

January 2009

Tuesday, January 27th - James 3: 15, 16

These verses reveal to us the source and the fruit of false wisdom. The source is ultimately demonic. Those motivated by such wisdom are in the same situation as were Adam and Eve, who heard and heeded infernal counsel that promised exaltation above God, but provided sinful alienation from God, guilt in His sight, corruption, and misery. Also, as the original demonic counsel came to our first parents in the guise of a serpent, so the same hellish counsel comes to us now mediated through conduits more familiar and appealing to us than its true demonic source. False wisdom makes good earthly sense, meaning that it is pragmatic but unprincipled. It is suited only to cater to our sensual and immediate gratification, urging us to gain the world while losing our souls as we give no thought to heaven or heaven's God. Such wisdom is natural, meaning emotional, but not spiritual. It emphasizes good feelings while disregarding the revealed truth of God that alone saves and sets us free.

Wednesday, January 28th - James 3: 17

In contrast to the demonic wisdom that seems to come from the natural way of this world, but really comes from hellish demons, there is a wisdom that comes from heaven above. This heavenly wisdom beckons us to lose our lives for Christ's sake in order to find them perfected in eternal and abundant life, and it actually provides all that it promises and more. Yet, because it calls us to bear the cross before we inherit the crown of glory, this heavenly wisdom is considered foolishness by the natural man (1 Cor. 1:18-31). Nevertheless, to those who are being saved by God's grace, such heavenly wisdom is rightly apprehended to be both pious and practical here and now on earth as well as hereafter in heaven. While such heavenly wisdom works wonders for us in this world, it is supremely designed to fit us for reigning forever with Christ in His heavenly glory.

Thursday, January 29th - James 3: 17

Notice how much more rich and full is the wisdom from above than is that which is worldly and demonic. James lists no fewer than eight blessed attributes to this wisdom that comes to us from the highest realm of our glorious God, whose wisdom is perfect and infallible. We learn from our studying other places in Scripture where godly wisdom is extolled—in the book of Proverbs, for example—that these eight attributes are representative, not exhaustive. There is always more to godly wisdom than at first meets the eyes and ears of those who receive it.

Friday, January 30th - James 3: 17

The first attribute of heavenly wisdom listed by James is purity. This speaks of the inner quality of unadulterated holiness. Those motivated by heavenly wisdom do not countenance sinful thoughts or actions because the holiness of their God who indwells them by His Spirit will not allow them to countenance sin, but will, instead, enable them righteously and lovingly to know and do and delight in the holy will and ways of the Lord. We are taught how to cultivate such purity in 1 Jn. 3:1-3.

Saturday, January 31st - James 3: 17

Godly purity does not make a person impractically aloof or intolerantly unreasonable. The sweetest fruit that issues from purity is peace and a loving and effective commitment to work for

a righteous peace between oneself and others (Rom. 12:18). Nor does the Lord's wisdom prompt us to compel others to think or do even good things, but rather it moves us with loving gentleness, self-sacrifice, and merciful compassion to seek charitably to persuade, encourage, and tenderly to guide others to embrace with us everything that the Lord would have us to possess and enjoy together. The way of worldly wisdom is the attainment of one's own way by thuggish pressure; the way of heavenly wisdom is the attainment of loving cooperation and communion in the Savior who is the way, truth, and life.

Sunday, February 1st - James 3: 17

The purity, peaceableness, gentleness, reasonableness, and mercifulness of heavenly wisdom does not so encumber and complicate one's thinking and feeling and therefore make practical living difficult if not impossible. The wisdom from above abounds in good fruits. The only thoughts, words, and actions that it inhibits are evil and lead to bitterness and destruction. Those filled with heavenly wisdom abound in works that are good and beneficial to all who are on this earth. No other wisdom can with such complete credibility make such a claim.

Monday, February 2nd - James 3: 17

One might be led to think that the tender aspects of heavenly wisdom—its gentleness, mercy, and self-sacrificial nature—would render such wisdom weak in resolve and sentimentally pliable. However, heavenly wisdom is unwavering precisely because of its adamant strength of godly purity and love. It renders one unyieldingly determined to pursue righteous reconciliation and loving intimacy with others. At the same time, there is a sweet reasonableness in genuine heavenly wisdom. The word in this verse translated, *reasonable*, literally means good persuasion, and speaks of a loving gentleness in our endeavor to persuade (not to compel) others, and also a humble spirit in ourselves, as we are ever ready to be persuaded of ways that are higher and more righteous, holy, and loving than those we have currently grasped.

Tuesday, February 3rd - James 3: 17

Heavenly wisdom is without hypocrisy. It is truly and essentially all that it appears to be. Its gentle and merciful manners are not mere devices cunningly adopted to disarm others and thus render them more easily compelled to accept a dictated course. Its inviting features are but the outer traces of its sweet, sanctifying, and delightful essence. Demonic wisdom dons pleasing guises to camouflage its horrid essence; heavenly wisdom issues forth blessing rays from its essential warmth, light, life and love.

Wednesday, February 4th - James 3: 17

The precious, rich, and potent wisdom described in this verse comes from above. It does not arise from man's own endowments and attainments, but is rather a gift from our heavenly Father (Jas 1:5,17). Therefore, we should seek this gift from the proper source and be ever more heavenly minded (Col. 2:1-3), and determine to know nothing better than or above Christ Jesus, and Him crucified for sinners among whom we should regard ourselves as being prominent, if not chief (1 Cor. 2:2-16).

Thursday, February 5th - James 3: 18

This verse tells us that the wisdom from above is not like sinful man's cleverness and cunning, but consists in our being made like Christ. Hence, the goal and effective attainment of

heavenly wisdom being operative in our lives is righteous peace securely made between ourselves and others. The fruits of heavenly wisdom are all good, and they are not merely done as deeds accomplished but are sown as potent seeds for the production of peace in the matrix of which love flourishes and abounds. Those who are most filled with such wisdom love best and accomplish most for the blessing of men and to the glory of God, the Source and Giver of this wisdom.

Friday, February 6th - James 4: 1

We have noted how James has manifested grace and gentleness throughout this letter as he has addressed a number of practical issues in Christian living. Repeatedly he refers to his readers as *my brethren* when he corrects them (Jas. 1:2,16,19; 2:1,5,14; 3:1,10), and he often casts his teaching in hypothetical terms, posing the matter as if it could be the case rather than stating it as though it actually was the case (Jas. 1:5,23; 2:2; 3:14). Yet, in Jas. 4:1-10, James becomes more direct in his challenge, and his gentleness appears to give way to a more severe spirit when he refers to his readers as those who lust (v.2), as adulteresses (v.4), and as double-minded sinners (v.8). This shift in tone may cause us to wonder whether James himself is at this point failing to manifest the gentle, reasonable, merciful, and peaceable spirit of heavenly wisdom that he has just defined (Jas. 3:17). Here James seems to declare war on the saints. We shall see that what he declares war upon is not the saints but rather upon their unrighteous attitudes that militate against their experience of holy peace. Hence, this stern address serves as a righteous corrective given to make true peace among those reading this letter (Jas. 3:18). Even gentle Jesus tells us to declare ruthless war against the right eye that offends the well-being of the body (Mt. 5:29).

Saturday, February 7th - James 4: 1

Those to whom James originally addressed this letter apparently lacked the peace to which he referred in 3:18. They were, instead, actually experiencing quarrels and conflicts among themselves. James demonstrates that he is one committed to working for true, righteous peace amid these conflicts. In his endeavor, he uses tools appropriate to the task, namely, godly discernment and serious corrective challenge. In this verse, James discerns that his readers had not chosen peace and righteousness (Jas. 3:18), but rather pleasures and conflicts. Their choice of personal pleasures over godly principles was one that ever begot quarrels and conflicts. If our prayer is, *Thy will be done*, we shall ever be at peace with God and our brethren; if we pray, *my will be done*, we shall ever have ceaseless strife with God and man.

Sunday, February 8th - James 4: 1, 2

Selfish pleasures prompt us to be combatants against our brethren rather than to be lovingly at peace with them. This is so because our selfish pleasures can never be satisfied. As Thomas Manton well writes: *The language of lust is give, give, it is an appetite without bound or measure. If we had one world...we would covet another: carnal desire is a gulf that is never filled up* (Commentary on James, p. 33).

Monday, February 9th - James 4: 1, 2

James diagnoses the source of his readers' conflicts as being their selfish pleasures. The true source of a Christian's pleasure is the Lord, who gives greatest delight and deepest peace, for it is only in His presence that we have fullness of joy and pleasures forever (Ps. 16:11). James

goes on to diagnose the location of the problem when he writes that the trouble is *in your members*. By this he means that the corporate discord his readers were experiencing resulted from their personal disgruntlement over not having their selfish desires satisfied. Unrighteous desires may promise satisfaction, but they can only produce inward strife that leads to outward discord.

Tuesday, February 10th - James 4: 1, 2

Personal pleasures can seem a natural right and one that should breed only contentment and serene satisfaction. Yet, the sinner, like the prodigal son, does not know that he is an incompetent judge of what will make him truly happy. Accordingly, those committed to the fulfillment of selfish pleasures will ever find themselves in a counter-productive course. Their desires will become lusts that only cause hunger but never result in one's having lasting satisfaction. Such lustful pursuit of our pleasures constitutes within us a hostile foe that fights not only against us but also against our dearest neighbors and most beloved brethren. Therefore, James connects inward lusting with outward murder. If we think he exaggerates, we need but recall David's lust for Bathsheba and his murder of the godly Uriah.

Wednesday, February 11th - James 4: 2, 3

Instead of our allowing our desires to develop into lusts that we feel compelled to satisfy at any cost, we should be asking our God to satisfy us with His good gifts (Jas. 1:17). Instead of our demanding our satisfaction from other people, even if it costs them their lives, we should acknowledge and accept our dependence upon our heavenly Father, and ask Him in humble trust and confident expectation that He would withhold no good thing from us or allow any harmful thing to come to us (Rom. 8:32). When we ask our Lord to be our portion and delight, He will never disappoint us but will bless us far above what we ask or think.

