

## **“SLEEPLESS IN SUSA.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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### **Scripture Texts: Esther 6:1-13**

#### **Esther 6:1-3, Sleepless in Susa.**

On that night. On that very night, the king could not sleep. How can this possibly be news worthy or Scripture worthy? Lots of people have nights they can't sleep, even kings and queens. Yet this seemingly insignificant and mundane moment in the hands of God is the turning point of the whole book of Esther.

Of all the moments in the book of Esther, this has to be the most insignificant, yet this is the providential pivot point for the great reversal. Haman is riding high, Mordecai is going to hang even higher, the Jews will be exterminated and then the king can't sleep and everything changes.

It's not Esther's feast or Mordecai's loyalty to the king or Haman's edict. They aren't in control, they aren't directing what happens. Clearly this is outside of them, it is the hand of God.

Literally sleep fled him, which some interpret to mean God took sleep from him. Maybe the feast with Esther was on his mind, after all he did offer up to half his kingdom. Maybe he is mulling over what she could be wanting.

What do you do when you can't sleep. What happens next is yet another strange coincidence. Instead of calling for one of his harem girls, or asking his cooks to whip up something to eat or bring a glass of warm milk, or going to his office to work on some official business or catch up on e-mail and Facebook, he asks for the Chronicles of the Kingdom to be read to him, administrative records and reports from the 127 provinces of the empire.

Frankly, this is the last thing we would expect. I picture this being the equivalence of the President asking for the Congressional Record to be read to him. A sure cure for insomnia.

And in fact, that may be just what the king hopes, that the monotonous reading will put him to sleep. Of all the record entries from all the 127 provinces the reader turns to the page about Mordecai. What are the odds? While Haman is preparing to take Mordecai's life, the king is hearing about how Mordecai saved his life.

That nothing was done for Mordecai was scandalous for Persian kings who were known for generously rewarding those who did good to them. They took pride in blessing loyalty. Besides unrewarded loyalty could come back to bit you.

Remember there was a huge gap, maybe as many as five years, between the event and this knowledge of it. The timing was very important, though Mordecai could never have guessed it.

How often do we get impatient with God's timing, with God's apparent slowness in acting? How often do we want God to follow our time table rather than His? God's timing is always exactly right for God's purposes.

One of the challenges of following Christ and being a Christian is submitting ourselves to God and to His will and His ways. Not my will but thy will be done.

### **Esther 6:4-9, Haman traps himself.**

As the king was up all night, so possibly was Haman, busy building and preparing his plan to kill Mordecai. Anxious to be the first one on the king's appointment docket he appeared at the palace very early in the morning and as it turns out at just the moment when the king asks if there is anyone in the palace.

We can see the trap Haman is setting for himself, though he can't. There is a dark humor in all of this. Interesting, both of them have Mordecai on their mind and want to talk about him. One awake planning how to honor Mordecai, another awake planning how to humiliate Mordecai.

The king asks who can help and the perfect answer is there, his best advisor, his number two man at just the moment he needs him. The king is thrilled Haman is there already, and Haman is thrilled the king is up already and has asked for him.

***“What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?”***

Notice how many times this gets repeated.

It is a perfectly innocent question and it throws Haman off guard. Haman's vanity and sense of self-importance blind him. He trips over his own pride. Who in the kingdom could possibly be more important than him? Who possibly could be more worthy of a great reward?

He already has the king's signet ring, he has been asked to come to two invitation only feasts with the king and queen. Who is more important?

If Haman had been wise he would have asked the king who he wished to honor, but he is a fool. This is a man who craves honor and glory. His ego constantly needs inflating.

This is evident in his answer in that he doesn't ask for money or land or some great title, after all he is already number two. There was nowhere up, except to be like the king, to wear what the king's wears, ride the horse the king rides, be treated as the king is treated.

Oh, how the mighty are fallen. God resists the proud and humbles the exalted.

**Proverbs 18:7** A fool's mouth is his ruin, and his lips are a snare to his soul.

**Proverbs 10:14** The wise lay-up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool brings ruin near.

**Proverbs 26:27** Whoever digs a pit will fall into it,  
and a stone will come back on him who starts it rolling.

**Esther 6:10-13, Mordecai honored and Haman humiliated.**

Now comes the poetic justice, the beginning of Haman's terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. God's perfect timing created the opportunity, Haman's ego provided the rest.

Of course, the great irony is how Haman becomes trapped by his very words. He makes the trap even worse by saying all of this should be done by one of the king's most senior officials.

The king tells Haman to do everything he has just said, being sure not to leave out a single detail, for Mordecai, and without delay.

