

Devotion 20:

Our Father humbles The Exalted And Exalts The Humble

Esther 1—10

There is something about the human condition that makes us love a rags-to-riches story. Modern American cinema has tapped into the soul with mastering the technique of wooing audiences to pull for the underdog. And when a reversal of fortune has occurred, especially when a dastardly villain has oppressed the likeable hero, there is satisfactory relief as patrons exit the theatre. Such is the feeling one has after reading the 10 chapters in the book of Esther.

Esther is unique in that the name of God or the word “God” never appears in its pages. Yet, after reading over 700 pages and 16 Old Testament books to this point, the reader instinctively knows that God’s sovereign control is behind the events.

First, a Persian official is trying to exterminate the Jews who are scattered in their captivity in Babylon. If successful, this will prevent our Father from fulfilling His promise to send us a savior through the tribe of Judah. Second, like Ruth and Rahab before her, Esther is humble and loyal to the point of possible death. (4:11, 16) Third, there is the air of inevitable deliverance. Listen to Mordecai’s encouraging Esther to approach King Xerxes on behalf of the Jews:

“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to a royal position for such a time as this?” 4:14

And lastly, several times the expression is repeated, “*if the king regards me with favor.*” (2:15, 17; 5:2, 8; 7:3) “*Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, she won his favor and approval.*” (2:17) We have seen it more than once in the Scriptures thus far that God has orchestrated the hearts and minds of believers and of unbelievers to achieve His purposes. Now we see Him do such through a woman attracting a man.

The wise sage in Proverbs muses in Prov. 30:18-19:

“There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a maiden.”

But these things are not too amazing for our Father who created them all.

To make the story complete, however, a dastardly villain also plays a significant part. Haman is cold, cruel, and calculating. Furthermore, he is from the Amalekites, the first

people to attack the Israelites after they left Egypt. For this reason, Mordecai refuses to kneel to him after he is exalted by King Xerxes. This angers Haman and he proceeds to build a gallows for Mordecai, but he doesn't stop there: *"Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom."* (3:5-6)

The exalted Haman, though, is humbled when Xerxes discovers that Mordecai once saved the king's life and had never been honored for it. In a sweet, redemptive turn of events, Haman ends up hanging on the gallows he built for Mordecai, and Mordecai ends up reaping the rewards Haman himself was expecting to receive.

What is seen in the story of Esther is that our Father *"brings one down, he exalts another."* (Ps. 75:7) *"The Lord sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor."* (I Sam. 2:7-8)

Esther's humility is evident in her words to King Xerxes:

"And spare my people—this is my request. For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king." 7:4

The story ends with the Jews having their sorrow turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration. (9:22)

So where are you today? Is someone unjustly harassing you? Are you humbly doing your duty and being overlooked for honor? Are you being persecuted? Maybe life's circumstances are humbling you. Esther tells us we have hope. Our Father exalts the humble. And our day of exaltation is coming when He will raise us up on the last Day. Our sorrow over battling and often losing to this world, the devil, and our flesh will be turned into joy and our mourning into an eternal day of celebration