

#### **9.4.08 Esther 5-10 midweekchurch Esther 2 (mid)**

The science professor continued to taunt the Christians in his lab, as he did each year. “There is no God”, he declared. “Only scientific laws. God does not exist. God does not change things. Prayer makes no difference. The earth has evolved in such a way that science and scientific laws are the only ones in control of our world.”

One of the students, a Christian, could handle it no longer and so he stood and defended his Lord before the class. The Professor laughed. “Just to show everyone who is right and who is wrong, lets set up a little experiment shall we? I will drop this glass beaker from about 5 foot onto the concrete floor”, he said. “But before I do it, I will give you a chance to pray. Now if your God can stop the beaker from crashing onto the concrete without breaking, then there is a god. If not, science rules.”

The Christian student nervously agreed to the Professor’s challenge. He prayed, “Lord, I know you are real. I know that you are there. I know that you answer prayer. Please prove it to everyone else here by somehow allowing this beaker not to break.”

The Professor theatrically held the beaker up. And with an arrogance bordering on overconfidence he let it go, but a little too close to the desk. The beaker clipped the edge of the desk on the way down, which diverted its path a little and it ended up landing not on the concrete floor but on the Professor’s toe. And it didn’t break. The Professor was red faced. The time for the lecture ended and the Professor never again made his challenge to scientific laws in any of his future classes.

Now that would have been great to be there wouldn’t it? To see it? To see the Professor’s face? But tell me was that just a co-incidence or was it a god incident? Did God actually step into that classroom or was it just luck, pure and simple. Was it chance? Was it fate? Does God break into the everyday or does he make the world in a certain way that his laws do indeed govern everything that happens?

This is an important question isn’t it? Because we live in a day where we haven’t experienced any raising of the dead? No parting of the Red Sea? No sun standing still in the middle of the day? So is God still at work, today? Does He still do miracles? Does he change circumstances because of our prayers?

This is where the book of Esther is important., really important. For as most people have pointed out it never mentions God. Not even once. There is no mention of worship in it or even prayer. But that I believe is the point, its main point. God isn’t always upfront. God doesn’t always use the miraculous, sometimes he works through the every day, through what seems luck or chance. Sure God may not be mentioned at all in the book of Esther, but as one commentator has put

it, his fingerprints are all over the book. The unseen God is always in control.

So remember last week, the old queen Vashti has been deposed, by the powerful Persian king Xerxes. And after 4 years of sampling every gorgeous girl in the kingdom, Xerxes chooses as his new queen Esther, who is unbeknown to him a Jew. But at the same time Haman, the Prime Minister, has decided to wipe the whole Jewish people of the face of the globe and has decreed that the thirteenth day of the twelfth month is the day the slaughter will happen.

And where we left the story last week, Esther's adopted Dad, Mordecai has told Esther of Haman's evil plans and asked her to stand up for her people. To go into the presence of the King and plead for mercy. To risk death in order to save her nation. She was challenged to have the courage of her convictions. To stand up for the faith. To risk her life for others. To do what Martin Luther did on 18<sup>th</sup> April, 1521, at the Parliament of Worms, when he said "*Here I stand, I can do no other. God help me. Amen.*"

And you would expect that when God calls us to stand, to fight, to hang in there that he would send an angel to strengthen us, that he would miraculously do something, that he would show us in some way that he is beside us no matter what. But he doesn't in the book of Esther, does he? He is silent. He is seemingly absent. He doesn't seem to step in. And so Esther calls on her fellow Jews to fast and then she takes a deep breathe and approaches the King.

Now no-one, not even the queen, can approach the King. And the penalty, if such an action displeases the king is death. Death. But Esther courageously stands in the King's presence and Xerxes, the King, looks with favour on Esther and grants her an audience and Esther asks for the King's presence along with the Prime Minister Haman to come to tea the next day. Which they do.

No flashing lights. No legions of angels. No sending of fire down to warn Xerxes, just tea with Esther. And after the tea party is ended, Xerxes asks what Esther wants and she invites them both back for tea the next day as well.

Now this makes Haman feel like a million drachma, tea with the king and the queen twice in two days. He is on cloud nine, until he sees Mordecai the Jew and his anger consumes him. So he builds a gallows, some 23 metres high to hang his enemy on. And here is when the coincidences fly thick and fast.

The next day the gallows are built and Haman arrives early at the palace to get the King's permission to hang Mordecai on them. But unfortunately for Haman, the King has had a bad night. He couldn't sleep at all, and instead of counting sheep, he had sent for some

history books instead and while the histories of his reign were being read, he was reminded that a certain Jew, a guy called Mordecai had once saved the King's life, and nothing had been done to reward him.

So what should be done to reward a man of honour, the King asks Haman, who has now entered the court? Haman thinks Xerxes is talking about himself and proposes a royal crown, a royal steed, a nobleman guiding the horse around, telling the world that this man is highly esteemed by the King. "What a good idea" says Xerxes, "make sure *you* do that for Mordecai."

Haman is horrified, he is humiliated, he is humbled and when he is finished he quickly gets ready for his tea with the queen. But if the day has started off bad, its going to get worse, much worse, as Queen Esther asks Xerxes for her life, for the life of her people and that the perpetrator behind this hideous crime be punished. And whose behind it? Haman. The King is livid and Haman ends up on the gallows he made for Mordecai. Mordecai is made PM. And he gives the Jews permission to defend themselves against their enemies on the day of slaughter. So in the end, it is not the Jews who are defeated, it is there enemies.

**1. So ... where is God in all this?** He is the unseen conductor of the symphony, one who is always there, directing it all without once ever stepping into the limelight. God is the one who stops Xerxes from sleeping. God is the one who years before allowed Mordecai to foil an assassination on the King. God is behind the building of the gallows. God conducts each twist and turns in this symphony to ensure that the finale is a triumphant one, not an off note.

