IF IT PLEASES *THE KING*

CHRIST CONNECTION

While the situation seemed hopeless for Esther's people, the Jews, God was totally in control and had a plan to save them. Humanity's situation may have appeared hopeless because of the depth of our sin, but God always had a plan for our salvation: the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus.

BEHIND THE SCENES

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Esther

GOD IS WITH US

ESTHER 3:7-10,12-13

7 In the first month, the month of Nisan, in King Ahasuerus's twelfth year, the pur—that is, the lot—was cast before Haman for each day in each month, and it fell on the twelfth month, the month Adar. 8 Then Haman informed King Ahasuerus, "There is one ethnic group, scattered throughout the peoples in every province of your kingdom, keeping themselves separate. Their laws are different from everyone else's and they do not obey the king's laws. It is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. 9 If the king approves, let an order be drawn up authorizing their destruction, and I will pay 375 tons of silver to the officials for deposit in the royal treasury." 10 The king removed his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. . . . 12 The royal scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and the order was written exactly as Haman commanded. It was intended for the royal satraps, the governors of each of the provinces, and the officials of each ethnic group and written for each province in its own script and to each ethnic group in its own language. It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the royal signet ring. 13 Letters were sent by couriers to each of the royal provinces telling the officials to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jewish people—young and old, women and children—and plunder their possessions on a single day, the thirteenth day of Adar, the twelfth month.

GOD IS WORKING FOR US

ESTHER 8:5-8,11-12,17

5 She said, "If it pleases the king and I have found favor with him, if the matter seems right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let a royal edict be written. Let it revoke the documents the scheming Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the king's provinces. 6 For how could I bear to see the disaster that would come on my people? How could I bear to see the destruction of my relatives?" 7 King Ahasuerus said to Esther the queen and to Mordecai the Jew, "Look, I have given Haman's estate to Esther, and he was hanged on the gallows because he attacked the Jews. 8 Write in the king's name whatever pleases you concerning the Jews, and seal it with the royal signet ring. A document written in the king's name and sealed with the royal signet ring cannot be revoked." . . . 11 The king's edict gave the Jews in each and every city the right to assemble and defend themselves, to destroy, kill, and annihilate every ethnic and provincial army hostile to them, including women and children, and to take their possessions as spoils of war. 12 This would take place on a single day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month Adar. . . . 17 In every province and every city where the king's command and edict reached, gladness and joy took place among the Jews. There was a celebration and a holiday. And many of the ethnic groups of the land professed themselves to be Jews because fear of the Jews had overcome them.

MAIN POINT.

Though we can't always see Him moving, we can trust God is with us and working for us.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

GOD'S PLAN AND HUMAN ACTION

God's sovereignty over all of life includes the free actions of human beings. Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many plans are in a person's heart, but the Lord's decree will prevail." In ways we are unable to comprehend fully, the Lord's plan goes forward through the choices of human beings. Even freely chosen sinful actions are factored into God's overarching plan, as is the case with the crucifixion of Jesus—an event both purposed by God yet also carried out by the wicked decisions of human beings (Acts 2:23). Knowing that God is working all things for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28), we trust in His promise to fulfill His plan, even when we do not understand our present circumstances.

DISCUSSION

GOD IS WITH US

ESTHER 3:7-10,12-13

- **Have you ever been in the right place at the right time? What about in the wrong place at the wrong time? Explain.**
- **Why is this conflict bigger than just Haman versus the Jews? Who did the conflict affect?**
- **The king announced the Jews' destruction on the evening before Passover. Why was this significant? How do you think the Jews felt?**

GOD IS WORKING FOR US

ESTHER 8:5-8,11-12,17

- **As a Jew, Esther was in the minority in Persia. When have you felt this way as a believer in our culture?**
- **Do you think God uses *all* the parts of our story? How can this help you to honor him in all seasons?**
- **The new edict gave the Jews a *chance* of victory. How do we have more than a chance of victory in Jesus?**

WHAT DIFFERENCE WOULD IT MAKE IF YOU BELIEVED GOD WAS AT WORK IN YOUR LIFE, IN THE GOOD AND THE BAD?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Many of us want to know *why* life happens the way it does—why bad things happen, why our lives are the way they are, why we suffer. This desire to know isn't new; Adam and Eve wrestled too, and the serpent used the desire against them, baiting them with a promise that eating the fruit would give them knowledge—God's knowledge (Gen. 3:5). But God had commanded them *not* to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Why? Because doing so would lead to death. Here's the truth: In our humanity, we aren't able to understand all things. God didn't design us to carry that weight. Instead, He designed us to walk with Him by faith, to trust in His knowledge and understanding (Prov. 3:5-6). So, what do we do when we can't see where God is leading us, when we don't understand? How can we believe God is at work, in control, and moving when we can't see evidence? We walk with Him anyway. We trust in God's vision and knowledge anyway, rather than our own. He'll never lead us to places He won't go with us. And His presence with us is all we need.

