

Esther #5

Pride and Humility

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Esther 5:9-14

And Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai. Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and brought his friends and his wife Zeresh. And Haman recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the servants of the king. Then Haman said, "Even Queen Esther let no one but me come with the king to the feast she prepared. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king. Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows fifty cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged upon it. Then go joyfully with the king to the feast." This idea pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made.

On that night the king could not sleep. And he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. And it was found written how Mordecai had told about Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, and who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. And the king said, "What honor or distinction has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" The king's young men who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him." And the king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to speak to the king about having Mordecai hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for him. And the king's young men told him, "Haman is there, standing in the court." And the king said, "Let him come in." So Haman came in, and the king said to him, "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?" And Haman said to himself, "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?" And Haman said to the king, "For the man whom the king delights to honor, let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and the horse that the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown is set. And let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials. Let them dress the man whom the king delights to honor, and let them lead him on the horse through the square of the city, proclaiming before him: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.'" Then the king said to Haman, "Hurry; take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Leave out nothing that you have mentioned." So Haman took the robes and the horse, and he dressed

Mordecai and led him through the square of the city, proclaiming before him, “Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.”

Then Mordecai returned to the king’s gate. But Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered. And Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, “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.”

My mother was deeply concerned about me becoming prideful. She often quoted “Pride goes before a fall” to me. Being the word nerd that I was and am, I, of course, corrected her.

Proverbs 16:18 reads: “**Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.**”

Get that? Pride goes before destruction. It’s the haughty spirit that goes before a fall. To me it seemed not good to let Mom just walk around in Biblical ignorance. It seemed appropriate for a 7 year old me to correct her. So I did. She didn’t seem overly pleased to receive this kind of correction from her smart aleck kid.

She was wise to be concerned and pride was and is a constant hindrance to my walk with God. Perhaps it is for you, as well.

In 6th grade I drew a picture of a horse. Mrs. Grisson, my teacher, said it was the best picture of a horse she’d ever seen. I was very excited and brought it home and told Mom what Mrs. Grisson had said. Mom’s response was to quote Proverbs 27:2 “**Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.**” I explained to Mom that another had praised me and that I was just passing on the information. She wasn’t buying it.

I wanted to be good at something. I wanted to matter. Like Haman I wanted to shine. My older sister has a genius IQ and a photographic memory. Mom once called it a photogenic memory which was pretty funny. I, of course, had to correct her. Sister Miriam was valedictorian of every class she was ever in; she was brilliant. So when I followed her two years later to the same school with an even higher IQ, the expectations for what I might accomplish were even greater. Instead of being the best student, I was in the bottom third of the class. A huge disappointment for all. I longed for someone to praise me. To acknowledge how good I was at something. No one did.

It’s important to know that humility is not thinking poorly of yourself. It is also not found in being put down by others. **True humility is a choice.** We sometimes doubt we have what it takes we doubt who we are. Our bad self image can masquerade as humility. **It isn’t.** To deny that we are gifted with unique abilities and talents is to deny what God has done in us. That’s wrong and needs to be repented of.

We can also use **false** humility to garner attention. “*My greatest attribute is my humility.*” To be ordained in the Christian Reformed Church without having graduated from seminary, one had to write a letter indicating that you believed you were called and that you had attributes in line with what they had determined were necessary to be a pastor. Among the assets they listed were things like

- a vibrant prayer life,
- the native ability to preach,
- a passion for those who don’t know Jesus, and, my absolute favorite,
- appropriate humility for the task.

I had to write a letter telling those who would be testing me that I was appropriately humble. How does that work? If you are hoping to convince others of your humility you’ve already lost.

In the miniseries entitled *Esther*, or *God in the Shadows*, we have arrived at Episode 4. Queen Esther has stated, “If I perish, I perish.” She has decided to take her stand: to do what God has called her to do, to set the trap for Haman. She is ready to die for her people. Can you hear the ominous music playing in the background? The screen slowly fades to black... Then our scene opens:

A determined and resolute Esther, planning a feast. Xerxes, a powerful king exercising his might, celebrating his god-like powers.

