

Esther 6 "How the Lord Can Use a Sleepless Night"*

Proposition: In Esther 6, we discover a series of five "coincidences" that illustrate that God is sovereign over all the details of our lives.

I. Coincidence #1: The king couldn't sleep (1).

A. The timing was strategic.

B. The tranquilizer was providential.

II. Coincidence #2: The king discovered an oversight (2-3).

A. Mordecai had saved the king's life (2).

B. The king had failed to reward him (3).

III. Coincidence #3: Haman showed up at that very moment (4-5).

A. He'd already built the gallows.

B. He needed permission to use them on Mordecai.

IV. Coincidence #4: Haman assumed he was the man (6-11).

A. We see the evidence of pride (6-9).

1. A proud person is a self-focused person.

2. He thinks the world revolves around him.

B. We see the consequences of pride (10-11).

V. Coincidence #5: The tables began to turn (12-14).

A. Mordecai returns to work (12a).

B. Haman goes home in shame (12b-13).

C. The royal escorts arrive (14).

Some lessons from Esther 6...

1. If God is sovereign--and He is--then *nothing* just "happens."

2. We need to learn to look for the hand of God in the details of our lives.

3. When God's plan doesn't make sense, remember the final chapter isn't in yet.

4. The penalty for living a self-centered life is severe.

Recently the *New York Times* wrote a feature on what is perhaps one of the past millennium's greatest missed opportunities. John MacArthur reviews the account:

"By AD 1400, China possessed the world's largest and most advanced navy. It's admiral, Zheng He, commanded an armada of three hundred ships--some as long as four hundred feet. By comparison, when Christopher Columbus embarked on his transatlantic voyage, he took three ships, none larger than eighty-five feet. Moreover, Zheng He's ships used balanced rudders and watertight bulwark compartments--advances that wouldn't be introduced in Europe for another 350 years.

"Zheng He led his massive fleet on seven expeditions. Fifty years before Columbus set sail for the New World, Chinese ships traveled regularly to India, Siam, the East Indies, the Persian Gulf, and East Africa. With such an impressive fleet, it was only a matter of time before Zheng He turned his sights eastward and discovered the New World.

"But the discovery never happened. In 1424, the death of China's emperor led to a power struggle between the progressives, who supported foreign trade and exploration and the traditionalist Confucian scholars, who opposed China's involvement with foreign nations. When the scholars ultimately gained control, they ended all foreign trading and sea exploration. They ordered the great fleet dismantled and Zheng He's maps and records burned, setting China on a course of isolation that would last well into the twentieth century."

And the world was changed because of what China *didn't* do. It was sixty years *after* Zheng He's final voyage that Christopher Columbus discovered the New World, and Europe, not China, colonized the Americas. Europe, not China, brought its culture, its economics, and its *religion* to America. If China had not dismantled its navy, and if China had colonized the New World first, the land in which we live would be very different today. Instead of churches on street corners proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ, there would be Buddhist shrines, altars and temples.

And so I ask the question. Did the traditionalists just "happen" to win the power struggle with the progressives in China in 1424? Was it mere coincidence that Europe and not China discovered and colonized America in 1492?

History is a tapestry. For that matter, so are our individual lives. The Creator God specializes in weaving together the threads of the events of our lives to make something beautiful according to His plan. Nothing just "happens."

That's what we're seeing vividly in our study of the book of Esther. We've been watching God weave together a series of seemingly unrelated "threads." Quite honestly, to this point the tapestry doesn't look too pretty.

It's the fifth century B.C. A handful of Jews are back in the Promised Land, but the majority are not. They're out of the will of God, living in exile.

Xerxes is the king of the known world. In chapter one he threw a couple of parties, and after the second deposed his queen-wife, Vashti. In chapter two, a Jewish orphan girl named Esther won a beauty contest and became the new queen. Her cousin Mordecai was rewarded a civil servant's job where one day he uncovered an assassination plot against the king. Unfortunately, he didn't even get handshake for his efforts.

In the third chapter, Mordecai offended Xerxes' right hand man, Haman, by refusing to bow before him. Haman convinced the king to pass an edict that would result in the extermination of all the Jews on a set day in eleven months.

