

## Faith Among the Faithless

### Esther 3

#### The Adversary

You never forget the clang of the steel vestibule doors of a jail. My first time in jail. One week until graduation. Cat calls. Doors rattling. "Fish!" Fear.

Fear is natural and good. It can alert us to danger. It can protect us from harm. A certain level of fear is appropriate in jail. It is good to fear a red hot stove. A gun. Fear God or fear the circumstances around us.

But fear can also control us. A decision awaits each of us: will we ultimately fear God or the circumstances around us?

A story of people with misplaced fear. Haman. Xerxes. Saul.

How do you respond to fear? When the principal calls you into his office? When your boss calls you into her office? When you see that it is doctor's office calling with results from the biopsy you took yesterday.

In the midst of the swirling fears of this world, God invites us to release the fear of the world and fear him.

"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" Romans 8:15

Fear doesn't just change our actions, it changes our identity. We live out of slavery when we live in fear.

We have been loving this sermon series on Esther. If you are jumping in with us now, we would love for you check out the earlier sermons on YouTube, but let's catch you up with the action. The players: Mordecai, Esther, Xerxes, and Haman.

Last week Mordecai saves the King from an assassination attempt.

Esther 3:1

Chapter 3 begins "After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite."

Wait a second. After *these things* Haman gets the promotion??? Not Mordecai. Life isn't fair.

Tex set up the scene so well last week: Haman and Mordecai are the same guy. Hungry for power and prestige. The fuel of compromise is fear.

Three truths. We become who we don't want to be because of fear.

Haman exists because of compromise and because Saul didn't fear the Lord.

The Agagite. Haman was a descendant of Agag, who was the king of the Amalekites, the people who God commanded Israel to destroy, but they failed to do so because of their lack of obedience. You might remember the story of Moses' arms being lifted when the Israelites fought the Amalekites. God promised to blot out the Amalekites (see Deut 25:17-19, Ex 17, and Num 24:7-8, 20). God repeats the commandment to Saul to destroy the Amalekites (1 Sam 15:1-3).

Saul defeated the Amalekites, but spared Agag and took the best of the livestock. Because of this, God removed his blessing over Saul (1 Sam 15).

Esther 3:2

Haman was only happy if everyone else was below him.

Mordecai was no better.

We think we are so unlike our opponents, but are we?

Purim: booing and hissing Haman. Cheering Mordecai. Not that simple.

Black hat and white hat. Haman and Mordecai.

Old proverb about a crocodile: the more you feed it, the hungrier it gets. We think that we will satisfy our fears by feeding them, but it never works.

A security system won't cure your fears. An insurance policy won't cure your fears. A promotion won't cure your fears. They just morph and grow. It's the same with all desire and sin.

"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." Matthew 10:28

Kneel to God, not to your fears.

God is in control.

Esther 3:3-6

Who fills you with rage (v. 4)?

Who is an annoyance?

Unborn children who take away our freedom. Christians in India. Political opponents.

Esther 3:7

Month of Nisan: celebrate deliverance from Egypt. Now they are about to be destroyed. The adversary they didn't destroy is about to destroy them.

11 month reprieve. God is always in charge.

Prov 16:33: The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

The resolve was taken up in the first month, in the twelfth year of the king, when Esther had been his wife about five years.

Esther 3:8

Haman leverages Xerxes's fear of a loss of revenue and a loss of respect.

Esther 3:9

Master manipulator. 10,000 talents of silver in today's dollars is about \$321B

Turn the King's financial fears against him. Leverage greed.

Esther 3:10-12

Even more power in Haman's hands now.

And yet Haman's true purpose was to advance himself and to see that everyone bowed low before him. So we treat this strange invader in our lives as though he were a friend -- we promote him and advance him. Isn't it interesting that we are not ashamed of our pride? We boast of it, we trust it, we regard it as an essential to life. We think that this principle, which demands that we think of ourselves first, is the very essence of living -- if this were destroyed, we would lose all. Thus we may recognize the Haman in our lives.

Esther 3:13-15

There is no evidence of crime. No formal charge. And yet the command for genocide is compelled.

Do not be confused. Jesus promised that his followers would be persecuted. It is certain, that persecution will only increase before Christ returns (Rev 17:6). And yet, we are not to fear. We are not to hope in political power of allegiances. We are to trust Christ, the crucified one.

<sup>35</sup> While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" <sup>36</sup> But overhearing<sup>[a]</sup> what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." Matthew 5:35-36

Kneel to God, not to your fears.

What fears are you vulnerable to? We are all vulnerable to different types of fear.

Fear of missing out,

fear of physical harm—sickness: covid.

Fear of a lack of security. Temptation of cheating on taxes.

Fear of losing respect.

Fear of powerlessness. Every generation is tempted to bow to the government. We just came out of a season where two sides tried to convince you that your only hope was to elect their candidate. The same thing is going to happen in another three years. Fear we will be trampled: our rights.

What drives you? Where are you vulnerable to the enemy's temptation to fear?

There is a problem with our problems are big and our God are small.

Are we going to fear our problems or God? God is big and God is good.

"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love." 1 John 4:18

"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"" Romans 8:15

God offers peace when we kneel to him and not our fears.

But Haman expected, what the Persian kings frequently received, a species of Divine adoration; and this is implied in the word *shachah*, which signifies that kind of prostration which implies the highest degree of reverence that can be paid to God or man, lying down flat on the earth, with the hands and feet extended, and the mouth in the dust.

Luke 12:31-33

<sup>31</sup> Instead, seek his<sup>[a]</sup> kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

<sup>32</sup> “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. <sup>33</sup> Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.

When we sin, there is a price to pay even our grandchildren pay. But, when we obey, there are blessings to our grandchildren.

Saul is 1050. Esther at 450. 600 years.

Misplaced fear is the issue. We ought to bow.