

“Our Lord rules all things for his Church—often in ways unseen”

Esther is unique among Biblical books: it makes no mention of God at all. Yet the book clearly shows the sovereignty of God throughout. The account of Haman and Mordecai shows that our Lord rules all things for his Church—often in ways unseen. History does not happen by coincidence or accident, but the book of Esther shows the hand of God ruling over the nations with quiet acts of providence. No matter the evil plans and purposes of men, God’s providential care for his Church cannot be frustrated.

To give a little bit of background leading up to our story this morning... the war machine of Babylon had rolled into Jerusalem three times, finally destroying the city in 586B.C., burning the temple to the ground and marching the citizens of the nation of Judah into exile. Roughly 50 years later, the Medes and Persians overtook the Babylonians and ruled the world under King Darius. Almost 50 years later, King Xerxes succeeded his father Darius in 486B.C. setting the stage for our story this morning. King Xerxes had a wife, Queen Vashti. One day she displeased the king. In his anger he did not allow her to enter his presence again. His royal advisers proposed that the king choose a new queen from among the beautiful woman of the king’s realm.

There was a Jew, a man from the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai. His family had been taken captive. He lived in a Jewish community in the citadel of Susa (capital city). Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah whom he was raising. She had no mother or father. You know her better as Esther.

When the king gave the edict to gather all the lovely women of the kingdom, Esther was also chosen and taken to the palace because, the Bible tells us, that she was lovely in form and features. (Esther 2:7) Because of her godly character she won the favor of everyone in the palace, more importantly, she won the king’s heart. King Xerxes made Esther queen instead of Vashti. It was not known that she was a Jewess.

Mordecai, her cousin, would hang around the king’s gate, as did many other men. He and Esther would often correspond through one of her servants. One day, Mordecai uncovered a plot by the gate guards to assassinate King Xerxes. Mordecai told Esther who told the King, giving full credit to her cousin Mordecai. Now, it is noteworthy that nothing was done at that time to honor Mordecai for saving the King’s life. Remember that nothing happens by coincidence.

Enter onto the stage: Haman. The King elevated Haman to a position higher than his other royal officials. When Haman and the other officials would walk through the palace gates every day the men would rise to their feet in respect, everyone, that is, except Mordecai. Day after day, Haman would observe Mordecai, who refused to stand to his feet when he would walk by. Day after day his frustration turned into anger and anger into rage and rage into hatred. Haman wanted to kill Mordecai. But then, learning who Mordecai’s people were, killing Mordecai wasn’t enough. He looked for a way to eradicate all the Jewish people throughout the whole kingdom. You see, Haman was an Amalekite. Amalekites had been bitter enemies of the nation of Israel. 1,000 years earlier, Amalek attacked Israel soon after they had fled Egypt with Moses. For this reason the LORD said, “I will be at war with Amalek from generation to generation.” (Exodus 17.16) Under King Saul, who was from the tribe of Benjamin, the armies of Israel wiped out most of the Amalekites, but not all of them. 500 years later, a son of the tribe of Benjamin, Mordecai, continues the war with the Amalekites.

Being close to the king, Haman presented a proposal: destroy a certain foreign people who live in your kingdom, people who do not obey the king's laws. The king signed it and stamped it without question. On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (on the Jewish calendar), which was March 7, 473B.C., on that single day, anyone could slaughter Jews; men, women, children, young and old, in every province of the kingdom. Mordecai and the whole Jewish community were filled with grief. Even the citizens of the nation were confused. The Jews would be wiped out.

Would God really stand by and do nothing? He had made a promise to return the people in exile to Jerusalem. He had promised that they would rebuild the temple and the city walls. He had promised that he would preserve a small remnant, and from that remnant, he promised to provide a Savior from Israel's family tree, tribe of Judah, a promise to save the world from sin and evil.

There's nothing new today. Nations are in turmoil because of out-of-control dictators who rule with tyranny. They allow the rape in Sudan, the oppression of women in Saudi Arabia, the ethnic cleansing in Darfur, the corruption of power and greed by men like Mubarak and Kadafi. Christianity is prohibited in many countries. Nearly 1,000 Christians are executed every year for their faith. We look at our own culture, and how the media and Hollywood so blatantly defy God's good and gracious will for us, how they make a mockery of all that God ordained to be good. We wonder, why does God allow this to continue? Why does he not rise up and use his power to punish and bring justice?