Mordecai urged Esther to "Do something!" in chapter four, with this plea, "Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" Esther asked the Jews to fast for three days, and then went to the king. It could have cost her her life for to approach Xerxes without his initiation was against the law.

But the king gave her not only an audience, but a blank check offer (5:3): "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you." Surprisingly, rather than telling the king what was on her mind, she invited him to a banquet, along with Haman. At that banquet, the king repeated his blank-check offer. To which Esther said, "Come to another banquet--tomorrow. Then I'll tell you my request."

So the king and Haman left. On the way out, Haman ran into Mordecai who once again refused to bow. Haman went from cloud nine to the pits, such was his rage. His wife and "friends" urged him to build a

gallows and ask the king for permission to eliminate Mordecai.

If the story ended right there, someone could easily say, "I don't get it. How does this book illustrate God's providence? It looks like haphazard chaos to me. I see a bunch of 'threads' but I don't see God at work." You will today. You're about to see the "threads" take shape!

In Esther 6, we discover a series of five "coincidences" that illustrate that God is sovereign over all the details of our lives. Here's the first.

I. Coincidence #1: The king couldn't sleep (1).

"That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him." There are two important features about this sleepless night.

A. The timing was strategic. It happened *that* night. What night? The night after Esther's first banquet and before her second banquet. On the next day Esther will spell out her petition to the king. But on this night, the night before he would hear her, the king couldn't sleep.

Why not? We're not told. From a human standpoint, there are lots of possibilities. This guy has a lot on his mind--running a kingdom, avoiding threats to his throne. Not to mention all rich food he's been eating at his parties!

But unknown to Xerxes, there's another reason he can't sleep. It's the divine reason. God has something in store for him that night. The *Schofield Bible* offers an insightful comment about the situation: "Here is a remarkable instance of the veiled providential control of God over circumstances of human history. Upon the king's insomnia, humanly speaking, were hinged the survival of the chosen nation, the fulfillment of prophecy, the coming of the Redeemer, and therefore the whole work of redemption. Yet the outcome was never in doubt; for God was in control, making the most trivial of events work together for Haman's defeat and Israel's preservation." So the timing was strategic.

B. The tranquilizer was providential. What do you do when you can't sleep? Maybe you listen to music, or turn on the television, or count sheep (or still better, talk to the Shepherd!). Some people read. That's the option Xerxes chose.

He didn't have *Niquil* so he did the next best thing. He ordered his servants to read to him "the book of the chronicles." That's not the biblical book of Chronicles, for as verse 1 specifies it was "the record of his reign." Xerxes was a self-focused man, so it ought not surprise us that he wanted to hear about *his* reign. And it didn't matter to him that he kept someone else awake. It was his own sleeplessness that bothered him, so he ordered one of his subjects to read to him.

You say, "A book of government records doesn't sound too exciting." No, and that's the point. Xerxes wanted something boring--and few documents are more boring to listen to than board minutes!

But it just so "happened" that the tranquilizer Xerxes selected was providential. Which brings us to the second coincidence.

II. Coincidence #2: The king discovered an oversight (2-3).

Notice the first words of verse 2, "It was found recorded there." The verb is passive. The author of Esther never mentions God by name, but He's there orchestrating every detail. In this case, God made sure Xerxes *found* the following record.

"It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who

guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes."

Think of all the possible pages Xerxes' servant could have selected to read. By this time Xerxes had been king for twelve years. A lot had happened in twelve years. But the servant just "happened" to turn in the book to an event that happened *five* years earlier. Not six nor four, but *five*. He read an account that described how...

A. Mordecai had saved the king's life (2). The narrator told us that detail back in 2:21-23, but it didn't seem significant at the time. Nothing happened.

Isn't that the way life is for us, too? Things that seem insignificant at the time later become very significant in God's plan. In my life, for instance, when I was a child my father was a High School principal. Due to changes in State regulations, he had to go back to school which meant we had to move. Which meant we ended up changing churches. Which resulted in us landing in a Bible believing church.

Furthermore, at about the same time God was at work in another family, in another father's job change. As a result, a seventh grade teen girl just happened to move to the same town to which I moved. Today she's my wife. It's amazing to watch how God works!

