

How quickly a picture of a successful, prosperous government turns dark. A man is promoted to a high position. You would expect him to act in the best interest of the nation's citizens but instead his newfound power goes to his head. He insists people pay him homage, as if he were the king. So in the election of that particular man security is suddenly at risk..

But before we get into all of that, How many of you consider yourselves overly responsible? We all know those "other people" – those people who buy lottery tickets, thinking they are going to win that thing! Those people who throw all caution to the wind and buy property in the middle of the desert just sure that it will become an oasis. If you live with a reasonable sense of responsibility; if you are into security and like to live a predictable life, you are going to hate this week's story. It involves a huge gamble in which the stakes are quite high.

If circumstances presented themselves, would you risk your life for someone else? People do all the time; for example, members of the military, policemen and fireman take risks. And others take investment risks or risk starting a new business.

You risk adverse people might be thinking, *I wish I had played golf today!*

This is a story of great risk; of dangerous adventure. Almost everyone took a risk, some good and some bad.

Haman took a risk. He wanted power and authority. He did not think of God or of doing the right thing. The Psalmist calls this kind of person "wicked." This person strives to destroy God's people.<sup>1</sup> God's people have an enemy who indeed thinks in these destructive terms. Haman had such a worldview.

Remember Jesus' temptation in the desert? Satan said to Him, "Jesus, turn this rock into bread. Go ahead; abuse your power for your own interests and needs." Haman abused his power for his own interests and needs.

Satan said to Jesus, "I'll give you all the kingdoms of the world if you bow down and worship me." All the people were to bow down to Haman.

Haman was easy prey for Satan. He was power hungry. In addition, bitterness brewed inside of Haman. His ancestors, his people were enemies of the Jews. Haman carried on that centuries-old ethnic prejudice. We know what tremendous tension that has brought to our own nation. So between Haman's deep bitterness and his ambition, when Mordecai refuses to bow, he explodes in hatred.

Unresolved bitterness can really hurt us. We often experience the impact of bitterness. Haven't you had old grudges pop up sometimes out of nowhere and in an effort to protect yourself, you strike out at others? Old grudges affect us, particularly in relationships.

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<sup>1</sup>Read Psalm 94

Haman's bitterness bred cruelty. He thought annihilating the Jews would take away his problems and give him peace. Does hatred really take away the hurt inside? Many people think it does. But God says no, vengeance is mine; put it in My hands because bitterness will destroy you.

Likewise, the king had some very bad habits which hampered his worldview as a ruler. He drank too much. Consumed with parties and wealth, his judgment was dulled. He didn't ask questions and was easily deceived and manipulated by Haman.

Mordecai, though, saw Haman for who he was, and as a Jew, he was unwilling to bow to a man. Right there was the clash of two worldviews – one self-serving and the other bowing only to God. Mordecai's actions spoke of faith. Yet they led to Haman's evil plan.

You might say – I don't see God at all here. God doesn't prevent or circumvent all the evil plans people come up with. God, rather, is in the midst helping us through. Mordecai learned of the plan and Mordecai suddenly saw God had placed Esther in just the right position to do something.

But, how to convince Esther to take this risk? He loved her and I bet he didn't want to ask her to do it! Yet he urged her to do the right thing, what was best for the larger community.

You've probably heard that Mordecai said, "Esther, if you don't do this deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place." But, the Hebrew language is not nearly as precise as English, so another way to translate it is as a question, "*Will relief and deliverance for the Jews arise from any other place?*" He's not saying oh well, Esther, if you don't do it, deliverance will arise from some unknown, unexpected, mysterious source. No, he's urging her, saying "*you are the only possible source!*" He sees it. He sees what God is doing, and he's trying to motivate her to act. He essentially said, "Esther, you're not there by accident. God put you there for a reason!" If you don't step up, people will perish. You and I are God's only resource.

While living in California I used to hike in the Altadena Foothills which overlook Pasadena and Los Angeles. One day as I hiked, I told God I couldn't do it. Seminary was too hard. I missed my husband and family, who lived in Texas. I missed being an airline employee, traveling on weekends instead of working at church. I walked along that path, telling God no, that I was going home, expecting to hear God's voice. I only heard silence. I walked all the way across the hill as the sun went down in the distance.

In my frustration I thought, *see God doesn't care. God's not here.* I stopped and looked over the valley, watching lights blinking on, hearing sounds rising of people arriving home, of community life. And as I stood there this small whisper came to me, "Then, who's going to tell them?" And I knew at that instant that it takes me and it takes every one of you because there are millions out there who need to hear. And if we don't do it, people truly perish.

Do you see yourself as important to God? You are. Can you take the risk that God matters more than anything, and seek out your special part in God's plan to share the message?

Esther risked Mordecai's vision that God wanted to use her. But she didn't just run in and save the day. She fasted and prayed first. It's very important to get in touch with God to rely on God and ask for God's power. She asked everyone to be a part.

Do you believe we are part of God's plan to reach this community? God has already placed it in your hearts. Remember our Prayer Vigil on Good Friday? Listen to your prayers and hear what matters to you. (Read prayer journal.)

- Pray for this church, may we be a service to this community that would be pleasing to the Lord.
- Pray that our church would show the love & goodness of God and that He would be honored in this community because of our witness to His power.
- Our church is here for a purpose. Show us how to share Your message that people will be drawn to you. May we be used to help meet the needs here & even around the world.
- Our Father, You have blessed us. Help us to open the door in turn to others.
- Please let our community learn of Your great & mighty love.
- May Your kingdom come into more & more of Duncanville because Your children in this church love you, love each other, and gladly serve you together!
- Our Father and King, May we reflect Your glory to those around us & constantly extend grace to others.
- *I pray that this church can be used by God to reach people in this community.*
- We pray that you will give us the strength and the will to gather more members of the community.
- Father, help us to make a difference in this community.
- May we always be there for anyone who needs help of any type. May we spread Your message and Your love everywhere we go.
- Take my eyes, help me to see the world as you see it. Lead me as a little child.
- Help those who feel separated from you to find you.
- Help us Precious Savior to be Light & Salt in this world. So many don't know you. Help our church to welcome lost souls and encourage them to come into Your family. Give us wisdom to reach those who seem unreachable.
- We pray that Your word takes root in our hearts and minds. That we can be Your servants and that the evil one will be bound by Your blood and authority.
- How can we turn the tide of those who want to diminish our faith? We pray that we can do this one step at a time, with your power and love.

These are your prayers. God has obviously placed the desire to share the message. And God will use you! You can count on that because your desires are the very thing God desires, that people will not perish but have eternal life.

There's that period of faith between saying "yes" to God and seeing the power of God, that period of fasting and prayer. We'll come back next week to see what happened to Esther.

In the meantime, Will you be totally irresponsible and say, "Yes, God, Here's my life, use me!" Perhaps we too will find that we are the ones He has placed *for such a time as this*. AMEN