Thursday, February 12th - James 4: 2, 3

Two kinds of asking are contrasted in these verses. One kind is right and the other is wrong. James deals first with the wrong kind of asking, which is wrong in its object and motivation. We ask with wrong motive when we ask with no thought for the glory of God and good of others, but only with desire for self-gratification. Wrong objects for which we ask God are those things that are not good and right. As a child may ask his father for candy that tastes delightful but does not nourish, so we may ask amiss when seeking our provision from the Lord. The best evidence that we ask wrongly is that we have nothing from our asking, for God answers such prayers with nothing.

Friday, February 13th - James 4: 3-5

Wrong asking offends and alienates us from our loving and saving Lord. As sin makes us self-centered, so our regeneration and faith make us God-centered. As new creatures in Christ we are united to the sinless Son of God who sought ever to glorify and please His Father and found His highest pleasure in loving God and loving His people unto His own death (Gal. 2:20). Accordingly, we act in conformity with the character and will of our Savior and in conformity with our own new natures when we ever seek to glorify our God and find our joy in Him forever. We also act in accord with the relationship of holy and loving intimacy that binds us to God in Christ when we seek first God Himself as our portion (Ps. 16:5,6). If our desires are for anything apart from Christ, we act as an adulterous wife who seeks intimate satisfaction

through someone other than her husband. Our asking is more indicative of our attitude toward our God than we may, apart from the teaching of God's Word, realize.

Saturday, February 14th - James 4: 3-5

Our asking indicates our desire for satisfaction either from our covenant God who is our heavenly Bridegroom, or from this cursed world that is full of fallen humanity in rebellion and alienation from God. There is no middle ground, no neutral way of asking. Nothing indicates the character and orientation of our attitude and desires as does our asking. If we ask for something of this world apart from or in opposition to the character and revealed will of our God, we are asking Him to facilitate our infidelity to Him. We also indicate a wishful desire to have less of God and more of something other than God. Such wishing, if not mortified, will develop in us an attitude that grows increasingly critical of and hostile to our God. Let us, then, test our attitudes by considering what we ask of God and why we ask it, and confirm or change our asking accordingly.

Sunday, February 15th - James 4: 3-5

While we are taught by our Lord to seek from Him our daily bread, we are also taught in the Lord's Prayer to petition God to manifest His glory and to accomplish His will before we concern ourselves with the lesser necessities of life. If it is right that for every one time we consider our sins we should consider Christ ten times, it also is right that for every one time we wish to have some creational blessing we should desire with zealous longing ten times to have more vital communion with our Creator and Redeemer. This is so because our God loves us with a jealous desire to have all that we are and all that He has made us and will make us in Christ. Our love should be a reflective response to His holy love for us.

Monday, February 16th - James 4: 4-6

When James refers in v.5 to the Scripture speaking, he is not citing any particular verse in the Word of God but rather refers to the consistent teaching of the whole counsel of God given to us in Scripture. The way that James states what Scripture says is somewhat ambiguous. It could read, as the King James Version indicates, that the spirit in the believer should not lustfully envy the things of the world. It could also read that God jealously desires the new spirit and/or the Holy Spirit, both of which are ours in Christ (Rom. 8:16). Both senses are clearly indicated by the whole tenor of Scripture's teaching. Neither our new natures nor the Holy Spirit who indwells us rightly desire with lustful envy the things of the world, but rather neither loves the world (1 Jn. 2:15-17), but counts it as rubbish in comparison with Christ (Phil. 3:7,8). At the same time, God jealously desires both the new, regenerate spirit He has made of us and the Holy Spirit whom He has caused to indwell us, not so that we might grieve Him with our worldly longings, but rather so that we might submit to His promptings to devote ourselves utterly to our God.

Tuesday, February 17th - James 4: 4-6

As unfaithful to our God as our wrong asking can indicate us to be, as grievous to our God that our friendship with and giving our hearts to the world can be, and as painful to our God that our refusal to give Him the delight of enjoying the sweet fruit of His sanctifying work in us, as we hanker after the world, yet our God remains ever faithful to give us greater measures of His

grace. By that lavish and loving divine gift of grace, we become humbled and redirect our proud asking as we hunger and thirst all the more for our loving Lord Himself (Ps. 42:1,2).

Wednesday, February 18th - James 4: 7

Behind the sin of our determined self-gratification and wrong asking in our petitions to God lurks Satan. The devil stirs the shattered remnants of our old sin nature, giving them the appearance and deceptive power of lustful life. James' correct identification of this satanic root accounts for his severe tone in this section. Here James is like his brother, the Lord Jesus, who spoke severely to His beloved disciple, Peter, when that disciple yielded himself uncritically to be an instrument of Satan. Here as there at Caesarea Philippi, the spiritual man commands: *Get behind Me, Satan.*

Thursday, February 19th - James 4: 7

As the antidote to the poison of satanically stimulated self-pleasing, James prescribes a two-part cure. Positively, we are to submit to God. This means that we recognize and sincerely accept that our God, not our passions, should reign sovereign over us. Therefore, in all of our thinking and even in our asking from God in prayer, our petition should ever be: *Not my will but Thy will be done.* Secondly, we are to resist the devil. Such resistance presupposes our growing recognition of his lying and murderous wiles, whereby he promises us pleasure, prompting us to seek it in disobedience to our God, but then delivers only guilt, shame, and misery. By our faithful resisting of the devil, he flees from us and with him all discontentment, lusting passions, quarrels, and conflicts leave us as well.

Friday, February 20th - James 4: 7, 8

There is more to our right relationship with our Lord than our submitting to His wise, loving, and holy will, whereby only our highest blessing and deepest satisfaction are attained. Our God is not only our Lord but He is also the Lover of our souls. As such, He has drawn near to us through His Son by whose redeeming death and justifying resurrection He has demonstrated His love for us at our worst, and reconciled us to Himself and adopted us as His beloved children. Hence, James speaks not only of our submitting to our wise, holy, and sovereign God, but he goes on to speak of our drawing near to Him in grateful and loving devotion. The true desire of our new natures in Christ is for such holy and loving communion with our redeeming God, and His Word directs us to cultivate such communion, while His indwelling Holy Spirit prompts and enables us to seek, find, and savor it.

Saturday, February 21st - James 4: 8

Our worldly hostility toward God alienates us from Him but does not alienate Him from us. The foolish prodigal son left his father, thinking to find his pleasure elsewhere, but upon his repentant return home he found his father not to be reluctant but rejoicing to see and embrace him again. Similarly, whenever we draw near to our God—no matter how far or long we have been drifting or even fleeing from Him—we shall always find Him nearer to and more welcoming of us than we, in the far country, ever dared to dream possible.

Sunday, February 22nd - James 4: 8

Our drawing near to God is not done in spatial but rather in spiritual terms. We do not need to ascend to heaven to find restored intimacy with our heavenly Father. We need but repent of our sinful actions and attitudes. Hence, James tells us to cleanse our hands (symbolic of deeds) and purify our hearts (symbolic of attitude). In another context, Jesus tells us that the pure in heart see God (Mt. 5:8), and seeing God, in His light we see the reality of what we become when we wander from Him, namely, sinners and double-minded ones halting between devotion to God and devotion to the world. We also see the reality of our full and free forgiveness and restoration when we, by God's grace, confess our sins and repent of them (1 Jn. 1:9).

Monday, February 23rd - James 4: 9, 10

Aspects that pertain to true repentance are set out for our consideration in these verses. Part of our drawing near to our God is our realizing our truly and inescapably miserable condition apart from Him. Our feeling our misery should result in our mourning (inward sadness) and our weeping (outward expression of sadness). The giddy laughter and counterfeit, fleeting joys of our selfish pleasures then fill us with disgust and gloom, as we realize that such pleasures are more curses than blessings. Part of the reason that selfish pleasures are curses is that they puff us up with pride. Yet as some have said, pride in sinful endeavor is like a man boasting of his exaltation when he stands upon his gallows.

Tuesday, February 24th - James 4: 9, 10

The call for us to submit to God, to deny our personal pleasures, to carry our cross, and to humble ourselves, may seem a summons to a manifold cursed and miserable existence. It can seem to be the certain and lasting death of peace and pleasure. Yet it is truly a call for us to stop drinking poison, to rid ourselves of a satanic tyrant, and to return to our true home and to our saving God who exalts us in our union with Him in eternal life, fullness of joy, and lasting pleasures that He holds for us (Ps. 16:11).

Wednesday, February 25th - James 4: 11

James has been contrasting heavenly and worldly wisdom and showing their drastically different fruits. In this fourth chapter of his epistle, he continues drawing out this contrast by dealing with several areas of life where heavenly and worldly wisdom and their fruits manifest further great differences from each other. He has dealt with and contrasted righteous peace with selfish passions in 3:17-4:10. In v.10 James called upon us to humble ourselves before God. But as the summation of the Moral Law commands us to love God and man, so we see how James moves from a call for believers to humble themselves before God to a call for them to live humbly with their brethren. Both love for and humility with our brethren forbid us from our nurturing harsh judgments against our brethren in mind and speech. We are not to be oriented toward finding faults that may exist in our brethren or toward manufacturing faults in them by our own boastful words whereby we seek to exalt ourselves and put our brethren down. Even when we are rightly in a position to judge a brother, we should do so from a sense of humility, knowing our own frailty and vulnerability to sin, and should seek to be lovingly corrective, not harshly condemning (Gal. 6:1,2).

Thursday, February 26th - James 4: 11

What James here forbids is a censorious spirit of negative criticism that is the opposite of the judgment of charity. In all of us there is plenty that can be criticized, and if we spent our time looking for such fodder for our negative censures we would find a full-time occupation. James draws our attention, instead, to the fact that we in Christ are *brethren* (he uses the fraternal designation three times in this one verse). Therefore, we should regard others in Christ as those who are beloved and accepted by God our Father, who graciously considers the honest aim and real good accomplished by His children in spite of their weaknesses and defects. We should therefore lovingly regard our brethren and neither judge them harshly nor speak of them lovelessly.