DAY ONE

ESTHER 4

In this week's lesson, you learned about Haman's plan to destroy the Jews and how God used Esther and Mordecai to save His people. Since we know how the story ended for Esther, losing sight of how intense and dangerous this situation was for her is easy. In chapter 4, Mordecai encouraged Esther to use the position God had given her to help save the people. Esther was scared at first because the king had the power to put her to death if he was displeased with her. Mordecai reminded Esther that if she didn't take this opportunity, the Lord would use someone else to save His people and fulfill His plans. Esther showed incredible boldness and selflessness by putting her life on the line to save her people.

This exact situation probably won't happen to any of us, but we can learn so much from Esther's story. You may not be asked by the Lord to risk your physical life to fulfill His plan and share the gospel, but He will ask you to make sacrifices for the kingdom—sacrifices of time, popularity, success, worldly possessions and praise, and persecution. To be deterred by fear of failure or rejection is normal, but serving the Lord even when it requires sacrifice is a gift. God has given us the opportunity to be a part of taking the gospel to the world, and we should love the people around us enough to take risks to reach them with the good news. Serving God is a joy, and serving the people around us so that they might be brought into God's family is an honor. The Lord will accomplish His plan regardless of our obedience, but He lovingly calls us to be a part of it, and we should seek to serve Him at every opportunity!

- **WHAT FEARS DO YOU HAVE THAT MIGHT KEEP YOU FROM DOING WHAT GOD HAS CALLED YOU TO DO?**
- **HOW CAN YOU BOLDLY AND SELFLESSLY SERVE THE LORD RIGHT NOW—IN YOUR FAMILY, AT YOUR SCHOOL, IN YOUR FRIEND GROUP, ON YOUR TEAM, AND SO ON?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE A PART OF YOUR REDEMPTION PLAN FOR THE WORLD. HELP ME TO BE BOLD AND TO SERVE THOSE AROUND ME AS IF I'M SERVING YOU.

DAY TWO

PSALM 83

At some point in your life, you've likely felt like something unfair happened to you. Maybe it was how someone treated you, and you may have wanted to find a way to pay them back for what they did. As we've seen in the last few weeks, a lot of nations fought against Israel throughout their history. In Psalm 83, Asaph cried out to God while suffering at the hands of enemies. A lot of people would have cried out for revenge or vengeance, but Asaph cried out for protection and for God to move. On an even deeper level, he cried out for God to move against his enemies so that they would realize the power of God and turn to Him in worship!

We likely don't have many physical enemies seeking to hurt or work against us, but we do see significant injustice and cruelty in the world. At times, this suffering and evil can be overwhelming, and your instinct might be to desire or seek revenge. Seeking justice for yourself and taking matters into your own hands instead of seeking the Lord and His guidance would be incredibly easy—and tempting. In those moments, we should seek to follow Asaph's example in this psalm. When we experience injustice or cruelty, we can cry out to the Lord to move and make Himself known to those perpetrating evil. Ultimately, our role in this world is to share the gospel and this includes sharing with people who act against God's commands. This doesn't mean that God won't call us to act against injustice and take a stand in some way, but our heart should always be for people to know God and not to get revenge for our suffering. We cry out to the Lord and trust Him to guide us and to bring ultimate justice to the world.

- **HOW DO YOU USUALLY RESPOND TO INJUSTICE OR CRUELTY IN YOUR LIFE OR IN THE LIVES OF THOSE AROUND YOU?**
- **HOW DOES KNOWING GOD WILL ULTIMATELY BRING JUSTICE CHANGE HOW WE LIVE? HOW COULD IT CHANGE THE WAY YOU REACT TO YOUR ENEMIES?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR BEING A GOD OF JUSTICE AND FOR CARING DEEPLY FOR ALL THOSE IN THE WORLD. HELP US TO CRY OUT TO YOU IN THE FACE OF EVIL AND TO SEEK JUSTICE BY YOUR GUIDANCE.

DAY THREE

PSALM 40

If you haven't realized this already, life isn't always easy. But you probably know this already. Tragedies happen and things go wrong every day because we live in a world broken by sin. In Psalm 40, King David praised God for how He provided for him and brought him out of a difficult time. The imagery of how God had cared for David is beautiful, but the psalm starts with David saying that he waited patiently for the Lord. You will have times in life when you may cry out to God for help yet feel like He is ignoring you. However, we know from the truths throughout Scripture that God will always provide for His children, and we sometimes need to wait patiently for Him to move. This doesn't mean our lives will be perfect or easy in every way, but we will have everything we need and God will move to help us during time of distress.

