

“A EUCATASTROPHE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Esther 8

Introduction.

J.R.R. Tolkien, the author of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of The Rings*, invented a word for “what makes a story, especially fairy stories, truly great. He called it *eucatastrophe*. A good catastrophe! He said it means, “the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears.” He likened the sudden relief that eucatastrophe brings to the snapping back into place of a limb that had been long put out of joint. Joyous relief”

(<https://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/eucatastrophe>).

The Jews reading this story through their painful history, read this text with great delight, savoring every morsel of this eucatastrophe.

This is poetic justice, a fancy term for he got his comeuppance, his just desserts. What Haman planned to do to others was done to him. He was impaled on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai and everything that was his is given over to Mordecai.

Mordecai’s promotion, vss. 1-2.

Haman estate and fortune revert back to King Ahasuerus and he in turn turns it over to Esther who gives it to Mordecai, his new prime minister. Furthermore the king gives Mordecai his signet ring. This is the next of several reversals to come, which will culminate in chapter 9.

The fact that Mordecai is elevated by the king to Haman’s former position does raise one interesting question. What are we to make of the wisdom of Mordecai’s and Esther’s early strategy to keep their identity under cover. If they had both been upfront, could this entire crisis have been averted? Could Esther have live without compromising her values and morals?

Sometime when we compromise and cover up and try to play it safe, things don’t turn out as well as we hoped. Sometimes it only makes matters worse. How often do we sin out of fear of dangers that never actually happen? Sin usually only complicates matters and makes them worse.

Faithfulness and obedience are the shortest path to God’s best purpose and plan. But we are speculating. This is the path of history, this is the path God choose to reveal His redemptive power.

Esther’s plea to revoke the decree, vss. 3-8.

The enemy is dead, a sense of justice is satisfied, the king's anger is gone, but there is still something unfinished. Haman is dead but the crisis is far from over, the edict still stands. In about ten months all the Jews in all 127 provinces of the Persian empire will be killed.

The man who built the bomb is killed, but the bomb is still ticking with no way to defuse it.

Esther is truly distraught, she loves her people. She throws herself down before the king just as Haman had done before her, but he was trying to save his own neck, where Esther is trying to save her people.

The king extends the golden scepter. This time she gets straight to the point, no deferring like she did at the feasts. She has shown her loyalty to the king and doesn't have to mince words. Still she is careful and most deferential with her words.

Four deferential clauses seems a bit overdone to us.

“If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and if the thing seems right before the king, and I am pleasing in his eyes, then ...”

She builds the king's favor phrase by phrase. And she finishes with two questions meant to tug at the king's heartstrings. How could he possibly refuse?

“For how can I bear to see the calamity that is coming to my people? Or how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred?”

But there is a problem, it is the matter of the irrevocability or irreversibility of the laws of the Medes and the Persians. The king cannot overturn or erase the decree.

There is only one possible solution.

The king gives Mordecai free reign to come up with a new law that might circumvent the old law. Write whatever law you want to write realizing that the old law is still out there and it was sealed with the king's seal and cannot be revoked.

Go ahead and try to reverse the irreversible. Write a law that contradicts the first law and in essence make it null and void. “May the best edict win!” (Iain Duguid).

Mordecai's new counter decree, vs. 9-14.

Mordecai wastes no time, for there is no time to waste. It is a vast empire and the word must travel far and wide. The royal secretaries are summoned to write a counter edict and then translate it into all the languages and alphabets of the empire.

The new edict says the Jews may defend themselves from their enemies. They may do what was ordered to be done to them, to destroy, kill and annihilate their attackers and their families.

The edict matches the wording of Haman's edict, even down to plundering their enemies, but with one difference. Haman's edict was a call to attack, Mordecai's edict is a call to defend themselves from any attack. It is meant to level the playing field for the Jews and neutralize Haman's edict.

It was self-defense with a twist. Anyone who attacked them, they could in turn attack, and not just them but the families and possessions of their attackers.

Those who sought to destroy Jews, could now receive Haman's fate, to be killed and have their family and possessions taken. But as we will see in chapter 9, no possessions or plunder are taken.

The pony expresse take off on their fastest horses. All that remains now is to wait and see what happens in about 10 months.

Celebrating in Susa, vss. 15-17.

And the edict is posted in Susa where there is joyous relief, a eucatastrophe.

The first edict had thrown Susa into confusion and turmoil
This second edict threw Susa into shouting and rejoicing.

After the first edict the four words used were mourning, fasting, weeping and wailing (4:3).
After the second edict the four words used were light and gladness and joy and honor (8:16).

From fasting and sorrow to feasting and joy. This is like Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter all rolled into one.

To see lowly and humble Mordecai walking the streets in full royal regalia is overwhelming to the Jews. Who would have ever believed this possible?

Remember Mordecai sitting at the king's gate in sackcloth and ashes, now robed in luxury, in fine linen and purple.

How things have changed? Mordecai has the king's full favor. He is like Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon.

So great is the reversal and celebration that many people in the kingdom declare themselves Jews. What does this mean? Is this a mass conversion?

“Many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews, for fear of the Jews had fallen on them.”