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Saturday, March 28th - James 4: 11

We who are in Christ are not to speak against our brethren. Clearly, this means that we should never communicate anything false or fabricated regarding our brethren. It also means that we should never speak anything that is true but unnecessarily injurious or unkind to or about our brothers and sisters in Christ. The matter is stated well in its negative dimension in Psalm 15:3: *He does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend.* Positively, the matter is expressed in the Great Commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves and in the words of 1 Corinthians 13:4,7: *Love is patient, love is kind...bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.* The more we love our brethren, the more we shall be for them in all things and against them in nothing.

Sunday, March 29th - James 4: 11

We are not to judge our brethren in the critical, condemning way that Jesus forbids in Matthew 7:1ff. When James adds the prohibition of such judging to that of our speaking against our brethren, he is getting to the attitude of our hearts that guides the use of our mouths. If our hearts were more full of loving determination to edify our brethren, we would not be so ready lovelessly to condemn them with our thoughts and criticize them with our tongues.

Monday, March 30th - James 4: 11

When we judgmentally think and speak against our brethren, we are thinking and speaking against the law of God. For all of the seeming condemning character of God's holy law, it is rightly summarized by our Lord Himself as a matter of one's loving God and his neighbor. As Dale White, one of our church elders, wisely has said: *God commands us not to beat up, but to build up each other.*

Tuesday, March 31st - James 4: 11

The law of God commands us to love our brethren. Our God has not given us His law to use as a club with which to beat our brethren. Nor has He given us His law so that we might critique it, ignore it, or reduce it to a heartless standard of outward performance that applies to others more than to ourselves. Our calling is to be grateful doers of the law, and not to be censorious judges of it. Since the law obliges us to love our brethren, we must seek always to appropriate God's grace that inclines us lovingly and consistently to be for our brethren, so that we regard

them charitably, communicate with them encouragingly, and, when necessary, correct them with compassionate gentleness and patience.

Wednesday, April 1st - James 4: 11, 12

When our attitude toward a brother in Christ is uncharitable and our speech to him condemning, we not only fail to fulfill God's law of love, we also proudly endeavor to usurp the prerogatives of the living, holy, sovereign Lord who gave to us His commandment to love Him and His children. Therefore, James alerts us in v.11 to our violation of the law of God when we judge or speak against a brother, and in v.12 he charges us, when we judge or speak against a brother, with offending the God who gave us His law. We may think it a small matter when we think or speak lovelessly with respect to other believers. We may also easily slip into a neglect of the heart of the law of God, reducing the law to a collection of loveless principles that we see our brother violating, and judge that accordingly he is deserving of our censures. Yet, it is a great and manifold sin that we commit when we think or communicate lovelessly with others. Although we may delude ourselves into thinking that we are zealous for the glory of God's holy and righteous law, when we treat a brother censoriously instead of charitably we violate the animating spirit of the law, act contrary to the fraternal relation that has been forged by the reconciling death of the Son of God, and offend and grieve the God who gave us His law.

Thursday, April 2nd – James 4: 11, 12

Our calling is to love our brethren, not to be lords over them. Our responsibility is to serve our brethren for their edification, and not to seek to exercise a loveless and critical sovereignty over them that discourages and tears them down. If we are to fulfill our God-given duty to love others, we must shift our focus from our brethren's imperfections to the unique and glorious perfections of our God. It is our Lord alone who gave the law that we are called to obey by His enabling grace, not to enforce upon others by our own impure motives and harsh communications. God alone has pure and immeasurable love whereby He chooses to love sinners and to save them by His gracious and redeeming power. God alone is the omniscient, holy, and infallible Judge who manifests the glory of His perfect justice when He condemns sinners who spurn His saving grace. Who are we in comparison to this glorious God? Why do we poor wretches ever think that our mighty, just, and merciful Lord is defective and in need of our help? Surely it is when we fail to know how greatly and perfectly He has loved us that we fail gratefully and trustingly to love Him and sincerely to love our brethren.

Friday, April 3rd – James 4: 11, 12

We are competent to obey God's law, but not to judge it or the God who gave it. We are competent to love our brethren and even our neighbor who may not be a Christian, but we are not competent to judge them. If we would devote ourselves to our duty to owe no person anything but love, we would find neither time nor inclination to judge others.

Saturday, April 4th – James 4: 13-15

In vv. 10-12, James calls upon his readers to live humbly and lovingly before the Lord with their brethren. In vv.13ff, James calls for us to maintain an attitude of humility with respect to God's providence. He condemns the attitude of presumptuous pride that can manifest itself in how we plan and pursue the practical matters of our lives. When Jesus tells us that without Him we can do nothing, He does not restrict His claim to matters spiritual or ecclesiastical only, but

informs us that we cannot rightly and blessedly deal with the practical affairs of our lives without our trusting, grateful, and loving dependence upon Him.

Sunday, April 5th – James 4: 13-15

Proud presumption can be manifested in the sphere of our daily business while it may appear to be absent when we are gathered in the assembly of our brethren. Yet, if we are humble only when we are in church meetings, we may merely be acting in humble fashion for a time rather than truly being humble at all times and in all situations. The way we conduct our practical and commercial affairs can be quite revealing of the character of our trusting dependence upon the Lord. If we feel competent to control every aspect of our careers, we manifest trust in our own flesh rather than in the sovereign Lord of our lives. If we delight in forming plans and long-range ventures, anticipating their success and profit, we manifest a fixation upon monetary gain rather than a faith that is focused upon the Lord. James calls upon all who have such misplaced focus to redirect their priorities so as to seek first the Lord and His sovereign will for His glory (Mt. 6:33).

Monday, April 6th - James 4: 13-15

In v.13 a five-point plan for successful business venture is set forth. This plan takes account of the time, the place, and the duration of business transactions in the place, the occupation for that duration, and the anticipated results. There is nothing inherently wrong with the making of such plans and the diligent endeavoring to make them succeed. The Book of Proverbs commends such thoughtful and diligent actions. However, the plans as set out in v.13 are fatally flawed because they leave the Lord entirely out of all reckoning and endeavoring. What is missing is the one thing necessary. By our faithful dependence upon the Lord we find ourselves willing and doing His good pleasure, and true and most satisfying success results when we trust in the Lord with all our hearts and take care to know and do His holy will (Josh. 1:7,8; Prov. 3:5,6).

Tuesday, April 7th - James 4: 13-15

The language in vv.13,14 is remarkable for its omission of the Lord and is revealing of a spirit of complete self-sufficiency. The repeated use of the pronoun, *you*, indicates the readers' reliance upon themselves instead of their reliance upon the Lord (v.15). The folly of our leaning upon the shaky reed of self is clearly indicated when we note that these references to *you* immediately follow the reference to *you* in v.12, where James asked: *Who are you to judge your neighbor?* In v. 12, our incompetence to judge our neighbor was stressed; in vv.13,14, our incompetence to judge our own business affairs is likewise stressed. Without our Lord, we are vanishing vapors. How completely we need our Lord in every area of our lives! How well, therefore, does our humility fit our need, while our pride is the height of our folly.

Wednesday, April 8th - James 4: 15

In contrast to the spirit of self-dependent presumption manifested in vv.13,14, James states the spirit of humble devotion to and dependence upon the Lord in v.15. While James instructs us what we rightly should say in our business proposals, he is talking about something far removed from mere superstitious words spoken in a way that regards the Lord as a lucky charm used to endow one's endeavor with success. Instead, he intends us to understand that such reference to the Lord in our speech should represent the outward communication to others of that inward and

vital communion we have with our redeeming God who directs and empowers us to think, speak, and act for His glory and our highest good. This communion runs far deeper than does a mere mental recognition of the infallible wisdom and omnipotent power of the Lord, by which anyone thinking rightly would desire his undertakings to be blessed. True communion with our Lord begins and ends with love. We apprehend His love for us that has saved us and that orchestrates all things in our lives for our good. To this apprehension, we respond in love for Him as we gratefully recognize and joyfully accept the truth that our God not only gave His Son to die for us while we were yet sinners, but also, now that we are His children, He will give us all things with His Son (Rom. 8:32).

Thursday, April 9th - James 4: 15

The matters that are dependant upon God's will are all-encompassing. Most basically and vitally, if the Lord wills, we shall live. The rich fool in the Gospel account thought that his riches and commodious barns secured his life, failing to realize that when he least expected it, the Lord would require his soul (Prov. 10:27, Lk. 12:13-21). In addition to our living, our doing depends upon the will of the Lord. *The mind of a man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.* (Prov. 16:9). How blessed we are when we commit all that we are and all that we do to our heavenly Father who loves us and whose will is ever for our highest good.

Friday, April 10th - James 4: 16

Both our Lord Jesus and His apostle Paul forbid our anxious care over our lives and our affairs (Mt. 6:34; Phil 4:6,7). Here James forbids the opposite extreme of our arrogant confidence in our own capabilities. Both extremes result only when we leave our Lord out of our reckoning. Self-reliance is not only unprofitable, it is sinful. It is evil for us to regard our fears or our foolish arrogance above the Lord. Without Him we can be and do nothing; with Him we can do all things, right, good, holy, and loving and triumph as more than conquerors over all that would resist us.

Saturday, April 11th - James 4: 17

This verse is a summary statement of what James has been teaching regarding Christians living as humble, loving servants instead of proud, self-centered judges. We are called to know what is right as determined by the will of God revealed to us in Scripture. However, our knowing the principles of right is to lead us to the performance of what is right. Our failure to know and do right is sin. Ignorance of the will of God is inexcusable; bare belief in God and truth without right action is demonic (Jas. 2:19). Ultimately, the knowledge and performance we are called to manifest are higher than mere principles; they are intensely personal. We are called to know, trust, and love the God of creation and redemption. We are called to serve Him by our loving obedience to Him and by our loving service rendered to our neighbor. Anything less than or other than such loving of God and our neighbor is sin that our God commands us and that our new natures sincerely desire to crucify.

Sunday, April 12th - James 5: 1-3

James has been warning his readers against all forms of worldliness. In 4:13-17, he warned against a presumptuous obsession with material profit to the exclusion of a vital concern with the living Lord, the pearl of infinitely great price. This warning theme continues in the first six verses of this final chapter of James' letter. He pronounces a very stern woe upon the rich. Once

more we might wonder whether James violates the dictates of heavenly wisdom as he himself has defined it in 3:17. Yet, faithful warning strongly stated in view of certain catastrophe is more consistent with true love than mild words that confirm men in harm's way rather than arouse them to flee from that way.