Mordecai didn't know anything would come of his efforts to expose an assassination plot. He was just doing his job. And for the next five years, nothing did come of it--and never would have except for the night when a king couldn't sleep.

As Xerxes listened to his servant drone on and on, all of a sudden this caught his ear: "Bigthana and Teresh. Yea, I remember them. Those were those scoundrels who used to guard my door and wanted to get rid of me. That's right. I forgot about them. And what was that fellow's name who uncovered the plot? Oh, yea--Mordecai."

At that point, the king stopped his reader. Verse 3 tells what happened, "'What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this?' the king asked. 'Nothing has been done for him,' his attendants answered."

Here was the oversight. Mordecai had saved the king's life, but...

B. The king had failed to reward him (3). The ancient historian, Herodotus, recorded that it was a point of honor for Persian kings to reward promptly and generously subjects who helped them. For instance, Xerxes once gave two men land as a reward. Another time he recognized a man who saved the life of his brother by giving him the governorship of Cilicia.

But in Mordecai's case, nothing had been done. Not even a "thank you" note. And now that he's reminded of it, the oversight bothered Xerxes. It was a reflection on the king if he failed to reward one of his benefactors. Here's coincidence #3...

III. Coincidence #3: Haman showed up at that very moment (4-5).

Verses 4-5, "The king said, 'Who is in the court?' Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the palace to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows he had erected for him. 5 His attendants answered, 'Haman is standing in the court.' 'Bring him in,' the king ordered."

Talk about timing! Xerxes has just discovered his oversight when, perhaps, he hears a noise in the outer court. "Who's out there?" he wants to know. It's Haman. What's he doing there? We're not told the time, but it's likely still dark outside.

Why is Haman in the palace? He has something on his mind. Maybe he can't sleep either. Maybe he knows

the king's schedule fills up quickly and wants to be first on the docket. Maybe, as Xerxes' right hand man, he knows the king's sleep patterns and just figures he'll be awake. Maybe.

Of this we can be sure. Haman did not show up at that time by accident. I'm sure he had no idea of it, but it's true. He was there according to divine appointment.

From his perspective and by his own choice, Haman showed up because he had an agenda, a twofold agenda. First...

A. He'd already built the gallows. He'd followed the advice of his wife and friends and built a 75 feet high death instrument. According to verse 4, the gallows are in place, but Haman's agenda isn't complete.

B. He needed permission to use them on Mordecai. And that's why he's there at this odd hour, to ask the king to authorize an execution.

Upon hearing that his henchman is the man in the court, the king gives the order, "Bring him in (5)." And now the stage is set for the fourth coincidence.

IV. Coincidence #4: Haman assumed he was the man (6-11).

Remember the sequence. The king and his servant had just discovered the oversight of Mordecai when Haman entered the room, but Haman knew nothing of the previous conversation. Xerxes bypasses formalities with Haman and poses him with an immediate question.

Notice the question and Haman's answer in verse 6: "When Haman entered, the king asked him, 'What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?' Now Haman thought to himself, 'Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?'"

For some reason, the king doesn't mention a name, but simply states, "What should be done for *the man* the king delights to honor?" And Haman falsely assumes he's *the man*.

What is that? It's pride. Haman was a proud man, and his pride is about to lead to his downfall. In verses 6-9 we see...

A. We see the evidence of pride (6-9). Listen to Haman beginning in verse 7: "So he answered the king, 'For the man the king delights to honor, 8 have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head. 9 Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king's most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, 'This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!'"

Pride shows up in lots of ways. Haman exhibits two of them.

1. *A proud person is a self-focused person.* Haman didn't need money--we've already heard him boast about his vast wealth back in 5:11. More money didn't appeal to him. But *respect* did. He craved the respect of people.

By the way it was his lust for respect that blinded him back in chapter three, too. When Mordecai refused to bow before him, Haman was enraged (5). "How dare he not bow? I deserve respect!" And he wanted it so much that he was willing to kill an entire race of people to get it.

Haman's "wish list" tells us a lot about Haman. And you get the sense that Haman didn't have to think too long before answering. "O king, here's what you should do for *the man*. Put one of your royal robes on him--

not a new one, but one you've already worn [that way people will think, "Wow! This fellow must be important if the king shares his clothes with him!"]. And let him ride one of your royal horses, one that has a royal crest on its head. And let one of your noble princes escort *the man* through the streets proclaiming what a great guy he is!"

