

“MORDECAI SAVES THE KING.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Esther 2:19-23

Introduction.

We are in Susa, one of the oldest cities in the world located in present day Iran. It served as the winter capital of Persia. On a hill in the center of the city was the citadel, or fortress palace, of King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I the Great), emperor of the largest empire up to that time in history, stretching from India to Egypt. He was the most powerful man in the world.

Esther was crowned the new queen to replace Vashti and as King Ahasuerus liked to do, there was a huge party to celebrate.

Now the story quickly settles into the political life around the palace, stories of promotions and plots, the stuff of our evening news. Life in politics is never all sweetness and light.

Mordecai's promotion.

Our text begins with a couple of strange notes, a gathering of the virgins and a reminder that no one knows Esther's true identity.

The gathering of the virgins may refer to the releasing of all the virgins that had been gathered into the harem during the beauty contest to choose a queen, those who had not spent a night with the king. Or this is a second gathering, indicating the king had not given up his old ways and continued to gather girls for his own sinful pleasure.

Even as queen, Esther remains loyal to Mordecai and obeys his request. This brief note by the writer is preparing us for a great conflict that will soon arise and may hint at anti-Semitic tensions already at work in the palace.

These details aside, we turn to the business of Mordecai sitting at the king's gate. That phrase can refer to holding an official position or office, like a judge sitting on the bench.

The palace gate was an important gathering place and Mordecai's presence there suggests some kind of position and rank. Gates in ancient times were large courtyard like places

for carrying out official business, legal and civil matters and commercial transactions. You might recall Boaz conducting some business in a city gate on behalf of young Ruth.

Mordecai foils a conspiracy to kill the king.

Both Scripture and history are filled with assassinations and assassination attempts. In our own nation there have been four assassinations of presidents (Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley, Kennedy) and at least 16 attempts.

We know from history that Ahasuerus would eventually be assassinated in 465 BC in his bedroom by the commander of the royal bodyguard with the help of a eunuch.

Our text recounts an earlier attempt by two of the royal bodyguards, Bigthan and Teresh, who were assigned to guard the threshold to the king's palace, or the door to his private residence. They had inside access to the king so he was an easy target.

We are not told why they were angry with the king and began scheming to kill him. A few speculate maybe it had something to do with the removal of Vashti and the replacement being non-Persian or maybe even known by some to be a Jew.

Remember what Scripture says about anger.

Matthew 5:21-22 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.

I John 3:15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

Anger unrepented of leads to other sins like vengeance, violence and even murder. It poisons the soul. The seeds of this sin are in every one of our hearts. We have all felt it and even seen it well up into words or actions we later regret. We are capable of much evil. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. Deal with your anger quickly, don't let it fester and lead to bitterness.

It just so happened that something was overheard by someone and somehow it just happened to come to the attention of Mordecai who told Esther who told the king who put together an investigative committee which verified the facts of the matter.

The two traitors were hanged and the circumstances of this matter were recorded in the official book of the chronicles of Persia. Sort of like the congressional record. This little detail is very crucial to what happens later.

Then something unexpected happens, or should I say nothing happens, which is unexpected. Persian kings were known for their generosity and for richly rewarding those who helped them. So we would expect chapter 3 to be with Mordecai's promotion, sort of something like what happened with Joseph and Pharaoh. The king owes him his life.

But nothing is done for Mordecai and by contrast as we see in the next chapter, Haman is promoted by the king without any explanation. What an interesting twist in this story, Haman's unexplained promotion and Mordecai's unrewarded loyalty.

Timing is everything and it was absolutely necessary in God's bigger plan to delay any reward. Even when nothing happens, it is God's doing. The name of God is nowhere mentioned, but the hand of God is very much present. There is purpose in every step.

Remember Joseph in prison in Egypt helps the royal baker, but his kindness isn't rewarded for two more years, but at just the right time.

Fate vs. Providence.

Let's pause to ponder the providence of God. It is good to be reminded of what is true about God in a world where everything and everyone around us seems to deny Him.

The providence of God means that God according to His good, wise, perfect and holy will governs and guides all creation and all creatures, all actions and events for His own glory. This includes all the actions of every single one of the over 7 billion people alive on our planet right now.

Someone has called providence "the hand of God in the glove of human history." The name of God may be absent, but the hand of God is very much present.

There is no such thing as fate or chance or luck or mere coincidence. Nothing just happens. Can you imagine the Bible beginning, "In the beginning was fate and good fortune"?

A young Jewish girl finds favor in the king's harem and in the king's palace. Her cousin is promoted to some position giving him access to palace matters. He happens to overhear news of an assassination attempt.

Does God really have time to pay attention even to gossip in some ancient, pagan kingdom? To what depths does He condescend? How far down does His providence extend? Is the God of the galaxies Lord over gossip?