Monday, April 13th - James 5: 1-3

Joseph Mayor, in his commentary, *The Epistle of James*, writes with respect to the stern language used by the brother of our Lord: *The prophetic announcement of impending evil is not inconsistent with the tenderest sympathy....The rich represented the pride of the world. Their success, their triumphant career of selfish oppression...caused despair in the hearts of the brethren whom they oppressed. It was the truest kindness on the part of the prophet to set before both the fact of imminent judgment revealed to him by the Spirit. To the rich it was the final invitation, the hand-writing on the wall, which, if instantly accepted, might still enable them to seek a share in the humiliation of Christ (1:10): to the poor it was the encouragement needed to prevent them falling away (p. 230).*

Tuesday, April 14th - James 5: 1-3

Who are the rich here addressed by James? In 4:13ff, the carelessly commercial were addressed. Here it appears that the exploitative, oppressive capitalist is warned. It is not the rich *per se* who are condemned by the Lord. Such men as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and in his later years, Joseph, were all rich. It is not the possession of money that is the source of evil, but rather the love of money. Those who love money can love neither the Lord nor their neighbor. Lovers of money will oppress others (v.4), and even kill others (v.6) all so that they might maintain their luxurious living at the expense of others (v.5). We cannot serve unrighteous mammon and our righteous and lovingly redeeming Lord.

Wednesday, April 15th - James 5: 1-3

In terms of their actions, the rich here addressed are oppressive and self-indulgent. Clearly, therefore, many if not most of them would be unbelievers, whom James here warns and pronounces woe upon as Isaiah did in his prophecy with Babylon, Moab, and Egypt (Isa. 14,15,19). However, some of these oppressing rich may be those who merely profess the faith without practicing it. Still others may be true believers who drift from vital communion with the Lord, the way David did when he committed his heinous sin against Bathsheba and Uriah. Furthermore, this warning can apply not only to those who are actually rich, but also to those aspiring to become rich. For all of us, a cooling of our devotion to Christ and a drifting into careless commercialism can ripen into the bitter fruit of oppressive and even murderous endeavors. We all are most blessed and blessing toward others when we resist laying up earthly treasures and cleave to Christ as the one thing necessary.

Thursday, April 16th - James 5: 2, 3

These verses speak of the corruptible dimension of worldly riches. This corruption is presented not as a possible eventuality but rather as an imminent and growing cause of misery for those who set their hearts on unrighteous mammon. James speaks of his readers' wealth being transient, perishable, and corruptible. This transitory and corruptible nature of material

wealth serves as a witness to and against those who are overly fond of their wealth, revealing ultimately how poorly they have chosen when they regarded the trinkets of this world higher than the heavenly pearl of great price. The true value of all things can rightly be assessed only in the light of the last day, when believers will joyfully and thankfully treasure their divine Advocate while others will curse their useless idols.

Friday, April 17th - James 5: 4-6

In vv. 2,3, the corrupting character of unrighteous mammon was considered. Now in vv.4-6, the criminal behavior of those who love money comes into view. One easy and popular way for people to attain riches is for them to defraud and oppress the poor (v.4). James reminds his readers that although a man may successfully jilt the poor, he cannot escape accountability to the God who takes account of such wrongs and whose sovereign and holy rule over men and hosts of glorious angels and fallen demons makes it a terrible thing for any wrong-doer to fall into His hands.

Saturday, April 18th - James 5: 4, 5

The criminality represented in this verse may seem to the rich to be a matter of small concern. Rich oppressors heedlessly delay payment due to those who have completed labor for them. However, what may appear a small matter to a man whose abundance dulls his sensitivity to the critical nature of even small wrongs is shown to be a thing of great significance to the poor, whose pay sustains his life rather than expands his luxuries. It is also shown to be a thing of monumental significance to the Lord, who is the righteous judge of all men, and who obliges us not only to do right to all men, but also lovingly to be considerate of all men.

Sunday, April 19th - James 5: 5

Self-indulgence is not only inconvenient and even life-threatening to those whose wages the rich withhold; it is also suicidal for the rich themselves. The luxurious living and indiscriminate diversions of the rich desensitize their emotions and cloud their thoughts, so that the material trinkets they idolize serve to insulate them from the saving mercy of God that would raise them from the dead, free them of their sins, and save them from the divine wrath to come.

Monday, April 20th - James 5: 6

This verse speaks of how seriously criminal those addicted to material wealth potentially and actually become. They regard even the righteous person as an expendable stepping-stone to their prosperity. Thomas Manton in his commentary on James wells observes that: *Plenty begetteth injury; and when all things are possible, men think all things are lawful* (p.415). Judas traded the life of the supremely righteous Man for a few pieces of silver. Yet, neither did Jesus, nor do His followers, rise up strenuously to resist the evil oppression of the rich. The righteous man has transcendent treasure in Christ. Though he could summon legions of glorious angels to vindicate him, the righteous man chooses rather to endure ill-treatment, with an eye to both his infinite and blessed reward from the Lord (Mt. 5:11,12) and to the Lord's holy vengeance against his oppressors (Rom. 12:19-21).

Tuesday, April 21st - James 5: 6

The rich have their reward in the form of the trinkets they extort from the righteous. The cost of their reward will be their suffering the eternal and inextinguishable wrath of God. The

righteous wait to receive their reward, which will not only be incomparably greater than their sufferings (Rom. 8:18), but will grow to an eternal weight of glory through their patient enduring of such sufferings (2 Cor. 4:16-18). What James says here and what Jesus says about the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:9-31) together serve as a challenging warning to the self-indulgent and a blessed comfort to the patient sufferer, whose righteousness is more rewarding than all the money the rich could ever gather.

Wednesday, April 22nd - James 5: 7

From the inconsiderate and criminally injurious course of those who make money an idol, James in this verse to the end of his letter turns his attention to the course and rewards of those who are in faith and practice his brethren in Christ. In contrast to the cold calculating lovelessness and therefore emptiness of the rapacious man's life, we find the warm, noble, and generous cultivation of loving fraternity wrought out among those who are members of the body of Christ. It is in time and eternity infinitely better and more blessed that we embrace those who have been reconciled to God in Christ, nurturing the loving relationship that we have as beloved children of God and brethren in Christ, than that we devote ourselves to the loveless and isolating idol of dead and deadening, cold, hard cash.

Thursday, April 23rd - James 5: 7-11

James counsels those who are his brethren in Christ to exercise patience. Those who are in Christ are not commanded dutifully to be long-suffering but are rather encouraged to realize that they can afford to bear up under trying loads. For one thing, they have better breeding than do those who love cash above the true children of God. It is part of the perfection of their heavenly Father to exercise a holy patience that will manifest the glory of His wisdom, goodness, justice, and power (Mt. 5:48). Furthermore, the saints are in better company than are those who impatiently demand immediate gratification in lieu of their glorifying the Lord. We who are brethren in Christ have the example of and fellowship with the prophets (v.10), of men like Job (v.11), and, above all, of Jesus in our sufferings. The righteous, who are in communion with the living, loving God, can afford to wait for their better destiny. They will come into full possession of their vindication and reward at the coming of the Lord, who will only then show to them how richly they have been blessed by their productive patience (2 Cor. 4: 16-18).

Friday, April 24th - James 5: 7

The image James uses is very suitable to the counsel he gives for patience. The farmer has in view the harvest of his crop. He respects and works with, not contrary to, the passage of time required for his seed to germinate, mature, and bear fruit. He knows that rains are not a curse but rather a necessary component for his harvest. Accordingly, let us know that the tests and trials we patiently endure serve not for our harm, but rather for our growth in the arms of our Father's grace now and glory later.

Saturday, April 25th - James 5: 7, 8

Twice in these verses, James mentions the coming of the Lord. We must not only learn rightly to reckon that our reward grows daily while that of the lover of mammon diminishes daily. We must also live our lives and patiently endure our trials in light of the glorious reward that shall certainly be ours from the God of glory who graciously and lovingly guides us through the race He had set before us in this life (Heb. 12:1-3). We must view the outcome of His wise,

loving, and gracious dealings with us, knowing that He causes even the painful things we must endure to work for our highest and eternal good (Rom. 8:28).

Sunday, April 26th - James 5: 8

The patience James counsels is not a stoical endurance, but is rather a principled and productive working and waiting according to the character of the course our Lord has set before us in our pilgrimage. Accordingly, we are told not only to endure our trials patiently but also to strengthen our hearts in the course of our patient and confidently expectant waiting. Our business is not to make money at all costs, but rather to strengthen ourselves in the Lord our God, as David did when his own men talked of stoning him (1 Sam. 30:6). We must feed ourselves not upon our fears but rather upon the joy of the Lord that is our strength (Neh. 8:10). When earthly circumstances discourage us, we are directed to look heavenward, where our Redeemer who is our life, sits upon the divine throne of sovereign power (Col. 3:1-4). As we look to these blessed realities that are ours in Christ to be apprehended by faith, we do not grow dull and insensitive by the fattening and deadening effect of the love of money, but rather we grow strong in our Lord and in the strength of His infinite and eternal might and soul-enrapturing love.

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Monday, April 27th - James 5: 9

Believers are directed to be patient in their working, waiting, and even in their enduring the abuses (v.4) and criminal persecutions of their oppressors (v.6). Those who trust in Christ are also to strengthen their hearts by having their hope fixed on their risen Redeemer who will come for them on the final day, bringing their reward with Him. In addition to these positive directives, James gives a prohibition against believers' complaining against each other, even as they groan under the weight of their oppressions. This forbidding of the suffering saint's complaining is not calculated to repress the cries of his anguished heart so much as to redirect those cries to the only legitimate and productive place where they should be registered. Under pressure of our sufferings, we naturally become testy with others, complaining of their lack of sympathetic help in our desired relief from our distresses. Such complaints, however, do not help us but rather hurt us and others. Therefore, James directs the cries of the suffering believer to the Lord, our great High Priest and sympathetic Helper (Heb. 4:15,16), who is also our Advocate and the One who will deliver us from our sufferings and reward us in the day of judgment.

