In Esther 8 we're confronted with three changes that cannot be explained apart from the providence of God. We're going to examine them and then consider some implications for our lives.

I. In God's providence, positions can change (1-2).

A. It did for Esther (1a).

B. It did for Mordecai (1b-2).

1. He received the king's signet ring.

2. He was placed over Haman's estate.

II. In God's providence, predicaments can change (3-14).

A. We see Esther's request (3-6).

1. She was gripped by a need (3-4).

2. She refused to rejoice while others were condemned to die (5-6).

B. We see the king's response (7-8).

1. He couldn't cancel the first decree.

2. Instead he authorized a second decree.

C. We see the kingdom-wide results (9-14).

1. The new edict was drafted (9-10).

2. The new edict is explained (11-13).

3. The new edict was sent (14).

III. In God's providence, people can change (15-17).

A. Mordecai went from the gallows to the palace.

B. The Jews went from hopelessness to hopefulness.

C. Non-Jews chose to become Jews.

Implications: We need to affirm the following...

1. God is in control of everything.

2. God will take care of His people.

3. When helpless people are condemned to die, there's cause for action.

Providence. It's a good word, and I want to encourage you to make it an active part of your vocabulary. Webster defines providence as "divine care or guidance." The God of the Bible is in complete control of everything. What's more, He orchestrates everything to accomplish His good plan. It's true we are here today by God's *providence*.

According to the Bible, things don't just "happen." There is no such thing as "luck" or "fate" or "chance." Rather, the events of life unfold according to the amazing providence of God. As Romans 8:28 puts it, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to

his purpose."

God works all things together for good. That doesn't mean that all things are inherently good. They're not. There's nothing good about a birth defect, the tragic death of a child, a destructive flood, a painful divorce, getting fired from a job, or a host of other adversities. But when we affirm God's providence, we are acknowledging that He takes all the events of our lives--the good and the bad--and blends them together so they work together for His glory and our ultimate good.

I'm indebted, as I've shared in the past, to insights shared by Jerry Bridges in his book *Trusting God*. He shares the following illustration of how Romans 8:28 works:

"While growing up in Texas, I enjoyed my mother's buttermilk biscuits made from 'scratch' every morning for breakfast. But there was not a single ingredient in those biscuits that I would have enjoyed by itself. And even after they were mixed together, I would not have cared for the raw biscuit dough. Only after they were mixed together in the right proportions by my mother's skillful hands and then subjected to the fire of the oven were they ready to be enjoyed for breakfast."

"The 'things' of Romans 8:28 are like the ingredients of the biscuit dough. By themselves they are not tasteful to us. We shun them. And we certainly shun the heat of the oven. But when God in His infinite skill has blended them all together and cooked them properly in the oven of adversity, we shall one day say, it is good."

You won't find a definition of the word "providence" in the Bible. But you will find a vivid demonstration of it--in the book of Esther.

Today we come to chapter 8--and the "biscuits" are about ready to come out of the oven! This is our eighth week in Esther. Until our last study, the events of Esther seemed like "raw biscuit dough." The first six chapters didn't hold a lot of "good" for the people of God. It's been bleak for the Jews. That's about to change.

In Esther 8 we're confronted with three changes that cannot be explained apart from the providence of God. We're going to examine them and then consider some implications for our lives.

I. In God's providence, positions can change (1-2).

We discover two examples of this in verses 1-2.

A. It did for Esther (1a). "That same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews."

Notice the words, "that same day." It's been quite a day for Esther. Prior to this day Esther and her people were in big trouble. Many were in captivity, out of the will of God. They're under the tyranny of a dictator named Xerxes. They've felt the fury of the king's #2 man, Haman, who instigated an edict that would result in a Jewish holocaust in eleven months. Haman actually built a 75' gallows to kill one of the main characters of the book, the Jew Mordecai.

But on this day the tables were turning. The day before, Esther had thrown a banquet for Xerxes and Haman. The night after the party the king couldn't sleep, and while reading his court records discovered he'd failed to reward Mordecai for saving his life five years earlier. The following day--*this* day--Esther threw another private party, and this time exposed Haman and his deadly plot. The king ordered that Haman be executed on the very gallows he'd intended to use on Mordecai.

That *same day* the king gave Esther Haman's estate. Talk about a change! One day Haman is the enemy of

Esther and the Jews. The next day Esther receives his estate. But Esther's not the only person whose position changed.

B. It did for Mordecai (1b-2). "And Mordecai came into the presence of the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her. 2 The king took off his signet ring, which he had reclaimed from Haman, and presented it to Mordecai. And Esther appointed him over Haman's estate."

