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We are in the book of Esther this morning and have come to the 6th chapter which is the pivot chapter. Everything before has been mostly negative for God's people and everything after, mostly the opposite. You could refer to this chapter as the Great Reversal. So, it bears asking the question right up front – have you ever needed, do you need now, a great reversal in your life? God can do it.

If you're visiting today or haven't been here for the series, let me bring you up to speed, because you need to know the context of this passage. There are Jewish people living in Persia. It is after the time of the captivity and many jews have gone back to Jerusalem, but many have stayed back because life in Persia was so much nicer. Jerusalem was in ruins and Persia was a thriving empire. The negative was that the Jews were subject to the Persian authorities. They had their own subculture maintaining their traditions, but if push came to shove, the Persian way won.

The Persian king was Ahasuerus, and he got crossways with the queen Vashti and so he made her not queen and held a contest for a new queen. Esther won the beauty contest and became queen. But the king doesn't know that she is a Jew. Her story is she was orphaned as a child and raised by her cousin Mordecai, who had an official position of some kind where he sat at the city gate. One day Mordecai overhears a conversation between two guys plotting to kill the king. He does what any person in his position would do; he got word to the king, through Esther. The plot was foiled and the two men executed. But Mordecai is not rewarded for his loyalty, he is overlooked. Instead, another man, Haman, is honored for some reason and even promoted to the second highest position just below the King. This prestige goes to Haman's head, and he asks the king for a favor and that is to issue a decree that every person in Persia was required to bow down to him. The king agrees and everyone starts bowing down to Haman except one person – Mordecai. The population of the Persian empire at this time was more than 20 million people, but it doesn't matter to Haman that the multitudes were paying him homage; he was focused on the one guy who would not. His pride overwhelmed him with anger. He went back to the King and said, not only does he want Mordecai killed, but he also wants his entire race killed. The king, for whatever reason, agrees and the decree goes out that on the 13th of Adar, about 11 months later, on that day all Jews would be slaughtered. It was official, no turning back. The Jews are terrified. Mordecai urges Esther to go to the king and plead for her people. Remember, the King doesn't know she is a Jew. She tells Mordecai that going to the king without being summoned would get her killed. He tells her that perhaps she has this title of queen just for such a time as this. She courageously rises and tells him she will approach the king and she says: "If I perish, I perish." She goes to the king and he spares her life.

Her tactic to expose Haman is to have a banquet and invite the king and Haman. Up to this point, everything is going so well for Haman. The entire kingdom is bowing down to him, his wealth was beyond measure, he presumes the queen is preparing a banquet in his honor. Yet in 5:13, Haman says this:

Esther 5:13 (NASB95)

13 "Yet all of this does not satisfy me every time I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."

Pride, hatred, anger are horrible things that lead to absurd behavior. So that's the scene. It's the night before the banquet.

Esther 6:1–3

1 During that night the king could not sleep so he gave an order to bring the book of records, the chronicles, and they were read before the king.

He couldn't sleep, so maybe reading government records could help.

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2 It was found written what Mordecai had reported concerning Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who were doorkeepers, that they had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. 3 The king said, "What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" Then the king's servants who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him."

Mordecai was overlooked for recognition back when it happened. God kept him on ice because there was a bigger plan. This act of exposing the plot on the king's life would now be used to make the great reversal of the situation.

When it Seems God is Not Working, Hold On, Because He Definitely Is

Maybe you've prayed for something for a long time, and it seems nothing is happening. Maybe a situation seems hopeless, and you think God is distracted not listening to you. When it seems God is not working, hold on, because He definitely is.

I wonder if Mordecai wondered why the king never acknowledged the fact that he, Mordecai had saved the king's life. Why was he overlooked? Now we know. Much of God's providential plan for your life can only be seen in hindsight. That's just the way it works.

When I was a high school senior, I remember applying for a scholarship to a college in Idaho, that I really wanted to attend. It was a church school, and I had many friends there. Plus, I knew the scholarship was in the bag. It combined skills, leadership positions, character, and Christian witness. It was a full ride, and I had already worked it in to my college budget. Then the day came and the scholarship letters were sent out. I opened mine and it began with the sentence, "We regret to inform you . . ." My heart sank. The letter went on to offer me the secondary scholarship which would pay half my tuition, room and board. What made matters worse was when I discovered that a girl in my church was the one who received the scholarship. In my high school arrogance, I declared I will not go to that school. Changed plans and headed in the opposite direction to attend a school in Oklahoma. Their scholarship was much smaller, but I didn't care. I was throwing a temper tantrum, but God was making the great reversal happen. I had friends at that school who were getting married and they asked me to be in the wedding. At that wedding, I met a girl from Texas. A few years later, we got married, eventually we settled in Texas, putting me in exactly the right spot to be available at just the right time to pastor this great church. Had I received that scholarship, I can almost guarantee none of that would have happened. God's plan started with me being overlooked, disappointed.

Five years after we were married, the doctor told us we wouldn't be able to have kids. We were devastated. But God knew what He was doing. We called the adoption agency to get information. 7 months later, they put Travis, our son in our arms. Five years after that, the same agency put Haley, our daughter in our arms. We are so blessed.

When it seems God is not working, hold on, because He definitely is.

When the king finds out that Mordecai has been overlooked, here is what happens.