Tuesday, April 28th - James 5: 9

James is not cutting off a source of redress and relief for suffering believers when he directs them not to complain against each other due to the weight of their oppressions. It is neither right nor relieving when the suffering saints complain against each other. Other believers have not caused our sufferings; they are not our oppressors but rather are our loving brethren, who weep when we weep and who cry to the God of heaven for our relief. Nor are our brethren our saviors who have power and authority to deliver us from our furnaces of affliction. We should not complain against our brethren, but rather cherish them for their loving sympathy and for their deeds of kindness, which, however small they may be, are regarded with approbation by our Lord; if not by ourselves (Mt. 25:34-40).

Wednesday, April 29th - James 5: 9

Our complaints can be misguided by our pains and our fears. James commends to us a faithful enduring of our sufferings, that does not deny or despise the reality of our painful and unjust afflictions, but instead rightly directs our cries to our Savior, who alone can deliver us from our enemies, bringing His holy vengeance upon them, while He delivers, vindicates, and rewards us. Therefore, James teaches us to make our cries truly prevailing and productive of blessing, rather than to have them be misguided multipliers of misery.

Thursday, April 30th - James 5: 9, 10

The directives James gives to suffering believers in vv.7-9 are not a matter of pious but impractical theory, but rather have been tried and found triumphantly true in the furnaces of affliction endured by saints through the ages. Accordingly, James produces as encouraging examples to his readers, men such as the prophets and Job who found cause to bless the Lord and not to curse their brethren in the course of their sufferings. When we cast away the counsel of patience and uncomplaining endurance amid our sufferings, we are forsaking a way that has been repeatedly tried and found more precious than gold. Has impatient complaining ever produced anything but increased misery?

Friday, May 1st – James 5: 10, 11

James reminds us of the prophets of the Lord, many of whom suffered persecutions. They reacted to their enemies not by cursing them, still less by complaining against their brethren. Instead, they cried out in prayer to the Lord, and spoke faithfully the Word of the Lord to their brethren and to their enemies, in the name and by the authority of the Lord. Thus, they were not victims of their oppressors, but victors over them, as they prophetically warned their oppressors of divine judgment, while graciously calling upon such persecutors to repent of their sins and turn to the Lord for salvation. Such servants of the Lord we rightly regard as having been blessed in their calling to know and declare the God of justice and mercy, and in the reward they have received from the Lord as they entered into the joys of their Master. Those who receive the examples of such prophets and follow in their way will receive a prophet's reward (Mt. 5:10-12).

Saturday, May 2nd – James 5: 11

James adds the comforting and encouraging example of Job to the consoling examples of the prophets. Job is, with the exception of our Lord Jesus, the supreme example of suffering in Scripture. Yet his endurance of his painful, perplexing, and costly trials gives us also the supreme example of patience. Job's endurance was not stoical indifference. We are made acutely aware of his physical pain and emotional anguish through his cries and pleading questions. Yet, while he questioned the Lord's dealings with him, he never lost his trust in his divine Redeemer. While he raged against his friends, he did not so much complain against them as he did correct their brittle and compassionless false theology. Through Job's endurance we see how God brings a soul that trusts Him through the most exquisite sufferings into a more vital communion with the Lord and an apprehension of His compassion and mercy that overwhelms all sense of loss and suffering.

Sunday, May 3rd – James 5: 12

In this verse, James adds to the prohibition against believers complaining against one another

a prohibition that forbids them swearing. It may seem to us at first reading of this verse that James is here taking an abrupt departure from the topic of complaining. However, when we recall how the pressure of persecution and suffering can tempt believers to complain against each other, we should understand that in v.12 James is addressing the temptation Christians may face as they try to respond to complaints leveled against them by their harried brethren. When we seek to answer such complaints, it is a common temptation for us to make as strong a defense of ourselves as possible. As Peter sought to strengthen his sinful denials of his Lord with curses and oaths, so we may feel compelled to strengthen our righteous behavior with swearing. But righteous integrity can and should stand without desperate adornments. We who in Christ ought to judge one another in charity need not and should not demand of others or give from ourselves exaggerated defenses for our loving ministry to each other.

Monday, May 4th – James 5: 12

James is not denying the legitimate use of an oath, sworn in a court of law in confirmation of the veracity of testimony to be given. He is forbidding individuals from using oaths as compelling and manipulative devices, whereby they pledge their sincerity or intention by things like heaven or earth, which they neither possess nor are able to lose should their oath be found false. The Christian who possesses the love of God in Christ, the means of the Lord's grace, and the sure hope of glory, need not pledge trinkets to impress others, but can and should let his word, that he has prayerfully, wisely, and lovingly considered, stand and be accepted or rejected on its own.

Tuesday, May 5th – James 5: 12

The right alternative to our seeking to fortify with oaths our words of affirmation and denial is for us to have, nurture, and express words and deeds of truth, integrity, and love. Holy sincerity and loving simplicity speak most persuasively to the righteous, while no amount of swearing will convince the unrighteous. Such holy and loving sincerity can pass the bar of divine justice, whatever men—even our brethren—may make of them. The addition of swearing to our sincerity adds nothing of value to our sincerity but detracts from it and brings guilt upon us before our heavenly Judge.

Wednesday, May 6th - James 5: 13

In this verse, James gives us two other godly uses of our tongues in addition to the sincere and simple speech he wrote of in v.12. The praying and praising he commends are clearly directed to God, whereas the candid and clear speaking he commended in v.12 is addressed to men. The occasion James mentions for praying and praising in v.13 is not to be understood as exhaustive of the motives and emotions that should lead us to call upon our God. Instead, they are the poles of good feeling and bad feeling that include every emotion between them. Whether we soar in delight or sink into anguish we can and should direct our hearts as well as our minds and mouths toward the Lord.

Thursday, May 7th - James 5: 13

The word translated *suffering* in this verse literally means *bad feeling*. When we are feeling sad, gloomy, or depressed, we need not become trapped victims to such emotions. Scripture prescribes a most effectual cure when it tells us to pray to our God. Through such prayer we ask our compassionate heavenly Father for His gracious blessing that will deliver us from the causes

of our distress as well as from our feelings of distress. Accordingly, when God answers above what we ask or think in our prayers, our supplicating cries become songs of grateful praise.

Friday, May 8th – James 5: 13

The praises of the Christian indicate his awareness that his cheerful feelings are not mere glad emotions but rather the joy of the Lord that is inspired within him by the God in whose presence is fullness of joy and in whose right hand are pleasures forever (Ps. 16:11). Our praises are therefore the expression of our gratitude to the personal source of our joy, namely, our gracious and generous heavenly Father.

Saturday, May 9th - James 5: 13-15

In vv.14,5, James specifies a common form of the general suffering that he mentioned in v.13. The malady that is translated *sick* in both of these verses, is really a composition of *weakness* (see the Greek word used in v.14 that is translated *sick*) and *sickness* (see the Greek word used in v.15). The former is the debilitating effect, physically and emotionally, of the latter, which is the objective cause of the suffering. James prescribes that such a sick and weakened believer not only call on the Lord in prayer (v.13), but also that he call upon the family of faith, as represented by the Church elders, asking them to pray for him. This call to concerted prayer indicates to us that whenever we are sick and weak we have abundant helpers in our brethren and the source of all help in our heavenly Father.

Sunday, May 10th - James 5: 14, 15

The call for the elders places the sick and debilitated saint in the same position in which the paralytic in the gospels found himself (Mt. 9:2-8; Mk. 2:3-12; Lk. 5:18-26). Such a call to the elders results in one's being carried by the faithful hands of caring brethren to the feet of Jesus who can and will do the greater work of forgiving sins and the lesser work of healing sick bodies.

Monday, May 11th - James 5: 14,15

Why does James focus particularly upon believers experiencing sickness? Very likely he does so from practical considerations. For example, we never question God's love and power being operative in our lives so much as when we are sick. In sickness we do not sense the sympathy and comfort of Christ's sufferings because, while our Redeemer underwent trial and persecution, He was never sick. Yet whereas Jesus never was sick, He is the true and ultimate source of our healing. According to the divine decree and arrangement of our redemption, it is by the sufferings of Jesus that we find release from all of our sufferings, including our sickness. Jesus never showed fear, and yet He releases us from our fears. Therefore, James points us to prayer offered to God through the merits of Christ's person and work as the way to find true healing from our sickness.

Tuesday, May 12th - James 5: 14, 15

The reference to the elders anointing the sick one with oil has been variously understood by believers. Roman Catholics regard it as a sacrament wherein spiritual grace is ministered through a priest's application of oil to one dying of an illness. Many charismatics regard the application of oil almost as a magic charm. There is a kernel of truth in the Roman Catholic conception, as the Greek word that James uses for sickness in v.15 has the connotation of very serious illness. Clearly, the elders are not to be called upon to attend trivial sicknesses such as

colds. The Reformed position is one that understands the reference to oil not in a sense that is sacramental or magic, but rather as a physical and medicinal means applied to the afflicted one with the accompaniment of prayer. This last understanding appears to be most consistent with what James here teaches as well as with the entire tenor of Scripture. Prayer engages the God who can work with, without, or contrary to the means He has created, but who usually works through such means.

Wednesday, May 13th - James 5: 14, 15

A correct view of what is taught in these verses begins with the observation that it is the sick one who takes the initiative in this matter. The sick one is encouraged not only to pray for his own healing, but to call upon his brethren, as represented by their elders, to join him in crying to the Lord of heaven, who is the ultimate source of help and healing. At the same time, these prayers ask the Lord to make effectual the medicinal means being applied to the sickness, for the God who made such means expects us to use them, but not apart from prayer to Him for His blessing upon those means. Here is comforting help for us when we are laid aside by sickness.