It appears people are declaring themselves Jews to be on the right side of history. They see the shift of political and military power and they want to be on the winning team. Some became Jews out of a fear of the Lord, and some became Jews out of a fear of the Jews.

Are we really all that different? How much of our behavior is motivated by fear?

There is a spot on an x-ray and we are afraid until a second opinion or biopsy clears the way. Our health hasn't changed, but our emotions have.

There is a meeting called and we are anxious until it turns out to be nothing bad.

We hear a rumor and are dramatically impacted, only to have it be false.

We don't want to share our faith for fear of the response, so we keep silent during a conversation that is against Jesus or the Bible or our faith.

Was the rejoicing in Susa really merited? Was the empire all that different? First Haman was in power and then Mordecai? How stable is that? How secure is Mordecai with such fickle king? How soon could the pendulum swing the other way again?

The wheel of fortune can turn either direction.

How have Christians responded to the changes of presidents over the past couple of decades?

From Bush to Clinton to Bush to Obama to Trump. Back and forth the pendulum swings. Where is our rejoicing, where is our hope and trust? Not in the fickle winds of politics or culture or media or entertainment world.

How influenced are we by the rise and fall of political fortunes?

Is our mood or attitude or reaction based on what is happening on earth or in heaven, on horizontal realities or vertical realities?

When things are going badly in our country are we anxious about the future, or do we trust the One who controls the future and the changing tides of time?

Implications and applications.

The day that changed everything.

Our text begins, "On that day." What a day it has been, a long day. A day that began very early in the morning when the king couldn't sleep and listened to a historical account of Mordecai's saving the life of the king but not being properly rewarded.

At dawn's first light when Haman came to the palace to ask permission to hang Mordecai, the king instead asks what he should do to one he delights to honor. Haman lays out a grand plan for such honors, only to have to then be the one who honors Mordecai. Haman goes home from the worst day of his life, only to be whisked off to Queen Esther's feast where he is unmasked as the instigator behind a Jewish holocaust which gets him executed that very afternoon.

By evening all his possessions are in the hands of Mordecai, as is the king's signet ring. An edict is traveling across the empire and the Jews in Susa are celebrating.

How many days like that have there been in history? Where the pendulum swings in a completely different direction, where our perception or perspective is completely altered? The world as we know it changed forever?

The stock market crash of October 29, 1929.

The Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

The fall of the Berlin Wall, November 9, 1989.

The 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centers.

Each of us have those days in our own lives when everything changed. The day we got married, the birth of our children, the day we got that job that opened so many doors, the day we were diagnosed with a serious illness, the day we trusted Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

The day a woman in Sychar met a man at a well.

The day an Ethiopian was traveling back to Africa and met Philip.

The day a man on his way to Damascus with a death warrant got knocked off his horse.

The day a convicted criminal ask the man next to him, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom."

His is a kind of Mordecai story. In the morning he was condemned to die and by evening he was dressed in royalty, in the righteousness of Christ in heaven.

And of course there were the three days that changed everything, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, making possible the abating of the wrath of God and the forgiveness of sins and the justification of sinners.

After Adam and Eve sinned God announced His irrevocable decree of death on all who sin.

The edict to kill all the Jews is a kind of foreshadowing of the seriousness of the judgment to come. God's edict against all sinners still stands, but God issued a counter-decree to rescue and redeem people from sin and death.

Judgment will fall on all, men and women, young and old, who don't repent and submit to Jesus Christ and identify with God's people.

In Esther both decrees come from the same authority, the king's signet ring. The same is true of God. God could not rescind the first decree of death pronounced in the Garden of Eden, so He issues a counter-decree, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Whoever believes in His Son shall not perish but have everlasting life.

Esther and her people.

Suppose after the king saved Esther's and Mordecai's life, after the king gave Mordecai a great position in the palace, after the king gave Esther and Mordecai all of Haman's land and possessions and everything, suppose Esther and Mordecai were content with that and lived happily ever after while the Jewish people were destroyed?

I wonder if the king thought that once he did all that for them, they should be content, happy to live their lives pursuing the comforts and pleasures of palace life. Maybe Esther could busy herself with redecorating the palace. Maybe Mordecai could busy himself with managing all his new inheritance from Haman.

In a sense that is what we do when we are saved and trust in Jesus and then live our lives happily ever after, with little or no thought to the spiritual destiny of the people around us?

Shouldn't we at least be willing to pray for the lost souls around us and ask God how He might want to use us to rescue someone who is perishing?

Can we live our lives for our own comfort and pleasure when there are others all around us heading for judgment and hell? Esther risked her life to plead with the king for the souls of her people. What would it cost us to pray and intercede and be willing and available to share the good news about the Gospel?

We have all received the best news there is carried to us in our own language by countless witnesses across the ages. What are we going to do with that good news, that message of deliverance and salvation?

If you are a Christian today, it is because of someone else passing on the good news to you. Will it stop with you or will you share it?

Romans 10:13-15 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." 14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? 15 And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

Share the good news with someone willing to listen. May God give you one person with whom to share. And may God's Holy Spirit prepare their heart to respond the way the Jews did, with light and gladness and joy and honor.

May God use you to be a eucatastrophe in someone's life, bringing about a great reversal and may that day be the best day of their life.