

**Holy Cross Lutheran Church
Livestream Adult Bible Class
June 6, 2021
Esther 8:1-9:19**

Haman the Agagite is dead! But as is the case in many a story, the undoing of the bad guy is not the end of the story. The terrorist may be neutralized, but the bomb is still set to go off. Just when you would like to breathe a sigh of relief there is more tension and new drama. So it is in Esther. Haman the Agagite is dead, but the edict he issued is very much in effect and the undoing of that order which hangs over the Jewish people is the next challenge for Queen Esther.

The Law of the Medes and the Persians - Esther 8:1-6

The initial aftermath to Haman's downfall is incredibly positive for Esther and for Mordecai. Esther is given Haman's vast estate and Mordecai is brought into the presence of the king. His relationship to Esther is disclosed and he receives the signet ring that had been given to Haman and Esther appoints him over Haman's property. So far so good.

But there is a huge problem lurking in the background – the law of the Medes and the Persians. Royal decrees in the Persian empire were permanent. Many years before King Xerxes reigned his grandfather, Darius the Mede conquered the Babylonian empire and instituted a new regime. He ordered that all people who do not worship the king be thrown into the lion's den. Unwittingly, by issuing the order, he condemned Daniel, his most trustworthy official to death. When he tries to save Daniel, his officials remind him of the rule, "Remember, O king that according to the law of the Medes and the Persians no decree or edit that the king issues can be changed."

While this sounds rather strange to our ears, it was not unusual in the ancient world where rulers were seen as gods. A god is not much of a god if he/she keeps changing their mind. So, edicts issued by the king were permanent. Such was the case with the edict issued by Xerxes when Vashti refuses to entertain his friends at the banquet in Esther 1. The order for men to be "rulers over their household" is written as a law of Persia and Media which cannot be repealed. This was also the case with the edict against the Jews issued by Haman in the name of the king.

So, what to do?

Again, we see Esther at her best! She capitalizes on the king's favour and boldly comes to him with the request. Unlike the first time she came to talk to Xerxes she does not wait to be noticed and but begs him to put an end to Haman's plan even before the king extends the golden scepter toward her and inviting her to speak. Her appeal is direct but also carefully worded.

"If it pleases the king," she said, "and if he regards me with favor and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, devised and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces. For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?"

Perhaps not surprisingly the king has little objection to Esther's request. Haman is gone, Esther controls his estate, so write another decree in the king's name, seal it with the ring given to Haman and sent it out as an order that cannot be revoked.

The New Edict - Esther 8:7-14

Mordecai and Esther waste no time in getting to work on the new edict which very much parallels the edict given by Mordecai. The Jews are given:

- The right to assemble and protect themselves.
- To kill, destroy and annihilate anyone who might attack them or their women and children (NIV)
- To plunder the property of their enemies
- All to be done on the same day as the edit issued by Haman.

Thus, if the Jews are attacked on the 13th of Adar, they have the right to assemble and protect themselves and to kill anyone who would attack them.

The Unstated Problem - Two Decrees

But how will this be received in the empire? How will the king's people in the field respond to this second edict? Which pronouncement will they obey? To no one's surprise, the Jews are elated when the couriers riding the fast horses of the king arrive in their towns with the new decree. It would also appear that many of the people of the towns also realized the Jews were gaining the upper hand and some went so far as to convert to Judaism. The ruling class in each of the provinces seem to realize that Mordecai now wields great power and so they give their aid to the Jews.

Others however, perhaps out of loyalty to Haman, would not obey ten new edict and as chapter 9 details, enemies did attack and there were battles throughout the kingdom. In all about 75,000 men perished in the fighting, including 800 in the city of Susa. Haman's sons are captured and hanged. The Jews however did not exercise all the rights given them by the decree. In no case did they lay their hands upon the plunder. The families of the deceased would keep their possessions and not be reduced to poverty.

Two Decrees - The Battle Within Us (Romans 7-8)

One scholar has called the book of Esther the most up-to-date book of the Bible. The story comes to us out of the dim, distant past, but it finds a modern counterpart in each of our lives, for every Christian is, in a sense, a walking book of Esther. The same characters are involved, the same struggle goes on, the same defeat threatens, the same victory is won.

Each of us is under the sentence of death. There is a "law of the Medes and Persians which cannot be revoked" hanging over all our lives. In Romans 8:2 Paul describes it as the "law of sin and death." It cannot be altered nor revoked. The Law of God remains in force for all time. Jesus did not come to abolish the law and in many cases unpacked the full impact of the law on our lives, by calling us to

obedience not just in outward action, but also in our thoughts and attitudes. The weight of the Law hangs heavy on us. Paul speaks for us all when he says:

“²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

The Good News is that Law of God is not the final word on our lives. The “law of the Spirit of life” sets us free from the law of sin and death.

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

The “second edict” triumphs over the first! Through faith we are dead to sin, but alive to God because of the righteousness of Christ which covers our sin and frees us to live freely as God’s people!

¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

And in that victory, we live new lives.

¹⁵ 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!” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Through Christ we become like Mordecai who, “left the king's presence wearing royal garments of blue and white, a large crown of gold and a purple robe of fine linen. And the city of Susa held a joyous celebration. For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor. In every province and in every city, wherever the edict of the king went, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating.” Esther 8:15-17