

## Sabbath School Lesson #12 – Esther and Mordecai – 16-22 December 2023

**C**hrist will empower us to reveal His true identity and our true relationship with Him. “I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6). “For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place” (Esther 4:14). Notice, this week we will not follow day-by-day, but give a general summary.

Haman had secured a command of king Ahasuerus that all the king’s servants should pay worshipful reverence to him. Mordecai sat at the king’s gate. “All the king’s servants, that were in the king’s gate, bowed, and revered Haman,” but “Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence” (Esther 3:2). “And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath” (verse 6). Haman plotted to destroy Mordecai and all Jews. Haman misled king Ahasuerus to issue a death decree for Jews “scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces” of the kingdom of Persia (verse 8).

A death decree marked perilous time for the Jews; they fasted and wept (Esther 4:3). In this perilous time, Mordecai suggested to Esther that she appeals to king Ahasuerus for all the Jews including herself, saying: “For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time,” said Mordecai to Esther, “then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (verse 14). Esther enlisted the prayer of all the Jews as she ventured go to the king. “Go,” she directed Mordecai, “gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish” (verse 16). God saved the Jews!

God intervened to save the Jews: the king had sleepless night, he ordered the honour of Mordecai, Esther appeared before the king, Haman’s plot uncovered, Haman hanged, and Mordecai appointed next in rank to king Ahasuerus. As the decree of Persia could not be reversed, the death decree of all Jews being irreversible, the king allowed Mordecai to issue another counter decree allowing the Jews “to avenge themselves on their enemies” (Esther 8:13). What a turn of events! God turned the death decree into deliverance! “And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them” (verse 17).

It partly reveals the struggle between righteousness by faith and righteousness by works. Haman was a man of petty and bigoted hatred born and nursed by his pride. The result was what all hatred produces, a desire for the death of its object. Mordecai refused to kneel in homage to Haman, which hurt his pride, so Haman secured a death decree for Mordecai and all the Jews. A test of worship results in hatred and irrational anger. At the end of time, the test will be loyalty to the true God as manifested in an act of worship. Mordecai’s actions sent a message that he would remain loyal regardless of the consequences. In our time, it is the message of righteousness by faith that does and will cause hatred by those who are relying on their assurance of salvation based on their works, in which they have taken pride.

Esther was faced with a difficult choice. Her cousin Mordecai was a known Jew, but for unknown reasons Mordecai advised Esther not to reveal her racial identity at the time, so had Esther kept it a secret. If she kept it quiet, perhaps she had a chance of escaping the death decree. When Adam and Eve sinned, God could have quietly let nature take course, and they would have died as God predicted “in the day” (Genesis 2:17) that they ate of the tree. God could have created another pair as if nothing had gone wrong. But, the universe had not witnessed death, and the watching universe would wonder how a selflessly loving (*agape*) God could simply let go of those He loved. In Christ, God would save His creatures.

Most of the human race does not know its true condition, sinners in need of a saviour. Without a warning message, they will continue knowing nothing of their true condition and need. Most religions teach a form of works righteousness, which produces hopelessness. When Esther chose to disclose her true identity, she was willing to accept the consequences of being a part of a race under a death decree. Unlike Christ, Esther did not have a choice to be born Jewish, but Christ chose to be “made like unto His brethren” (Hebrews 2:17), and did so permanently aligning Himself with a race under a death decree. Three times Esther

was before the king of Persia (Esther 5:1 when she first came to the king; verse 6 at her first banquet; and 7:2 at her second banquet), and on the third time Esther sealed her fate as permanently aligned with her corporate kin by disclosing her secret. Three times Christ was before the King of the universe, praying, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine be done" (Luke 22) and Christ gave His will to His Father.

Lesson asks: "what circumstances might you think of where it could be prudent not to be over with our faith?" We are not told why Mordecai and Esther kept her faith a secret, but it came a time when clearly, they had to take a stand. There are some who think we should never discuss the true identity of Christ as "the Lord is that Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:17) who must live in us to manifest His own righteousness in us until the message of righteousness by faith is so diluted as to be indistinguishable from nominal evangelical righteousness by faith. Certainly, we need to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves, but if we truly believe this message is the "third angel's message in verity" (RH 1 April 1890), it must be given in detail to our own brethren in our church and to souls out there in a dying world.

Even on pain of death, the message must be given, but that is not humanly possible without the full acceptance that indeed "God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts" (Galatians 4:6) and that you cannot preach the true identity of Christ, His *agape* love, until you are truly convinced that it is not another divine being that lives in you but Christ Himself, and hence you can say like Paul "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). Except a man is born again – born of the Spirit of Christ – before he dies, he will never see the resurrection unto life. "If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Romans 8:11). Except the Spirit of Christ dwells in us, not another individual, we can be sure we will never be raised to life. Except Christ dwells in us, we are yet in the flesh; if yet in the flesh, we cannot please God; if we cannot please God, we can never see God.

The message of "Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2) is the end time message the faithful must uphold, for it is through which God is able to change willing hearts with His *agape* love for the entire human race. In this message we come to realise that the entire human race is under a death decree unless it accepts Christ and Him crucified. Our love for souls (not ourselves) compels us to risk everything to tell them of Christ. Christ will give us great power to lighten the whole earth with glory, and that includes the change of heart from self-centred to urgent selfless outreach evangelism. Nothing will hold us back; like Esther, we may say "if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16) but I will preach Christ and Him crucified!

We will be given power to preach! "I heard those clothed with the armor speak forth the truth in great power. It had effect. I saw those who had been bound; some wives had been bound by their husbands, and some children had been bound by their parents. The honest who had been held or prevented from hearing the truth, now eagerly laid hold of the truth spoken. All fear of their relatives was gone. The truth alone was exalted to them. It was dearer and more precious than life. They had been hungering and thirsting for truth. I asked what had made this great change. An angel answered, 'It is the latter rain. The refreshing from the presence of the Lord. The loud cry of the Third Angel'" (RH, 31 Dec 1857, Par 9).

"Great power was with these chosen ones. Said the angel, 'Look ye!' My attention was turned to the wicked, or unbelievers. They were all astir. The zeal and power with the people of God had aroused and enraged them. Confusion, confusion, was on every side. I saw measures taken against this company, who were having the power and light of God. Darkness thickened around them, yet there they stood, approved of God, and trusting in Him. I saw them perplexed. Next I heard them crying unto God earnestly. Through the day and night their cry ceased not. I heard these words, 'Thy will, O God, be done! If it can glorify thy name, make a way of escape for thy people! Deliver us from the heathen round about us! They have appointed us unto death; but thine arm can bring salvation.' These are all the words I can bring to mind. They seemed to have a deep sense of their unworthiness, and manifested entire submission to the will of God. Yet every one, without an exception, was earnestly pleading, and wrestling like Jacob for deliverance" (RH, 31 Dec 1857, Par 10).