Thursday, May 14th - James 5: 14, 17

The elders are to be summoned, not because they have any inherent power or gifts to heal, but because they are specially called and equipped to lead the congregation in the ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:4). The elders also represent the members of a local assembly of believers, who are all taught by God's Word and inclined by their new natures and by the prompting of the Holy Spirit and by the fruit of the Spirit growing within them to pray for one another (v.16). The elders are leading askers of the God who delights to hear and answer the prayers of His people.

Friday, May 15th - James 5: 14, 15

The elders are directed in these verses to do three distinct things. Primarily, they are to pray, asking the Lord to heal the sick one who has summoned them. From the reference to sins and forgiveness in v.15, we are to understand that such prayers would also include petitions asking the Lord to further sanctify the sick one through both his endurance of and relief from his sufferings. Such requests for sanctification would include prayers that engage the Lord in a process of searching and convicting the sufferer of any sins for which his suffering may be a divine chastisement, and asking the Lord's forgiveness for such specific sins. This does not imply that all sickness results as God's judgments upon specific sins, but rather intimates that there are times when sickness comes upon one as the Lord's corrective rod of affliction, designed to lead the sufferer to seek and ask for a deeper cause of his malady than mere physical infection and a cure deeper than mere physical restoration. In sum, such prayers lead us to ask for total healing, not physical restoration that may only be part of the suffering believer's need.

Saturday, May 16th - James 5: 14, 15

The second thing that the summoned elders are to do is to anoint the sufferer with oil. This anointing is with something that was the primary medicinal substance of that day (Is. 1:6; Mk. 6:13; Lk. 10:34). Therefore, James most likely means by this that the elders should ask God to make effectual any such medicinal application in any day. Accordingly, we are taught not to resort to medicine or medical procedures alone, nor are we to resort to prayer alone, but rather to resort to both in our quest for a total and thorough healing.

Sunday, May 17th - James 5: 14, 15

The final directive given to the praying elders in these verses is that they should pray and anoint the sick one in the name of Jesus. This indicates that while they prayerfully regard the application of medicine, their reliance is to be ultimately upon the wise and loving Redeemer, the Great Physician by whose wounds we are truly and lastingly healed. This invocation of the Savior's name is not to be a matter of rote formula or mechanical superstition, but rather a matter of sincere, vital, and faithful trust in and reliance upon the Lord. The disastrous failure of the sons of Sceva to cast out demons shows us how foolish and dangerous it is for anyone to invoke the name of Christ in any attitude other than that of faithful trust in and reliance upon the Lord (Acts 19:11-17).

Monday, May 18th - James 5: 14, 15

James writes of the prayer of faith in v.15. There is no warrant by teaching or example in the New Testament that we should believe that men other than the apostles had gifts of healing. Not even the elders, the perpetual officers in the Church, are spoken of in Scripture as having gifts of healing. But this seeming loss is supplied abundantly with a warrant for all believers, and especially their elders, to ask of and expect from God a restoring answer to their prayers that is above what they ask or think.

Tuesday, May 19th - James 5: 14, 15

Instead of the Church now having a few men who could work miraculous healings for some people occasionally, we now, as loving and faithful brethren in Christ, have clear warrant to carry our sick brethren to Jesus. We are not to rebuke sickness or try to cast out demons, but rather we are to cry out to our Lord. Such sympathetic intercession for our brethren that is directed to our Lord is how genuine faith works. For our faith is neither in faith itself, nor in powers we think we can directly wield, but rather is in our Lord and His almighty power and wise, holy, and loving prerogative. Jesus heals us from sicknesses more than we may be willing to ask or credit. Yet, Jesus also demonstrates his avoidance of those who seek Him only for His miraculous power, so we must not ask Him amiss. Even when He answers our cries with denial, it is because He has grace to supply us in our weakness that we cannot have apart from that weakness. Remember Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

Wednesday, May 20th - James 5: 16

James' use in this verse of the word, *therefore*, alerts us to the fact that what he has to say in vv.16-18 is based on and issues from what he has taught in vv.13-15. In those preceding verses, James described the prayer of faith; in vv.16-18, he speaks of the prayer of a righteous man. These two aspects are distinguishable but cannot rightly be separated. The prayer of faith can only be offered by a man justified by his faith in Jesus. Yet while such a man is reckoned righteous by God's gracious imputation of Christ's righteousness to the man, the impartation and personal possession of such righteousness is a progressive matter that involves the believer's continual discovery and mortification of sin in his own life. Therefore, v.16 moves beyond prayers that ask primarily for healing from sickness of body to prayers that focus directly upon sanctification of one's soul.

Thursday, May 21st - James 5: 16

James calls for a confession of sins in this verse. What he is not directing us to do is to

confess our sins to a priest in mediatory fashion. Neither is he confining us to confession only to the elders in the Church. He is directing us to confess our sins to one another—to our brethren in the body of Christ. Such confession is to be to those whom we know to be ones who love us and who will pray for us. Such confession is also mutual. As an atmosphere of mutual love, trust, and sympathetic helping develops, we become more open and honest with each other. Accordingly, we confess our sins, rather than seek to cover them by silence or denial. We confess our sins with expectation that we will not be condemned because of them but rather will be forgiven them by our Lord and cleansed by Him from all unrighteousness. As we should be desirous to forgive sins committed against us, so also we should be ready and willing to confess our sins to one another, in order that we might be rid of the corrupting power and grievous presence of sin in our lives.

Friday, May 22nd - James 5: 16

The translation that reads: *The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much*, can be literally translated in a way that emphasizes strength and energy. It could read: *Much strength [has] a petition of a righteous one who is energized*. Such holy boldness, such energized confidence, such moral strength that enables one to wrestle with God in prayer and prevail cannot be ours if we harbor our sins rather than confess them and be cleansed of them and established more firmly in righteousness.

Saturday, May 23rd - James 5: 16-18

By our corporate confession of sins and prayers for each other we serve to heal and be healed. The depth of such healing is apparent from the Greek word James uses in v.16 that is translated *may be healed*, which can also be translated *may be saved*. Great things can be accomplished by our prayers. As an example for our encouragement to righteous living and prevailing praying, James reminds us of Elijah. The prayers of that great prophet brought fire from heaven that consumed his offering on Mt. Carmel (1 Ki.18). His prayers brought fire also to consume the armies sent to arrest him (2 Ki. 1:9-12). Elijah also raised a widow's son from death (1 Ki.17:17-24). This example should encourage us to ask our Lord and expect from Him greater things than we currently ask or think.

Sunday, May 24th - James 5: 16-18

Although Elijah's prayers were many and mighty in their effects, James especially calls our attention to the prophet's praying for drought and then after three and a half years praying for rain (1 Ki. 17:1;18:41-46). How is this prayer related to the healing James mentions in v.16? Whereas Elijah's prayer for the widow's son saved one life, the prophet's prayer for drought then rain showed his prayerful dominion over the seemingly uncontrollable elements, but, more importantly, served to humble the sinning covenant nation of Israel, convicting them of their sins and bringing restoration of life in response to their repentance.

Monday, May 25th - James 5: 17, 18

Sin stultifies the flourishing of righteousness in an individual and in whole families, fellowships, and nations. But great and good changes can be wrought through our prayers when they issue from pure hearts and clean hands. It is true that Elijah had special divine warrant to pray as he did, but when we recognize that Jesus tells us seven times to pray for anything in His

name, we perceive that we have even greater warrant than did Elijah to pray effectively for many great things (Jn. 14:13,14; 15:7,16; 16:23,24,26,27).

Tuesday, May 26th - James 5: 19, 20

James concludes his letter that is full of instruction for the nurturing and exercising of the practical fruits of godly doctrine, with a final designating of his readers as his *brethren*. This natural and spiritual brother of Jesus exercises a ministry of inclusive, fraternal love throughout his letter. And as brethren in Christ, James is neither like nor would he have his readers to be like Cain, who disavowed his responsibility to be his brother's loving keeper. Therefore, this letter concludes with an acknowledgement of a painful reality, namely, that believers can stray from the truth, wisdom, and loving life of faith that is set out in this letter. Yet, the prevailing reality is that those who do not stray lovingly pray and endeavor to turn their straying brethren back to the truth (i.e. sound doctrine) and to the only righteous and loving way (i.e. godly practice). We who have new life in Christ are hereby alerted to our need to guard ourselves and to seek to guide rightly our brethren so long as we live out our new life in Christ in this cursed world plagued by fallen men and malicious devils. We are brethren, sharing this new life, and are bound together in holy and strong love. We are our brothers' keepers, ever to be turning them from death and to life, even as our redeeming elder Brother has done and continues to do as He ever lives to intercede for us.

The Book of Esther

Wednesday, May 27th – Esther 1: 1-4

The Book of Esther emphasizes not explicit doctrine about God but rather the mighty deeds of the Lord. The name of God appears nowhere in this book, and yet we perceive the Lord through the devotion and fidelity of His people and especially through His deliverance of them from their enemies. We also should perceive in the events recorded in Esther the ongoing spiritual warfare written of in such other parts of God's Word as Psalm 2, Ephesians 6:10ff, and Revelation. The enemies of the Church are present and active in any age and at times arise against the covenant people with awesome power and menacing threats. Yet, the Lord makes clear to us in Esther that although our enemies may be great, our delivering God is greater (Rom. 8:31ff). When things look desperate and the Lord is nowhere apparent, our God remains faithful to us and causes all things to work for our good, even through the weakest and most unlikely instruments of His deliverance.

Thursday, May 28th - Esther 1: 1-4

These opening verses introduce us to a worldly king and his worldly pomp. Neither the Lord nor His people seem to be of any account when men of the world rise to positions of power and grow rich by their acquisition of land, possessions, and wealth. On a personal level, Asaph was sorely tried when he observed the prosperity of the worldly and the humiliation of the people of God (Ps. 73). Yet, through his worship and devotion to his God, the eyes of his heart were opened to see that the Lord had set the feet of the worldly in slippery places while He had lovingly secured His people and lovingly lavished His precious and potent blessings upon them. The Book of Esther shows us this as well.