Less than twenty-four hours before this construction workers did a rush job to build a gallows for Mordecai. This was to be his final day. It turned out to be his day of opportunity. The text indicates two things happened to him.

1. *He received the king's signet ring.* In essence, that meant he was now the #2 man in the kingdom. To have the king's signet ring meant he had legal authority to act on the king's behalf. In a day Mordecai went from relative obscurity to the limelight.

2. *He was placed over Haman's estate.* I would remind you that Haman had been a wealthy man (remember how he boasted about his vast riches in 5:11?). Persian law gave the state the power to confiscate the property of those who had been condemned as criminals (Huey, 828). So it was now Esther's estate, but the queen needed an estate manager. Who better suited than her cousin and adoptive father, Mordecai?

How do you explain the changes that happened that day for Esther and Mordecai? Should we call it coincidence? Luck? No. God's at work, isn't He? In God's providence, positions can change. In verses 3-14 we discover a second change...

II. In God's providence, predicaments can change (3-14).

Esther's got it made, right? Her enemy is gone. She's in the good graces of the king. Her cousin just received a royal promotion. It's time to celebrate, right? Wrong.

Remember, the Jews are in a predicament. Things may be looking better for Esther and Mordecai, but not so for their people. The edict calling for the elimination of the Jews is still in place. How can you rejoice when people you care about are condemned to die?

Esther can't. Notice what happened next--three scenes in which God changed the predicament of His people. Scene #1...

A. We see Esther's request (3-6). "Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet and weeping. She begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman the Agagite, which he had devised against the Jews. 4 Then the king extended the gold scepter to Esther and she arose and stood before him."

Stop there for a moment. What happened to Esther?

1. *She was gripped by a need (3-4).* Do you see her intensity? She *pleaded*. She *fell* at the king's feet. She *wept*. She even *begged*. Why? Because she's gripped by a need. It's a life and death matter. Sure, she may be secure, but others are not. Others are in need, and she's determined to use her God-given abilities and position to do something about it. Something else impresses me about Esther's request...

2. *She refused to rejoice while others were condemned to die (5-6).* Listen to her plea in verses 5-6, "'If it pleases the king,' she said, 'and if he regards me with favor and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, devised and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces. 6 For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?'"

Notice that Esther doesn't presume upon the king's favor but prefaces her request with, "If it pleases the king," and "If he regards me," and "If he is pleased with me." She's polite. But she's also willing to take risks for others at personal expense. Allow me to say it again--Esther refused to rejoice while others were condemned to die.

Does that convict you like it does me? Let's be honest. When it comes to the needs of others, most of us struggle with complacency. "I'm going to heaven. I'm saved. I've got a relationship with Christ. That's all that matters." No! It's not all that matters! There's a world out there full of people who are condemned to die an eternal death. Do we have a responsibility to them? How can we ignore them?

May I ask you a person question? What did you do in the last week to try to rescue people who are condemned to die? Esther used what she had--her position and her influence--to do something about the plight of helpless people around her. Did it make a difference? Scene #2...

B. We see the king's response (7-8). "King Xerxes replied to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, 'Because Haman attacked the Jews, I have given his estate to Esther, and they have hanged him on the gallows. 8 Now write another decree in the king's name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the king's signet ring -- for no document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring can be revoked.'"

That final statement indicates why the king didn't just annul the first edict. He couldn't. "No document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring can be revoked."

1. *He couldn't cancel the first decree.* It was impossible to change the first edict, even for the king. His hands are tied. We've already seen this in an earlier situation that involved Vashti. Xerxes made a rash decision to depose Queen Vashti. Later when he cooled down and regretted his actions, it was too late.

When the king heard Esther say, "Please do something!", he knew he couldn't cancel the first decree. So...

2. *Instead he authorized a second decree.* The second decree, in effect, neutralized the first decree. The "you" in verse 8 is plural. The king gave Esther and Mordecai permission to work together and draft their own decree: "You make another decree and I'll approve it."

Which is exactly what transpired. Esther's request led to the king's response which produced kingdom-wide results. Scene #3...

C. We see the kingdom-wide results (9-14). Verse 9 begins, "At once" ["Then...at that time" in the KJV]. Things happen quickly now. The narrator explains that the proclamation of the new edict involved three steps. First...

1. *The new edict was drafted (9-10).* "At once the royal secretaries were summoned -- on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan. They wrote out all Mordecai's orders to the Jews, and to the satraps, governors and nobles of the 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush. These orders were written in the script of each province and the language of each people and also to the Jews in their own script and language. 10 Mordecai wrote in the name of King Xerxes, sealed the dispatches with the king's signet ring, and sent them by mounted couriers, who rode fast horses especially bred for the king."