Yes God could have intervened, but in this circumstance he choose not to. But is he any less in control? Can't God work through the miraculous and the seemingly coincidental? Through the fire and the still small voice? Through the instantaneously healing of prayer and laying on of hands and through the doctor's medicine.

God is sovereign. God is in control. Thus there are no coincidences. There is no such thing as luck. For he works through the ordinary and the extraordinary. Theologians call it providence, God's beneficial ordering of the affairs of men and women. The fact that God is equally in control when he sends the sun up again in the morning and when he stops the sun from rising in the morning. He is equally in control when he brings about his plans and purposes through the actions of men, even evil men, as much as when he supernaturally changes the course of history.

Thomas a Kempis said "Man proposes, but God disposes." Edward George Lytton said "Fate is not the ruler, but the servant of Providence" Rowland Bingham spoke that "There are no accidents in the life of the Christian." And John Newton once said, "We serve a

gracious Master who knows how to overrule even our mistakes to His glory and to His advantage.”

Where is God? He is not watching us from a distant. God is in our midst. God is swaying the wills of kings and orphans, of important men and ordinary children. God is using everyday events to fashion a people to himself. He works through the good, the bad and the ugly in order to bring us to a point where we will grow in faith. We can't always see him or hear Him or touch him, but that doesn't mean he is not directing everything that is going on.

God Moves in Mysterious Ways, as the hymn writer William Cowper once said. But I wonder if you know the story behind that hymn? You see William Cowper was a Christian, but he was suffering from depression. His heart was filled with despair. One foggy night he called for a horse drawn carriage and told the driver to take him to the London Bridge on the Thames River. He was planning to end his life.

But after two hours of driving through the dense fog, Cowper's coachman reluctantly confessed that he was lost. Cowper was angry at the delay and decided to leave the carriage and find London Bridge on his own. But after walking only a short distance, he discovered that he was at his own doorstep! The carriage had been going in circles.

Immediately Cowper recognized the providence of God. The Spirit of God began to speak to his heart and he realized that the way out of his problem was by trusting God, not by jumping in the river. He saw that God's hand had saved him from self-destruction, and now he trusted that God could save him from the other problems he faced.

As gratitude welled up in his heart, he sat down and wrote those great words: *“God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm. O fearful saints, fresh courage take, the clouds you so much dread; are big with mercy, and shall break in blessings on your head.”*

Now that's all very well in Cowper's situation , for everything turned out OK for him. It's all very well for Esther's situation for her life was saved and so was the lives of her nation. But things don't always finish with a happily ever after ending for us do they? So we can believe that God is in control when everything turns out fine.

**2. But where is God in the midst of tragedy?** Where is God when evil men seem to win? When luck is not on your side? When tragedy is not averted? When God seems silent and distant and no relief comes into sight? When depression continues to grip a loved one?

Yes we may be able to understand that God was here in the book of Esther, saving his people from destruction, but what about during WW2, when he failed to save some 6 million Jews from destruction?

So where is God in the midst of a tragedy like this?

I remember reading a story about three Jews being hung by the SS during the Second World War. Two of them were men and they died quite quickly in front of the rest of the prisoners in the concentration camp. The third was a youth, and he lasted a bit longer. As the crowd watched him die, a voice was clearly heard to all those standing around, "Where is God in all this? Where is God?"

There was silence, complete silence until an answer came forth from someone else, "He is there, there on the gallows."

God may seem silent, he may seem invisible, but he is still always there. In the joy and in the pain. And that is most clearly seen at the cross. For there in the midst of tremendous suffering. In the midst of pain. In the midst of confusion. Jesus cries out "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" But we still see that God is there. It is God the Son who hangs on that cross. God himself is giving mankind a chance to come back to himself. God is not absent. God is not out of touch. God is not passive. God has not forgotten his people.

In fact God is so powerful, so in control that the Bible says, "*that in all things he works for the good of those who love him.*" Not always in the spectacular, but daily, hourly, constantly God is quietly working through the good and the bad to bring about his good purposes.

**3. So where is God now?** He's here, he's quietly working amongst his people. Not just in the miraculous, but also in the everyday. Not just in the good times but also in the tough times. You can't always see him. You can't always feel his presence, you can't hear his voice, but that doesn't mean he is absent.

So look for him. Pray to Him. Trust in Him. His fingerprints are everywhere. He is the one behind all the luck, all the chance, all the coincidences. In fact there are no such things as coincidences, everything is a God incidence.

Now as I wrote those words in my script, my computer suddenly and unexpectedly closed down. And I lost most of my sermon. For I had got carried away over the last couple of hours and had forgotten to save what I had written. I admit I was annoyed, until I realised the irony of it all. It was a god incident. It was part of his plan. He was again teaching me a lesson. Sure it was inconvenient, sure I wished it didn't happen, sure it meant another hour or two's work. But he is in control. And he knows best. So instead of anger, there should be wonder. Instead of frustration, there should be praise.

Friends that is the message of Esther. God is at work in the lives of his people, even when we can't see it. He is doing something when we work on our computer, when we drive in our cars, when we are

mending a shirt, or washing up the dishes. It is not just in the great and mighty, in the miraculous that he does his work. Often it is quietly and behind the scenes that he does his best work.

What he wants for us, is to accept where he has put us. What he wants us to do is to boldly walk by faith. What he wants us to do is to praise him for all the things that happen in life. For its all part of his plan. A plan we may not recognise or see, but a plan that has brought us to this place, for a time like today. I wonder what his plan is for your life? And I wonder what today's highs and lows are doing to make you ready for what is around the corner?