The knife goes in deeper when the king specifically says, “Mordecai the Jew” who sits at the king’s gate. The Jews reading this story through their painful history, read this text with great delight, savoring every morsel.

Haman doesn’t just have to watch this done, he has to do it himself. And no doubt while he is walking the streets of Susa he can see those 75 foot gallows mocking him at every corner.

Having to do this galled Haman more than words can describe. If we saw his wrath before, this crushing humiliation is off the charts. He came to publicly shame and humiliate Mordecai and now he must honor him, he himself being the one shamed and humiliated. It was his worst nightmare.

The scene at Haman’s home is a stark contrast to the evening before which was full of great boasting. Now he is utterly crushed with humiliation.

This would be the moment to repent, this would be the moment to acknowledge your sin and turn from it. When God humbles you, pay attention, don’t resist. A broken and contrite and humble heart, God will not despise.

“If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him.”

This is a strange statement and hard to figure out. But they are agreed that if Mordecai is a Jew then there is no hope left for Haman. They somehow understand that what is ahead is going to go badly for Haman. They see something bigger at work.

Do they recognize the hand of God, the hidden providence?

Do they see the hate in Haman’s heart and the injustice of his actions?

Do they know something about God’s promise to the Israelites that they will destroy Amalek? (Exodus 17:14-16).

Against the God of Abraham and Moses and David there is no hope. God loves His people, God cares for His people.

### **Implications and application.**

There is a theoretical phenomenon called the butterfly effect that basically says small causes can have larger effects. This concept was initially used in theories about

weather prediction, for example a tornado being caused by the flapping of a butterfly's wings the week before.

It is similar to the domino effect, one small falling domino setting off a whole chain of events.

This theory is impossible to prove, but it introduces the question of the effect seemingly insignificant daily choices can have in our world. The history of the world is filled with countless millions of seemingly inconsequential moments setting in motion huge changes.

Abraham Lincoln deciding to go to the Ford Theater.

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria setting off WWI.

JFK deciding to ride with the convertible top down.

Rosa Parks deciding to sit in the front of a bus.

A single Chinese man facing down a column of tanks in Tiananmen Square.

Todd Beamer saying, "Let's roll" on United Flight 93 on 9/11.

A little monk nailing a piece of paper to the door of a church.

Your most mundane moments and trivial pursuits are infused with divinity, with God's presence and purpose. I am sure if you look back over your lives with the benefit of hindsight you can see small events that lead to life changing moments.

A phone call, a chance meeting, an unexpected offer, a move, any number of God's anonymous, redemptive, purposeful, meaningful moments.

I am certain the most important event in your life, your coming to faith in Jesus Christ was the result of a long series of a chain of events, most of which were insignificant.

"There is no event so commonplace but that God is present within it, always leaving you room to recognize him" (Frederick Buechner).

"There is no such thing as "chance," "luck," or "accident" in God's creation, or in our journey through this world. All is arranged and appointed by God, our heavenly Father. ... Let us seek to have an abiding sense of God's hand in all our affairs. All our steps are ordered by Him" (J.C. Ryle).

Esther wasn't lucky to be queen. Mordecai wasn't lucky to overhear the assassination plot. It wasn't luck that caused that reader to read that particular record or that Haman walked in just then.

God is intimately involved in the details of daily life. God had been working on His plan to save the Jews for at least five years, slowly steadily reversing the fortunes of the Jews.

To recognize this changes us, causes us to walk more intentionally by faith, to seize every moment as an opportunity to be used by God.

We too often look for God in the miraculous, in the spectacular, signs and wonders, and miss Him in the still small voice, in the simple and ordinary and common-place. Our God is so great that He doesn't need miracles, He can work the most ordinary events of billions of people to His eternal purposes.

Mordecai and the Jews were not saved by a miracle or the supernatural, but by the ordinary events of human life, sleeplessness, revenge, pride.

We need to sharpen our senses to detect God at work all around us in daily life.

Where in your life are you having a hard time waiting on the Lord? Where are you struggling to make sense out of the daily details of life? Where do you feel like God is silent or absent? Where in your life do you feel like God has forgotten you or neglected you or been unfair to you?

**John 13:7** Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand."

God doesn't tell Mordecai what He is doing or why, He doesn't tell him why he was passed over and forgotten or why He let the king decree the execution of all the Jews.

We are to walk by faith, not by sight. Faith says I don't have to know, I don't have to see all the way to the end, I don't have to have answers to all my questions.

To all who love and follow Jesus, God promises to be with you always, to never leave you alone in your suffering, and to never let whatever happens be meaningless or purposeless.

**Romans 8:31-32** What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?