My friend, this wish list is what Haman's living for. He wants fame, authority, applause, popularity, power, and most of all *respect*.

What about you? If you could have "your day," what would you request? This is key. Your desires indicate your values. What you want reveals what you're living for.

Sally (a fictitious person) told her friend over the telephone, "I'm miserable. What I want more than anything is a husband who loves me." Those words indicate what Sally's living for.

Steve and Mary (also fictitious) don't know what to do next. Their child has, in their words, "embarrassed" them again. In frustration Steve says to his wife, "I don't understand what we did to deserve this. All I've ever wanted was a well behaved child."

Those phrases are indicators. "All I've ever wanted." "What I want more than anything." What drives you? What do you dream about? What do you lose sleep over?

You say, "What *should* we want more than anything?" Listen to Jesus, "Not my will, but yours be done (Luke 22:42)." What was Jesus' highest desire? To do the Father's will. At the end of His earthly life Jesus prayed these words to His Father (John 17:4), "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do."

Is that what you want? Is that your utmost desire in life--to please the Father and do His will? I challenge you to take inventory today, and make this resolve, "Father, from this moment on I want to please You more than anything."

By the way, if you don't know Jesus Christ personally, you won't be able to say that. You won't want to. And even if you know Christ, you'll struggle but the Holy Spirit will produce right desires in you if you will cooperate with Him.

Rather than living to please God, a proud person, like Haman, is a self-focused person. Secondly...

2. He thinks the world revolves around him. Haman sure did! He walks into a room, hears a question about a man deserving honor, and thinks to himself (6), "Who is there that the king would rather honor *than me*?"

Let's set the record straight. The world doesn't revolve around *us*. This is God's world. All things are from Him, through Him, and to Him (Rom. 11:36). When we live as though the world revolves around us rather than God, we're in big trouble. There are consequences which is what we see next.

B. We see the consequences of pride (10-11). I would love to have had my Soni 8mm camcorder zoomed in on Haman's face to capture what happened next!

Verses 10-11, "'Go at once,' the king commanded Haman. 'Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended.'

11 So Haman got the robe and the horse. He robed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city streets, proclaiming before him, 'This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!'"

Talk about "Open mouth, insert foot."! I'm sure Haman's jaw hit the floor. What?! You're not talking about *me*? You want to honor *that* man, *that* Jewish man, Mordecai? And you want *me* to do it?

The man Haman most hates, the one whose people he's already taken steps to destroy, the one he'd built a gallows for and was here now to request permission to kill. *That* man!

"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall (Prov. 16:18)." "When pride comes, then comes disgrace (Prov. 11:2)." "A man's pride brings him low (Prov. 29:23)."

Nebuchadnezzar learned that truth the hard way about a century before this. After boasting about his greatness, God humbled him and he went insane for seven years. The moment he humbled himself and looked to God, he was restored and gave this testimony (Daniel 4:37), "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble."

That's what Haman learned--pride has consequences. Here's the final coincidence...

V. Coincidence #5: The tables began to turn (12-14).

The narrator provides us with three important details, the first concerns Mordecai.

A. Mordecai returns to work (12a). "Afterward Mordecai returned to the king's gate." The king's gate was where Mordecai worked. What a day it had been for Mordecai! He'd been fasting for three days. He woke up that morning knowing that unless God intervened he'd be dead in less than eleven months--if not sooner. And then his would-be-killer showed up, not to take his life but to escort him on the king's horse as a man of honor. Wow! What a difference 24 hours makes! No, what a difference *God* makes! Not just for Mordecai, either. Notice what happened to Haman.

B. Haman goes home in shame (12b-13). "But Haman rushed home, with his head covered in grief, 13 and told Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him. His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, 'Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him -- you will surely come to ruin!'"

Some would say Haman has a problem with poor self-esteem. Wrong. For perhaps the first time in his life, he's feeling what he should feel about himself. Shame. Grief.

But it's not godly grief. According to 2 Corinthians 7:9-11, godly sorrow produces repentance and an eagerness to change. People can shed tears for lots of reasons. Just because a person is emotional doesn't mean his heart has changed. Haman's hadn't.