A pensive Mordacai sitting in the gates deeply concerned for the daughter he never had and for his beloved people.

And, of course, the evil, prideful Haman full of himself, plotting to destroy those who refuse to recognize his greatness.

Let’s focus in on Haman: He should be on top of the world. He has already been to a banquet with Xerxes and the queen and now he’s been invited as the sole guest to Queen Esther’s feast for the king. He gets all his buddies together and brags: “I have lots of money. I have fathered lots of sons. I’ve been given all sorts of promotions and perks. I’m the greatest! I’m beyond special; if you don’t believe it just ask me. I’m beyond special.”

Can you imagine being the “friend” of such a blowhard? To have to listen to him going on and on about how great he is? You have to smile and listen to all his great accomplishments.

You would think he would be thrilled and delighted. But he’s not: he needs one guy to bow before him. Just one. ***He needs Mordecai to acknowledge how great he is.*** To bow down before

him. To fawn over him. To offer praise to him. **But it ain't gonna happen.** And that's driving him to madness. It occupies all of his mind: Mordecai must suffer and die.

Haman's wife, Zeresh, and his friends know him. They know how to humor him, to appease him by feeding his vanity. This is not rocket science. "Build a 75 foot gallows and impale Mordecai on it." Then everyone will know how great you are and no one will dare to ignore you." At that height everyone will see you! But God in the Shadows reveals himself at this point but quietly: he causes the king to have a sleepless night. Maybe the king is ADD; I get it. He wants someone to read a book of his great deeds: he has a little pride, too.

Haman gets to be the King's best bud. He'll just ask the king to let him kill Mordecai. Notice that the gallows are already built. He's assuming the king won't say no to his request. Pride does that. It makes us presumptuous. When you think you're great you think everyone thinks you're great. It's dangerous.

Here is where the God in the shadows reveals himself. Not with a mighty voice and a clarion call. No, the God of the shadows just causes the king to have a sleepless night. He might be ADD. At any rate, he has his people read from the book of memorable deeds in order to help him doze off. Do you think it's just the luck of the draw that the king happens to hear how Mordecai saved his life? Not a chance. The God in the shadows is always at work: always working his plan. Always with his people. Always with you.

One of my pet peeves is when people say, "Go where God is working and join him." Please, I want to scream, "God is at work everywhere all the time! Open your eyes and see what he's doing." God is at work here. Now. In this room. He's working in me! All the time. Open your eyes! In you. In all of us separately and collectively. The God in the shadows is with you. Calling you. Shaping you. Connecting with you. Correcting you. Taking delight in you. Urging you to trust him and his goodness. Do you know how huge and important this is? The God of the Shadows is here: He is with you, David. He dwells on you! Ashton, God sees you, he loves you and thinks you're something special. He's not hiding in the shadows from you. Daniel, by the way, God was at the celebration of your wedding anniversary! He's with you, he's present. He's with everyone in this room and takes delight in your.

The king asks if Mordecai has been properly rewarded for warning the king of the plot to kill him. Nothing has been done. At that **carefully arranged moment**, perfectly arranged by the King of kings and Lord of lords, Haman just happens to be standing in the courtyard of the palace hoping to get the king to agree to let him do away with Mordecai. ***The timing is impeccable.*** God's timing is always impeccable! Haman is summoned.

The king asks Haman, "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?"

What a moment for Haman! He thinks he gets to arrange his own parade. In his mind it simply doesn't get any better than this! So he goes hog wild. **"Dress him in the king's robe! Put him on the king's horse! Have the **most** noble official dress him, put him on the horse, and lead him through the city square. Announce to the world just how wonderful he is."**

Haman has to be drooling. He can hardly wait. The king says, "Let's do it. Everything you just said. Let's do it." Haman is so excited!

"Do it for Mordecai."