These are questions we ask not just when we watch the world news, but as we observe the newsreel of our own personal lives: the congregation struggles to pay the bills while undertaking a new construction project; husband wonders about future employment and his family worries about the future; husband and wife make poor financial decisions, face overwhelming debt repayment; deployed Soldier leaves spouse at home, and both struggle with the separation; widow and widower struggle with emptiness, seek companionship, long for comfort after the sudden death of loved one; Christian wonders why disease and sudden illness have entered his or her life. And we even worry about events that haven't even happened, but we worry... tornados could strike our city, Wall Street may not allow my retirement to grow, will I have enough for retirement?

If God directs the affairs of the world, why does he allow these things to happen to me? At times we doubt God's promises... when we see him fail to put his power into action. When we doubt, then we are calling God a liar. When we fail to put our trust in his promises, then we are saying that we do not believe that he will do what he says he will do.

These are the same questions and doubts the people in the Bible raised. Even the disciples didn't understand why things had to happen they way they did, especially with Jesus' death. But after his resurrection, Jesus told them (from the Gospel this morning), "Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day." (Luke 24:44-52) Jesus did what he said he would do. And it was God who controlled these events. Jesus told them before he died, "No one takes my life from me. I lay it down on my own accord and I take it up again." (John 10:18) He determined when and how.

God even arranged the events of history so that the world was just right when Christ came. Listen to these words from the Apostle Paul, (Galatians 4:4,5) "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son. Literally, "in the fullness of time, i.e. when the time was just right. At that time in history Rome ruled the world and established the *Pax Romana*, the peace of Rome. There were no wars, which meant safe travel. Rome built roads so their armies could travel quickly. There was one language that everyone understood and spoke: Greek. A coincidence that these were the right conditions for God's people to spread good news, the gospel? History does not happen by coincidence or accident...

“When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”

God proves to you that he is in control by pointing you to the cross. There, his Son Jesus did what he promised he would do: to die in your place; to cover over your sins of doubt and worry; to wash away your sins of unbelief. And he did. And your sins have been covered by his blood. And God promises that through faith in Christ’s death, you are forgiven. By your baptism he had promised you, “You are holy and precious in his sight.”

God proves to you that he is in control by pointing you to his Son’s empty tomb. There, his Son Jesus did what he promised he would do. He raised his lifeless body to life again to prove that he is God, to prove that he has power over death and grave. God promises to you, that through faith in him, Christ’s resurrection is your resurrection, that his victory over death and grave is your victory over your death and over your grave.

God proves to you that he is in control by ascending into heaven. Christ had to ascend into heaven because he had finished his work of saving the world from sin and death. He also had to ascend so he could make himself invisible again, so that he could be everywhere at all times, to be with us no matter where we go or what we do. Christ ascended into heaven to reign and rule from his throne, to direct the affairs on the world for the good of his Church.

This proof that God is indeed in control is a very powerful tool in the life of a believer. Look at the disciples... after Christ’s ascension into heaven, they no longer hid behind locked doors, but we see them praising God in the temple, gathering together for worship, boldly teaching and preaching the Word of God. They had confidence in God’s promises, that no matter what happened, he was in control.

So what happens when the tornado comes, when the economy crashes, when you lose your job, when your health rapidly declines, when a loved one dies unexpectedly, what do you do when the nations rage against you and evil rulers threaten you? What do you do when you feel all alone, when it feels as if God is doing nothing? Then what? Then you will fix your eyes on God’s promises, where he points you to the cross, to the empty tomb, to see that he fulfilled his plan for you. Then you will fix your eyes on heaven, which he has already prepared for you, where you will live forever. Then you will fix your eyes on your ascended Lord Jesus, who is ruling the world for your good. Even though you may not understand why he allows things to happen, he promises, “I rule the nations for the good of my Church.”

History does not happen by coincidence or accident. He proves to you that everything happens for a reason, everything happens for the good of his Church; you, his people, just like he did in our story this morning with Mordecai and Esther. Want to know what happens with the rest of the story? I’m not going to tell you. But when you go home after Bible study this morning, you will eat your lunch and then you will open your Bibles and read the last three chapters of Esther and find out how God kept his promise and preserved his people.

To our Risen and Ascended Lord Jesus, who keeps his promises, who lives, who rules all things for our benefit, to our King be praise now and forever! Amen!