4 So the king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace in order to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows which he had prepared for him. 5 The king's servants said to him, "Behold, Haman is standing in the court." And the king said, "Let him come in." 6 So Haman came in and the king said to him, "What is to be done for the man whom the king desires to honor?" And Haman said to himself, "Whom would the king desire to honor more than me?" 7 Then Haman said to the king, "For the man whom the king desires to honor, 8 let them bring a royal robe which the king has worn, and the horse on which the king has

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ridden, and on whose head a royal crown has been placed; 9 and let the robe and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble princes and let them array the man whom the king desires to honor and lead him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him, 'Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor.' " 10 Then the king said to Haman, "Take quickly the robes and the horse as you have said, and do so for Mordecai the Jew, who is sitting at the king's gate; do not fall short in anything of all that you have said." 11 So Haman took the robe and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city square, and proclaimed before him, "Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor." 12 Then Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman hurried home, mourning, with his head covered.

Pride Blinds Us to the Truth

Haman assumes he is the honoree the king is talking about. After all, he is second in command, everyone is bowing down to him. His pride would not let him believe anything else. Reminds me of how sure I was of the scholarship. Jesus tells a parable in Luke 18 about a Pharisee and a tax collector. The Pharisee representing all the church people who thought they deserved special recognition for their good works. The tax collector would have been societies worst sinner of the time.

Luke 18:10–14 (NASB95)

10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' 13 "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' 14 "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

NEXT SLIDE

God will always have the final word. Your good works are not what get you into heaven nor are your bad works a disqualifier. Because it's not about you and what you do or don't do. Jesus came and died on a cross to pay the debt for your sin. None of us deserve His mercy, but He pours it all over us anyway. He took your punishment so you could be released, rescued from behavior-based validation. As a believer in Christ, you are righteous not because of anything you've done but because the righteous one has removed your sin and entered your life. You're holy because the Holy One lives in you. It's nothing but pride that says look at what I can do, look at who I am even in ministry. Do you struggle with pride? Of course you do. In James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5, we read this statement in both verses:

"God is opposed to the proud, but He gives grace to the humble."

God can be against you or pouring out His grace on you. Your choice. Pride demands it's way, to be noticed, to win, to be in charge. Humility is willing to submit, come under God's authority, and be free from the bondage, the tyranny of pride.

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Haman has met his match and it is God. You don't want to mess with God. Mordecai doesn't seek the recognition, but God gives grace and the recognition eventually finds him at just the right time. These two men could not be more different. Here's something you should know - God opposes your pride and will frustrate you, expose you, bring stress, whatever it takes to break your pride. He does it because He loves you so much. He wants you free from that need to win every conversation, be better than your neighbor, have better kids than your friends' kids. That stuff is so maddening, frustrating, and debilitating. God knows this and He doesn't want that for you. He wants you happy. The pride-filled are just not happy people. Here's something else I've discovered in my journey – people like humble people much more than prideful people. Haman is all bound up and controlled in his pride and Mordecai is free in his humility – which one are you most like?

One of my most favorite phrases in this entire book of Esther is found in verse 12. Mordecai has been revealed as a good man, been honored, riding through town on the King's horse, wearing the king's robe. But now the celebration of Mordecai is over. Verse 12.

12 Then Mordecai returned to the king's gate.

Don't you love that? He went back to his duties, doing what he does. No doubt the recognition made him feel good, lifted his spirits, and I'm sure he savored the moment. But when the party was over, he just went on doing his work.

I want to be like Mordecai.

When we look at this story of God's providential care of His people, a conclusion that we can make is this:

God Can Reverse Any Situation

Sometimes He does it over time, sometimes He does it in the nick of time and sometimes He does it instantly. In this story of Esther, we see God preparing for the great reversal from the very beginning. The king ousts the queen, and Esther is strategically placed by God as queen. Mordecai just happens to be close enough to hear about the plot. Haman happens to be in the King's court at the right time to be summoned. God is always working, always providing, always caring for His people. The same is true here at Grace.

When I think of my ministry here at Grace, I want you to know the good that has been done is all Jesus. Where things have gone wrong; those were all me trying to handle stuff. I have never had anything to offer that is good. Jesus is responsible for all the good. He gets all the glory. Now, you would expect an outgoing pastor to say those kinds of words, but only I truly the know the depth of what I'm saying. There have been so many weeks where I have struggled with sermons and feared that I was preparing to be embarrassed, exposed by my lack. And God, without fail, would, at some point, reverse the situation and just start downloading to me what to say. There have been times where I have personally felt inadequate to stand before you on a Sunday morning because maybe I had failed that past week, been a bad Christian example, said things I shouldn't have said and I would tell myself I had no business being a pastor, let alone be a preacher. But God loves His church and despite where I was in my own spiritual life, He would still supply the words to say. He would remind me that my preaching, my pastoring is not about me. I have come to marvel at the grace that God has shown both me and this church over these 23 years.

There is one verse that I quote often because it has become the story of my life. I want this to be the last verse I read as your pastor because it says everything. Jesus is speaking to His disciples. He says:

John 15:5 (NASB95)

5 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

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Cindy and I are so grateful for all you have done to support us through the years, and we are deeply honored to have taken this journey with you. We appreciate the celebration you have prepared today to honor what Jesus has done in this church these past 23 years. Praise the name of Jesus!