Wait, what? Mordecai? You're talking about Mordecai? The guy I've been stewing about and want to put on the gallows? *You can't fall faster or quicker than Haman just fell.* And he has no choice but to comply. **Refusal is instant death.** So he goes out and instead of killing Mordecai, he dresses him in kingly robes and puts him on the king's horse and leads him through the city making the announcement he had assumed would be for him.

That did not turn out at all as planned: Mordecai lifted up. Haman crushed. The humble lifted up. The proud brought low.

Pay careful attention to what Mordecai does: it's important. **Also, note what he doesn't do.** That is also important. He doesn't turn down the honor offered by the king. He doesn't say, "No, I don't need a parade. I'm good. Thanks, but no thanks." Instead he accepts the honor. *Is it because he thinks he deserves it?* Scripture reveals otherwise. His primary concern has been, and is, his people. The parade through the city will benefit his people by putting forward their plight. How do we know he isn't using the parade as a stepping stone to greater things? When the parade is over he goes back and sits in the gates. He goes back to where he was before the honor.

The city gates are significant: Elders of the city would resolve disputes. They were the place where the community gathered. It is where the news of the city was distributed. It was the place between the safety within the city walls and the unknown of what was beyond. Mordecai simply returns to where he had been. He doesn't capitalize on his new found fame. We live in a culture that says, "Capitalize on your moment: turn it into fame for a lifetime!"

Meanwhile Haman is freaking out. Everything has turned upside down. He goes home in mourning; his whole world has turned upside down. And his wife and friends are no help.

Marks of pride:

- It's all about me.
- Its demands are insatiable; they don't stop and you can't get away from them. I was the after-dinner speaker and I read a goofy poem I had written and I got a

standing ovation! My first thought is that this is amazing, my second thought was how can I get them to do it again.

- It demands immediate action. You can't wait to get the next acclamation, the next standing ovation. You can't just simply enjoy the beauty of a gift.

Marks of humility:

- It's all about God; not you. This is hard for us to give God glory, to honor him, to bring the his gifts and give them back to Him.
- There's a willingness to suffer: Can you see the suffering in Esther? Esther risks her life to Xerxes who just destroyed his former wife. When you take a humble stand to honor God, it also affects your community and the world around you.
- It results in service to others. Is your first thought to honor others? Scripture says we should see to do that.
- It seeks to do justice; it wants things made right: Mordecai is longing for justice for his people.
- It loves kindness and thoughtfulness
- It is patient for God to work. This is where it goes haywire: I don't want to wait; I want God to act like he is my servant.

Do you see how careful God's timing is? If Xerxes hadn't been reading that book and decided to honor Mordecai at that moment...? Mordecai trusts God to work but he doesn't know when.

Micah 6:8

"He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Whose honor do you seek? Who do you want this from?

What happens if nobody knows what you did? What if no one knows about your good deed? The guy who became my substitute dad, Pete Russ, told me that I could pay someone else's electric bill and no one will ever know! I don't get any credit???

I processed some of my pride issues at my Pilgrim Group this past week and I got to tell them how this was a struggle for me. I had just received an award: third place for a story of mine that was published in their magazine. But it is a big deal and these awards are nice to have. My article was titled **Depression Screening** about my doctor asking me questions and one of them was "do you talk about death alot?" And I answered yes, I'm a pastor. She didn't know what pastors do. My article won the prize in the category of HUMOR. I'm excited about that and I wanted to share it with people but I realized this was praise for the clapping gods.

Jim's question (in my PG) really spoke to me: "Is Jesus smiling down on your accomplishment?"

Take delight in the good gifts God has given you. Can you just take this accomplishment and go back and sit at the gates?

I Corinthians 4:7

“For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”

Think about this: what do you have that you haven't received. God gave me a love for words: I'm that crazy kid who read by flashlight the dictionary in bed and memorized definitions. I loved it. Do you think that I was great and God just made me greater? No, God gave me this. Don't be prideful! Be humble.

Stay tuned for **Episode 5** next week!