You may struggle to admit to others when you're struggling because you don't want to seem weak. Especially when it comes to our walk with the Lord, admitting that we need help and can't do it all by ourselves can be difficult, but we know that God is powerful and perfect. He is ready to help us by being our peace and our security in the middle of trouble. David set an example for us to cry out to God and confess our deep need for Him. The Lord knows our weaknesses and struggles, and He desires for us to come to Him with all of our needs. The Lord is our Helper and Deliverer (v. 17). We can trust God with our problems and weaknesses instead of working to hide them from Him and from others.

- **IS ADMITTING YOUR WEAKNESSES TO THE LORD DIFFICULT FOR YOU? WHY? HOW CAN YOU PRACTICE GOING TO GOD WITH YOUR STRUGGLES?**
- **HOW HAS GOD PROVIDED FOR YOU IN A TIME OF DIFFICULTY OR WEAKNESS?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONSTANT CARE FOR ME AND FOR YOUR PROVISION IN MY LIFE. HELP ME TO WAIT PATIENTLY FOR YOU TO MOVE AND TO TURN TO YOU IN ALL OF MY STRUGGLES.

DAY FOUR

PSALM 34:15-18

Imagine standing in front of the ocean or the Grand Canyon or something so big that you can't help but realize how small you are. Sometimes when we think about God, we end up feeling the same way—like God is so big and we're small and unimportant. Surely our daily lives and struggles aren't significant to Him? The truth is that these feelings couldn't be more wrong. We can't allow feeling this way to draw us away from seeking God's help and care in our times of need. In reality, Satan desires for us to believe these lies and to react by *not* going to God. Let's agree to recognize these lies and refuse to believe the "father of lies" (John 8:44).

This passage in Psalm 34 teaches us the exact opposite of Satan's lies: God is near to us in our pain and desires to walk us through our struggles. We may not always see exactly how He is moving, but Scripture tells us that God is never far from us. Think about Esther's story! God may not have been mentioned explicitly, but He was working all things out for the good of His people in big ways that they couldn't see. He is doing the same for your life, and you can place your trust in Him because of His proven faithfulness throughout all of history. In your struggles, pain, and sin, your Creator and Father walks every step with you, carrying you through and teaching you to depend on Him for strength. We will suffer in this world. But we never have to suffer without hope! We get to *choose* hope. Our God will carry us through every day on earth and bring us into the joy of eternity in His presence.

- **HAVE YOU EVER FELT LIKE GOD WAS DISTANT IN YOUR STRUGGLES? HOW DID YOU WORK THROUGH IT OR HOW CAN YOU WORK THROUGH IT NOW?**
- **WHERE DO YOU NEED TO *CHOOSE* HOPE? HOW DOES GOD'S WORK BEHIND THE SCENES IN ESTHER'S STORY GIVE YOU HOPE IN YOUR OWN STORY—IN PLACES YOU CAN'T SEE GOD'S WORK?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR CARING SO DEEPLY FOR MY STRUGGLES. HELP ME NEVER TO LOSE SIGHT OF YOUR LOVE FOR ME AND YOUR CONSTANT PROVISION IN MY LIFE.

DAY FIVE

ACTS 2:22-24

In the last few weeks, we've studied the people of Israel after they returned from exile, but this is just a small part of their story. They had many struggles and setbacks throughout their story, like Haman seeking to destroy the Jews and Satan constantly working to prevent the people from following God. In fact, Satan has been at work since the time of Adam and Eve to deter humans from following their Creator. However, the Lord has been at work for even longer—always. He has complete control over how human history unfolds, and His plan will always come to pass. The first glimpse of God's promise to redeem the world through Christ is in Genesis 3, and in Acts 2, Peter explained how it was fulfilled. Regardless of Satan's work or humanity's evil plans, God succeeded in bringing redemption to the world.

When it feels like our lives are falling apart, we can look to this truth and be reminded that God is in control over every detail. From huge decisions to the tiniest moments, the Lord will ensure that He is glorified and that things are working together to fulfill His promises. God cares deeply about the details of our lives and uses those who believe in Him to reach the world with the gospel. You can find peace in recognizing that your life is not in your hands and that you can lean on God to guide you every step of the way. This truth should impact the way we make decisions and live out our faith! When we turn to the Lord for every decision, our lives should reflect Christ more and more.

- **HOW DOES SEEING THAT GOD HAD A PLAN TO SAVE YOU BEFORE TIME EVEN BEGAN HELP YOU UNDERSTAND HIS LOVE?**
- **WHAT ARE PRACTICAL WAYS YOU CAN TRUST THE LORD TO GUIDE YOUR LIFE?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR PLAN OF REDEMPTION AND HOW YOU HAVE WORKED IT OUT FROM THE BEGINNING OF TIME. MAY I NEVER LOSE SIGHT OF YOUR PROVIDENCE AND CARE IN MY LIFE.