Haman's wife and advisers are real encouragers, aren't they? Don't you love it when people tell you the obvious as if you didn't already know? Their words: "Haman, it's bad. But it's going to get worse. You can't stand against the Jews. You're heading for ruin!"

In a word, Zeresh is a *fatalist*. Que sera, sera. Whatever will be, will be. What *should* she and the other advisers have said? This--"Haman, you're wrong. *We're* wrong. Let's get right with God. He's in this. These are His people we're dealing with. Let's stop resisting Him. Let's plead for mercy."

But that's not what Zeresh did. Nor Haman. Nor do unregenerate people today apart from the Holy Spirit's enablement. I see the same response all the time. God sends a trial, a wake-up call to get someone's attention. And the person responds with a fatalistic, "Whatever will be will be. God's in control." Which in essence means, "I don't have any intention of changing, and I'm not about to submit my life to God."

Talk about timing! At that very moment...

C. The royal escorts arrive (14). "While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman away to the banquet Esther had prepared."

What a difference a sleepless night can make! The destiny of an entire people was changed the night a king couldn't sleep. But how does this story apply to us?

Four lessons from Esther 6...

1. *If God is sovereign--and He is--then nothing just "happens."* Did it seem strange to you that the king would knowingly honor a Jew (he specifically calls Mordecai "the Jew" in verse 10) since he'd already passed an edict authorizing the elimination of the Jews? Such an action fits Xerxes well. He's an unpredictable man of extremes who lives by his whims. But even with such a man on the throne, God is in control.

Things don't just "happen." God has a purpose, and He wants us to trust Him.

2. *We need to learn to look for the hand of God in the details of our lives.* How can you explain the coincidences of Esther 6? You can't, other than to say, *Look what God did!* But do you know what we often do? So often we fail to recognize God. If He blesses us, we take it for granted. If He allows a trial, we think He's on vacation.

Beloved, we need to learn to see God's hand moving in the details of our lives. Allow me to give you some examples from our church family.

Bill Johnson pastored another church in our area. The church hurt him and his family deeply, so they came to us for a time of healing. Prior to coming here Bill and his wife, Beth, had tried to reach two families with the gospel. But the families were unresponsive. Until *after* the Johnsons came here. God used the Johnsons to open up a door for our church to begin to minister to these two families. Within the next year, God allowed us to reach both families for Christ. One has since moved to Columbus. The other is the Henry family who today are a vital part of our church.

Do you see the hand of God in this? God can use even painful church situations to accomplish His plan and bring people to Himself.

Another example. Kevin was facing a tough exam, but was filled with insecurity and fear. He needed help. A friend at work told him her pastor could help. So he drove an hour on a Monday evening to seek counsel. I remember it well. God used that trial to get Kevin's attention, and then He used His Word to bring Kevin to faith in Christ. Today, Kevin is serving Christ as a key part of our church family.

Dorman is another example. This 75 year old man had a stroke and moved to Wheelersburg to be closer to his son's care. Dorman's neighbor befriended him, a neighbor who happened to be from our church. Visits were made, the gospel was shared, and God saved Dorman's soul. Dorman died not long after.

Do you see the hand of God in these lives? More importantly, do you see His hand in *your* life? Are you cooperating? Perhaps you've been ignoring or even resisting God. Will you submit to Him today?

3. *When God's plan doesn't make sense, remember the final chapter isn't in yet.* The Cross didn't make sense when Jesus carried it along the Via Dolorosa. Nor when the crowds mocked and the leaders jeered. Nor when they extracted the stubborn nails from His hands and feet and lay Him in the tomb. It didn't make sense on Saturday when the silent tomb screamed, "What are you doing, God?!"

Then Sunday came. And it began to make sense. Jesus' death was no accident, no tragic quirk of fate. It

was the plan of God. He had to die. It was His Father's will. He died so that we might live! His death is the bridge by which we enter eternal life. And when He returns in all His glory and the final chapter is written, we won't be questioning the plan of God. We'll be worshipping and adoring Him.

And the question is--why wait until then?

4. *The penalty for living a self-centered life is severe. Just ask Haman.*