Friday, May 29th - Esther 1: 1-4

We do not know and need not know who wrote Esther. We do know that the book does not contain fable but rather a factual account of the redeeming work of God for His people in an historical situation. As with all Scripture, the words were inspired by the Holy Spirit and come to us as the edifying breath of the living God. What the Holy Spirit intends us to see in these opening verses is that there are times when worldly rulers ascend to great heights, but also that we who are citizens of heaven should neither envy nor fear them, for our God is opposed to the proud while He rewards the meek with victorious faith in this life and an imperishable and inconceivably glorious kingdom hereafter.

Saturday, May 30th - Esther 1: 1-4

These opening verses set before us the historical and political context for the events recorded in Esther. The Bible is not a book about our escape from the world, but rather about our faithful and victorious living in the world. Our new life in Christ is not lived out immediately in Paradise, but rather is tried, tested, and purified in the furnace of this cursed world wherein the kings and rulers take counsel together against the Lord and His Christ (Ps. 2). The Word and Spirit of our Redeemer tell us that in the world we will have tribulation, but that we should have hope, knowing that He has overcome the world (Jn. 16:33).

Sunday, May 31st – Esther 1: 1-4

The worldly king to whom we are introduced is here called Ahasuerus. As famous and powerful as he was in his day, historians cannot with assured precision identify him. He was certainly a Persian king, but whether Ahasuerus was another name for Xerxes, who reigned 486-465 B.C., or Artaxerxes II, who reigned 404-359 B.C., or even Cambyses, who was successor to Cyrus and reigned 529-522 B.C., cannot be determined with certainty. This imprecise identification of this great king is no indication of defect in the Word of God, but rather indicates to us the transient nature of worldly power and fame. Even the greatest of worldly rulers sink into obscurity with the passage of time, while the names of the Lord's servants are inscribed in His heart and on His hands forever.

Monday, June 1st – Esther 1: 1-4

Judging from the dates of the reigns of the likely candidates for the king called Ahasuerus in our account, the time of the events in the Book of Esther was after the Jews had returned to Israel from their Babylonian Captivity. The final of the three large waves of exiles to return to the covenant land occurred in 444 B.C., led by Nehemiah. The fact that we find Jews still living in the land of their captivity tells us that some Jews remained there willingly, perhaps having become enamored of their pagan situation, while others, such as Daniel, performed such valuable service for their captors that they were not allowed to return to the land of their fathers. The events in Esther show us that God has a care for His people, wherever they are and whatever the reason that keeps them there.

Tuesday, June 2nd – Esther 1: 1-4

The extensive range of the empire of king Ahasuerus is significant. He ruled over 127 provinces, more than the 120 provinces over which Darius the Mede ruled. That his empire stretched from India to Ethiopia indicates that he ruled over almost the entire civilized world of his time. Therefore, the effect of his decrees would have been practically universal. One of his

decrees, as we shall learn, was for the annihilation of the Jews, and in this historical event we perceive the operations of Satan, who was seeking to thwart the promise of God to give a Savior to His people through the seed of Eve arising from the chosen descendants of Israel. The Messiah, as we know, was to be born to Mary, a peasant descended from the tribes and kings of Israel. Yet, although the whole world may seem to lie in the power of the evil one, and although Satan may have his malicious focus set on the covenant people of God, the Church is always secure in the name of the Lord of their Salvation.

Wednesday, June 3rd – Esther 1: 1-4

The Persian king reigned over an extensive empire. He sat securely upon the throne of his earthly power. He delighted to display his riches and power as is indicated by his entertaining the leaders of his realm with a celebration that lasted six months. Ahasuerus would seem to be in as high and powerful position as any mortal man could wish to be. Yet, he becomes the slave of his own passions, the dupe of a cunning underling, and the puppet of Satan. If the Son of God has not set a man free from his sins, what does it matter if he possesses the whole world while his soul lies in such manifold bondage?

Thursday, May 4th – Esther 1: 3-5

Early in his reign, Ahasuerus gave an inaugural party of great duration and lavish provision. The primary motive for the king giving this festive celebration was not love for his people. Rather, it was a self-regarding determination to make an ostentatious display of his regal glory. Most of that display was lavished on those in the kingdom whom Ahasuerus wanted most to impress, namely, the national and military leaders, whose support was most necessary for the maintaining of his empire. These leaders were treated to a six-month feast, while the common subjects of the realm were entertained for only seven days. Even kings of the earth bow to and try to impress the rich and capable of the world, while the poor and needy the royal rulers hardly notice. Only the gracious King of kings cares for and exalts the poor and humble of the world.

Friday, June 5th – Esther 1: 6-8

Although this was a lavish and long-lasting celebration, mannerly self-control was officially permitted. The wine was plentiful (v.7) but drunkenness was not a required feature of this time of celebration, as v.8 indicates. This appeared to be the most refined and civilized event the world had ever seen or enjoyed. But, as we shall see, the best the world can offer is laced with ruinous sin that spoils it all.

Saturday, June 6th - Esther 1: 9

This verse introduces us to the Queen of Persia, Vashti, who was the wife of King Ahasuerus. She, too, was giving a banquet for the women in the palace. The brief notice of this banquet seems to indicate that the scale and grandeur of her banquet were far less than was the case with her husband's feast. Whether Vashti gave her banquet as a complement of or in competition with her husband's celebration cannot be decided and is not important for us to know. The notice given in this verse serves simply to alert us to the fact that Vashti was not with Ahasuerus at his grand celebration. God knew the motives of this queen, and whether they were sinful or noble, He used her actions to further His glory and the good of His people, as He always does with all things.

Sunday, June 7th - Esther 1: 10, 11

While we cannot determine from the record of Scripture precisely why Vashti was giving her banquet, we can begin to perceive from these verses that for all of the pompous display of the sovereign majesty of King Ahasuerus, the man's character inclined toward vile weakness. We are told that the king summoned his queen not as a sober and laudable exercise of his sovereign authority, still less as a manifestation of his love for his wife. Instead, while under the influence of his apparently excessive intake of wine, he gave an order that a band of his eunuchs should bring Vashti to him. The motive for this order was so that he might display his wife's physical beauty, thus treating her like one of his many possessions that he flashed before his subjects in order to impress them with a show of his material riches. No man—king or peasant—should treat his wife like chattel or like a mere ornament. God instituted marriage with much more loving and honorable designs than that (Gen. 2:18-23). Sin, of course, has ruined all marriages, but those in Christ find directives and gracious empowering to improve and deepen their bonds of holy matrimony (Eph. 5:21ff; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).

Monday, June 8th – Esther 1: 10, 11

All that glitters is not gold. While this Persian potentate ruled over most of the world and put on a lavish display of his vaunted majesty, power, and glory, yet we can perceive that not all was lovingly harmonious in his own household. In fact, we see that the king who ruled so much of the world could not rule himself, but gave himself into the ruinous power of wine. There is something essentially weak about a person who will give himself into the power of a distorting and debilitating substance. Such weakness, especially in a person in a responsible position, is very dangerous. Weakness renders a person vulnerable to exploitation by those who are wicked, as we shall see as the account of events in Esther progresses. It is not for nothing that we are exhorted and enabled to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His holy and righteous might (Eph. 6:10).

Tuesday, June 9th - Esther 1: 12

This verse informs us of Vashti's refusal to obey the order of Ahasuerus. Why she refused is unclear. She may have been sinfully rebellious. However, even if a believing wife had been in her place, she would have had just cause to refuse obeying an order issued by a drunken man and requiring that she prostitute herself before a gathering of men, most of them perhaps also drunk, and exciting lasciviousness in them as she paraded her physical beauty before them. The best way any wife in Vashti's position could have respected her husband and been submissive to him in the Lord would have been to refuse this order and, after her husband had sobered up, to appeal to him to be his best and most loving by his cherishing her and not cheapening her. The Apostle Paul tells us that the man who loves his wife loves himself (Eph. 5:28). Any wife who helps her husband rightly to love her blesses her husband. By his giving this foolish, vile, and sinful order, Ahasuerus showed that he loved and respected neither his wife, nor himself, nor the God who instituted marriage. Such a man should not and cannot expect his wife to obey him.

Wednesday, June 10th - Esther 1: 12

The immediate response of Ahasuerus to Vashti's refusal of his order was anger. It was not understanding, or lovingly seeking an explanation, or reconsidering whether his attitude and actions had provoked her disobedience. Rather than critique himself, he rashly and presumptuously turned against his wife and was angry that she would not demean herself by

agreeing to turn herself into a mere object for other men's visual gratification. It is possible that Vashti consciously determined to remain for herself and for her husband and king more than the mindlessly compliant object that he sought to make her. It is not uncommon even for Christian men to desire that their wives should be less their loving helpmeet than they actually are called by God to be and desire to be. Only a defective mind and heart would make any of us men desire such a thing.

Thursday, June 11th - Esther 1: 13-15

As his drunkenness had influenced the conceiving and giving of the sinful order to Vashti, so the anger of Ahasuerus clouded his judgment and hardened his heart so that the rectifying response he determined to take was that of legal regulation rather than loving reconciliation. His turning to his legal advisors might seem reasonable and responsible, but it was in fact another manifestation of the loveless and weak character of the king who was vaunting his greatness. As he had given himself into the intoxicating power of wine, so now he gives himself into the power of those under him. A show of regal majesty and sovereign authority does not necessarily indicate the effective presence of such qualities in a king.

Friday, June 12th - Esther 1: 13-15

Ahasuerus shows himself a loveless husband when he turns to the law as a first resort. Even if Vashti had in fact sinned against him, love would have prompted him to judge her action charitably and to go to her, seeking understanding and reconciliation. Legal recourse is the last resort in marriage, while love should always be the first resort.

Saturday, June 13th - Esther 1: 13-15

Ahasuerus also shows himself to be a cowardly man in his response to his wife's refusal to obey his order. Even if she had sinfully offended his leadership in the marriage, he should have gone to her rather than huddle with his cronies. Of course we understand that those ancient oriental kings ruled absolutely and could execute anyone who violated royal protocol (Esther 4:11). However, social mores and national culture may explain a man's sinful actions but they do not excuse them. The King of kings tells us that if someone sins against us, we should go to that one and seek reconciliation, rather than go to others seeking the punishment of the sinner (Mt. 18:15). Such directive is not only right but also loving.