Did you catch the date? The new edict was drafted on the twenty-third day of the third month. That's two months and ten days *after* Haman published his death warrant, and a little more than eight months *before* the scheduled holocaust.

To whom was the second edict to be sent? Verse 9--To the Jews and all government officials in the 127 provinces of Xerxes' kingdom, from India to Cush. In other words, the *same people* that received the first

edict would receive the second. To insure a speedy arrival, Mordecai sent the edict by couriers riding horses especially bred for the king. Today's equivalent would be to say he sent the edict first-class air mail! Step #2...

2. *The new edict is explained (11-13).* "The king's edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and annihilate any armed force of any nationality or province that might attack them and their women and children; and to plunder the property of their enemies. 12 The day appointed for the Jews to do this in all the provinces of King Xerxes was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar. 13 A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies."

Basically, the second edict gave the Jews the right to assemble, protect themselves from attack, and to destroy and plunder their enemies. Why a Persian ruler would allow a Jewish minority to massacre his subjects at will is difficult to understand. We've seen in earlier studies that this king is indifferent to the value of human life (3:11). It is noteworthy according to 9:10, 15, & 16 that while the Jews did take the lives of their enemies, they did not take the plunder though permitted to do so.

The date is repeated. The Jews will be given one day in which to defend themselves against their enemies--the same day that Haman authorized these enemies to kill the Jews. Under the first edict the Jews could no more have defended themselves than they could have in Hitler's gas chambers. But now they can. The second edict said they could, and they had eight months and twenty days to get ready. Step #3...

3. *The new edict was sent (14).* "The couriers, riding the royal horses, raced out, spurred on by the king's command. And the edict was also issued in the citadel of Susa."

Talk about a predicament change! What a difference a day makes! No, what a difference *God* makes! He's not through either. In God's providence, our position in life can change. So can our predicaments. Let's consider a third change before we ponder some implications.

III. In God's providence, people can change (15-17).

The text reads, "Mordecai left the king's presence wearing royal garments of blue and white, a large crown of gold and a purple robe of fine linen. And the city of Susa held a joyous celebration. 16 For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor. 17 In every province and in every city, wherever the edict of the king went, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them."

Can God change people? Can He change attitudes and hearts? Can He turn things around in people's lives? If He can't, you'll have a hard time explaining three reversals, three dramatic changes presented right here.

A. Mordecai went from the gallows to the palace. Less than twenty-four hours before this, Mordecai was as good as dead. Now he's wearing royal blue and purple and a crown of gold. What a turn around! Here's a second...

B. The Jews went from hopelessness to hopefulness. Prior to this day, the Jews were hopelessly awaiting extermination. They were on death row without a hope for a stay of execution. But then God changed the heart of a pagan king, and hope returned. Verse 16 says that for the Jews "it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor."

But to me, the most amazing reversal is the third...

C. Non-Jews chose to become Jews. Listen again to the end of verse 17, "And many people of

other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them."

Wow! Remember the first edict is still in place. There remains a death warrant on the heads of the Jews. Why would you willingly become identified with a people facing possible death in less than nine months? Why? The text says they did so because "the fear of the Jews seized them." One commentator observes (Huey, 832), "The tables had turned so completely that it was now dangerous not to be a Jew."

Can you imagine what non-Jews must have thought when they heard about the promotion of Mordecai the Jew and the proclamation of the second edict? "This is amazing! Your God really takes care of you. No one can stand against Him. He's on your side. We want to be on your side, too. We want your God to be on our side."

That's the way it was *supposed* to be for Old Testament Israel all along. They were to be a "light to the nations." God's intent in blessing the Jews was not to lead to a "holy-huddle" mentality. It was to make a prodigal world homesick for the true God.

That's the kind of influence we should be having, too. People around us ought to be saying, "Wow! God is real in your life. I need and want what you have."

So how do you explain all of this--how Mordecai could go from the gallows to the palace, how the Jews went from hopelessness to hopefulness, and how non-Jews actually chose to become Jews? There's only one explanation. *God*.

This morning God's Word has confronted us with three changes that are linked to God's providential working. In the providence of God, positions can change; predicaments can change; and people can change. If that's true, what must we do?

Implications: We need to affirm the following...(based on Esther 8)

1. *God is in control of everything.* Not most things, but *everything*. Providence says, "There's not one detail in the universe outside of God's control. God orchestrates everything to accomplish His eternal, good plan." If that wasn't true, we couldn't trust Him. But it is, and we can. And indeed, we must.