Apparently, because we have recorded in Scripture another assassination attempt foiled by gossip. The apostle Paul had a sister, and her son loved his uncle Paul. One day the teenager was in the shadows of Jerusalem when he overheard a plot to assassinate his beloved uncle (Acts 23:16).

Just in the nick of time the plot was uncovered and the Roman tribune ordered 470 men to protect Paul. Chance, good luck? No the active hand of God even in the smallest details of life.

Matthew 10:29-30 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

Do you believe that? Does God have the time or interest to count the hairs on our heads?

There is nothing God doesn't know. The hairs of our head, the hairs in our hair brush and on the bathroom floor. Yes, God is a micromanager.

You are sitting in your living room and a sparrow crashes into your window and falls to the ground dead. God knows everyone.

God knows the number of mosquitoes and spiders, the number of grains of sand and dust particles under every bed and on every surface.

I saw a gracious act of God's providence last weekend at the church family camp. After about ten years of camping at the Concrete KOA the decision was made to try someplace new. It was a bit drizzly and wet on Saturday evening for our big potluck dinner, but unlike the KOA this camp had a shelter house that all 77 of us could eat in without getting wet. God knew, God took care of us.

Do we ever begin to question if God is in control when we don't see Him at work, or He isn't answering our prayers, or things go from bad to worse to terrible? Like Mordecai we could question why we are being passed over or ignored or forgotten. We do good and nothing good comes from it, so what's the point?

I don't know the details of your life. I don't know what hardship or pain or suffering or struggle or difficulty or trial you are going through, but I do know something.

God is alive, God is all powerful, God is good, God has a plan and a purpose, and nothing can thwart Him or hold back His hand. He is trustworthy and He is with you and will not leave you or forsake you.

Is this fatalistic? No, fate is blind, providence has eyes, God sees and knows all things. Fate is impersonal, providence is very personal, intimately personal.

The book of Esther is much more like real life than the books that record the great miracles of God. In Exodus God parted the Red Sea and they walked across on dry ground, God fed them manna in the wilderness and made water come out of a rock, God knocked down the walls of Jericho. God can do all of that and sometimes does.

But God also just as powerfully works by His providence, quietly dictating and directing all things for His glory and our good. And if we have eyes to see, we can see His hand just as much in His providence as in His miracles.

The doctrine of the providence of God tells us that the world and our lives are not ruled by fate or chance, but by God. God is God and His goal is His glory and our good.

Implications and application.

All of us like to think that through careful planning and wise choices and decisions we can control the course and outcome of our lives. And to a degree we can. We learn, we work, we save, we organize, we make allowances for contingencies. But all of us can look back on our lives and see many times when things happened that changed the course of our lives over which we had no control, sometimes for good and sometimes for ill.

The truth is every new day opens to a myriad of possibilities that we can't anticipate nor can we know the true significance of them. Only God knows the beginning and the end.

Esther was taken from her home to belong to the king. Mordecai was denied reward and recognition owed him. The wicked seem to prosper and the righteous seem to suffer.

Have you been passed over, have you had your hard work go unnoticed, or even worse, credit given to another? Have you felt the sting of bitterness or resentment? Have you seen favor or favoritism given to one less deserving?

You don't know the meaning and significance of all the details of your life. So here is what remains for us to do. Be faithful, do good works, and trust a sovereign God to direct all things to a good and perfect and God-glorifying end. Exercise patience and grace and wait on the Lord.

Sometimes things run in reverse, sometimes things go backwards. Like the inner workings of a watch, some of the wheels spin clockwise and some counter clockwise, but both accomplishing a good purpose.

Thomas Watson, "God is to be trusted when his providences seem to run contrary to his promises" (*Body of Divinity*, p. 123).

We need a well-developed Christian worldview that reminds us that God is at work everywhere in everything and that where God is at work, not everything will make sense in the moment or be comfortable or pleasant all the time.

Let this be cause for comfort to you in a world where crazy dictators are shooting off rockets and terrorists set off bombs wherever they want and hurricanes leave huge trails of destruction and cancer cells multiply seemingly at will and accidents happen without warning.

Let the providence of God be cause for thankfulness and worship. Admire God for His power and wisdom to be in charge of everything. Be in awe of so great a God.

Let the providence of God be a deterrent to grumbling and complaining. Believe God loves you and cares for you and purposes no evil. Trust in Him for He is powerful and good. Everything that happens must be for our deepest and highest good.

Look forward to that day in heaven when all the mysterious providences of God will be made known and we will rejoice to see the glorious purposes of God and how absolutely everything worked for our salvation and sanctification.

This doctrine is our comfort. What is your only comfort in life and death? (p. 861)

Unison: That I am not my own, but belong – body and soul, in life and in death – to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven: in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for Him.