When God rescues Mordecai from the gallows and makes him the #2 man in the empire, it's easy to say, "Look what God did! God's in control of everything!" But was God in control two months earlier when Haman hoodwinked Xerxes into signing the holocaust edict? And was God in control when Haman built a gallows for Mordecai? How about years earlier when Esther lost her parents?

And the answer is, yes, He is. Nothing surprises God. In His providence, He works together *all things* for good. How are we to respond? By affirming His control. And by affirming our trust in Him--even when we don't understand.

2. *God will take care of His people.* Answer this. What people did Haman try to eliminate? Answer--the *Jews*--God's chosen people. Haman did not succeed, did he? He *could not*. Why not? Because God promises to take care of His own.

When Jesus died on Calvary, Satan thought He had won. He thought wrong. God gave a guarantee in Psalm 16:10. He promised He would raise His Son from the dead. And He did.

Know this. God will take care of His people. If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, God will forgive you and save you--it's a promise. If you are a child of God, you are eternally secure--it's a promise. If you're in need, God will provide just like He did for Esther, Mordecai, and the Jews in Esther 8--it's a promise.

3. *When helpless people are condemned to die, there's cause for action.* I'm challenged by Esther's questions in verse 6, "For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?"

Here are the facts. There are helpless and hopeless people condemned to die all around us. Here's the question. What are we doing about it?

Many if not most of us lead busy lives. And we may be busy doing good things. But the fact remains, when helpless people are condemned to die there's cause for action.

Some of us are not serving the Lord as we ought. We may have excuses, "I'm too busy...I can't do it...Somebody else could do a better job than me."

Stop. If you know Christ, you are commanded by God to make Christ known to others. Is that true or not? It's true. Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses (Acts 1:8)."

God gives us a powerful charge in Proverbs 24:11-12, "Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, 'But we knew nothing about this,' does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?"

I want to put a challenge on the table. Think of ways to rescue lost people. I'm not talking about ways for *somebody else* to do it, but for you. You have neighbors who don't know Christ. God put you where you are, as He did Esther, "for such a time as this." Will you say today, "Lord, please use me however You want."?

If you're thinking, "But I'm too busy," hold on. If you are not involved in rescuing lost people, then you are too busy--with things that will not matter in one hundred years.

We can argue methodology. One person argues, "I think we should reach lost people *this way*." Another person retorts, "No, that way's not the best way to do it. I like *my way* better!" D. L. Moody once responded to someone who criticized him for his evangelistic methods, "Frankly, sir, I prefer the way I do it to the way you don't do it."

Let's stop kidding ourselves. Let's just *do it*. The statistics are clear. The American church is in decline. Few churches are reaching *lost* people. Where there is a growing church, it's often due to transfer growth, not conversion growth.

Let's resolve to do something about it. Invite a neighbor to dinner this week and share your testimony. Ask your workmate to come to church with you and hear God's Word. Give your unsaved relative a tape of a sermon, and ask for his thoughts about it. Go visit a former classmate who's lost, and talk to him about the condition of his soul. Just do it.

Ask a classmate if she would like to study the Bible with you. Help your neighbor clean up his leaves and while you're doing it, ask him if he's interested in hearing about Jesus Christ. Just do it.

I'm concerned. Some of us--maybe *many* of us--have been lulled to sleep. We know the Lord. We're okay. We know where we're going. Oh, we're concerned for lost people--at least we *say* we are. But we've lost our passion to rescue the lost. It's not there like it once was when we first came to know Christ, when the smell of hell's fire was still on our clothes.

There are people condemned to eternal destruction all around us. If they died today, they would enter torment that will never end. God is worthy of honor from their lives, too. That's why He sent Jesus. He came to rescue sinners. He left the splendor and "comfort" of heaven for us. Are we willing to leave the comfort of

our easy chair to go visit our neighbor? Are we willing to turn down the comfort of the overtime offer so we'll have time to rub shoulders with lost people? Are we willing to lose sleep if necessary so we can pray for people currently under God's condemnation?

And remember this. We can't give to others what we don't possess ourselves. If you don't have a growing relationship with Jesus Christ, you won't be able to reach lost people, let alone desire to do so.

And so I ask you again. Is it true or not--when helpless people are condemned to die, isn't there cause for action? And if there is, will you allow the words of Esther to become your own?--"How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?" Will you surrender your life to the Lord today with a renewed passion to reach and rescue lost people?