Sunday, June 14th - Esther 1: 16-18

The Bible teaches us that the Law of God is holy and good, but that it is weak through our flesh (Rom. 7:12; 8:3). This means that because of our sinfulness, the Law of God can convict us but not convert us; it can kill us with condemnation but it cannot make us alive and willing and empowered to love and obey its holy directives. If this is so with the good Law of God, how much more is it the case with the laws framed by finite, fallen, and fallible men? Yet, when Vashti disobeyed her husband's orders, he does not seek with loving understanding to turn to her and seek reconciliation. Instead, he turns from her and to the laws of men seeking redress for the offense he thought he had suffered. We see in these verses how readily men make laws to punish, not to restore, those deemed wrong-doers.

Monday, June 15th - Esther 1: 16-18

Observe how the legal judgment of these subjects of Ahasuerus magnify the offense of

Vashti. Without a hint of due legal process they assume Vashti's guilt and raise the stakes from the domestic sphere to that of an offense against the entire empire. It is true, of course, that both sins and crimes can be aggravated by the significance of the persons against whom they have been committed. In this case, Ahasuerus was not simply Vashti's husband but also her king. It was also the case that Ahasuerus was king over the entire Persian Empire. So, an offense against him would be an offense against the head and whole body of the empire. However, what is also true but never considered by these Persian wise men is that their king had acted contrary to the laws of the King of kings, and therefore had exceeded his authority and abused the powers of his office when he sought to treat his wife as an object to gratify the base impulses of his nobles. Whatever the prevailing customs of families, cities, nations, or empires might be, if they run contrary to the liberating law of love of the living God, those who refuse to obey them will be commended by the Lord, while those practicing them will be condemned by Him.

Tuesday, June 16th - Esther 1: 16-18

Whereas the wise men of Persia magnified the offense of Vashti, they minimized to nothingness the transgression of Ahasuerus. It was, in view of their serving an absolute monarch, politic for them not to criticize their king. However, they failed faithfully to serve their king when they flattered him rather than inflict, with all respect if not love, the faithful wounds he truly needed to make him a better man, husband, and monarch. These worldly wise men may have had a reputation for knowing the times, the law, and justice (v.13), but they show themselves to be woefully ignorant of the more vital matters of love and honorable living. The true knowledge of such precious matters comes only when one knows the God who is love as well as the actual, not merely apparent, glorious Lord of all.

Wednesday, June 17th - Esther 1: 17, 18

Ahasuerus was outwardly a king with great power and riches. Yet we have perceived his weakness in his giving himself into the power of wine and acting according to his base passions that prompted him to treat his wife and queen as an object to show to lascivious men. Similarly, his counselors were renowned for their wisdom, and yet we perceive in them the weakness of their fawning over their king. We also perceive their fear that for all of the pomp that they and their king were displaying to impress the subjects of the realm, the social fabric of the empire was perceived by them to be fatally weak and in danger of a universal uprising of women, the weaker vessels. Those relying most on riches and worldly reputation usually prove to be weakest, whether they are individual men or the people of a great but worldly nation.

Thursday, June 18th - Esther 1: 17, 18

These counselors either lacked the wisdom attributed to them or else the empire they sought to help guide and portray in such grand terms was so tenuous as to be doomed with or without their counsel. When they state that all of the wives throughout the entire empire would arise in contemptuous rebellion against their husbands, they are either ridiculously over-stating the matter or there was domestic abuse and repression of such extent and magnitude as to make a feminine rebellion ready to erupt with or without Vashti's disobedience. These wise men were in no position truly to help the wives of the empire remove any specks they might have in their eyes so long as these men retained the distorting log in their own eyes.

Friday, June 19th - Esther 1: 19

The mention of the laws of the Medes and Persians that could not be repealed sounds a note of great significance at this point. In the short run, the edict of Ahasuerus, written into the Imperial Laws, would ensure that when the weak king sobered up and his anger against Vashti subsided, he would not be able to change his mind and thereby display the imperfection of his weakness. In the longer term, another edict, almost certainly written in the laws of the Medes and Persians, would seem to ensure the certain and complete annihilation of the Jews (Esther 3:10-15). Great are the challenges and potential dangers arrayed against the people of God, even before they are aware of them; greater are the sustaining and prevailing means of grace of the God who is with and for His people.

Saturday, June 20th - Esther 1: 19, 20

The counsel given to Ahasuerus was that he should depose his offending queen without giving any consideration to why she had disobeyed him. As the law can only convict and punish its offenders, so those who are lovelessly and legally inclined are inclined to discard and destroy those whom they deem to be law-breakers, not to redeem and restore them. Infinitely greater and more desirable is the reign of the Lord of love over us than are the rules, regulations, and laws of the nations of the earth.

Sunday, June 21st - Esther 1: 19, 20

Even if the so-called wise counselors of Ahasuerus were right to regard so seriously Vashti's offense against not only her husband but also her king, the counsel they offer the king could hardly be more misguided, inadequate, and ineffectual. No law that has ever been devised by sinful man can make wives truly honor and obey their husbands. If husbands fail to be loving enough to earn their wives' submission, all that a law directing wives to honor such loveless men can do is to force a show of submission and honor while the reality of contempt brews in the pot of legally enforced repression. Only those ignorant of the liberating and empowering love of God could be so foolish as to lean so heavily upon the shaky reed of such a foolish law.

Monday, June 22nd - Esther 1: 19, 20

With this weak, sinful, boastful, and easily manipulated king made weaker, more sinful and more foolish by his fearful and legally-minded counselors, we might wonder what this has to do with the people of God in the days of Ahasuerus' reign. Still more, we might wonder what good could come to God's people in all of this concert of sin. Yet, we shall see how God was sinlessly superintending the sins of Ahasuerus, Vashti (if indeed she was acting sinfully in her refusal of the king's order), and of the king's counselors. The other one more worthy than Vashti who would become queen in Vashti's place would be Esther, whom God would exalt to royalty so that she would be in a key position instrumentally to save her people. Our God is always sinlessly and masterfully superintending all situations, circumstances, and details of our lives for our good.

Tuesday, June 23rd - Esther 1: 20

The men who fancied themselves to be wise and who were reputed to be wise show their ridiculous arrogance and great folly in their words recorded in this verse. It is a laughable conceit that men who are obsessed with legalities should ever regard the rules and regulations they devise to have such great and effective power. The only lesson that Vashti's punishment would inculcate to the women of the empire would be that they must bow to brute spousal

force. Legislated repression can breed only resentment in a people, while loving, reasonable, and fair dealing begets in others reciprocated respect, honor, and even love.

Wednesday, June 24th - Esther 1: 21

The edict that Queen Vashti should be deposed from her office and that all wives of the empire should respect their husbands, and the thought that this edict would secure the domestic order and happiness of all families throughout the empire pleased the king and his princes. The fact that men feel they have power to repay their wives' offenses against them in legal coinage, or even for them to feel that they have need of such power, shows how unmanly and ungodly and truly contemptible they are. Infinitely greater is the power of a husband's sacrificial love for his wife than are all the laws that could ever be devised to shore up a godless brute of a husband. This way of love is the still more excellent way (1 Cor. 12:31-13:13) in which all husbands in all nations and throughout all ages should be truly and rightly pleased.

Thursday, June 25th - Esther 1: 21

The king, in his drunken stupor, did as the prince, Memucan, proposed. Accordingly, King Ahasuerus was ruled by his sinful passions, by an intoxicating substance, and by his lesser officials. He who should have ruled this great empire demonstrates to all with eyes truly to see that he could not rule himself, his household, or his realm. A weak man is a dangerous man because when push comes to shove weakness always sides with wickedness. A weak man sitting in a seat of earthly sovereignty is a threat to all who live under his rule, as he will invariably yield his sovereignty to wicked manipulation. How thankful we should be that our redeeming King is not like that.

Friday, June 26th – Esther 1: 22

With the publication of the edict that Vashti should be deposed and that all wives of the empire should honor their husbands, the folly of Ahasuerus is broadcast. Loveless mastery is offered to the husbands of the realm, and the wives are ordered to submit or face being put away by their husbands and shunned by society throughout the empire. Only fools would regard this law as being prudent, necessary, and effective. But a fool delights to broadcast his folly (Prov. 13:16), thinking that others are as foolish, if not more so, than he is himself. The common sense of the common people of this empire was wiser than those who devised and adopted this fool's edict. We can be thankful that our God reigns over the foolish rulers of this world who counsel together against Him, His anointed, and His wise and loving ways (Ps.2).

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Saturday, June 27th – Esther 2: 1

In this verse, the phrase, *after these things*, indicates a time after the lavish celebrations of Ahasuerus had ended on a painful note of the king deposing his queen, Vashti, and presumably divorcing her. It was after a time when laughter had turned to legal oppression. It was also after the king had emerged from his wine-inspired gladness that had prompted him to anger and rash judgments. In the clear light of ordinary living that is free from the disguises of excessive and substance-stimulated celebration, men cannot avoid seeing, thinking, and feeling more

clearly. In such a sober state, Ahasuerus may have felt the reality of how shamefully and lovelessly he had treated his queen, but clearly he sensed the grievous magnitude of the loss of his beautiful wife. His feeling the painful consequences of his sinfully foolish actions could have prodded him to own his sin and seek forgiveness from and reconciliation with Vashti. The pangs of a guilty conscience, painful though they may be, can lead a man to healing and restoration if he does not seek to dull them by denial or diversion from a rectifying course.

Sunday, June 28th - Esther 2: 1

We cannot know precisely how long it was after the events of Chapter 1 that the anger of Ahasuerus subsided. We do know that the lavish celebrations took place in the third year of his reign (Esth. 1:3), and that he took to his royal palace the replacement for deposed Vashti in the seventh year of his reign (Esth. 2:16). Even if we allow reasonable time for the process of the finding and selecting of Vashti's replacement, Ahasuerus may have nursed his anger for years. Why would he have cherished his wrath for so long? Surely it was because anger is a reaction to injury suffered. There was pain afflicting the king, pain that he reckoned Vashti had caused him, and for which he sought retribution through making her suffer. Such anger may be nursed for a long time, but it does eventually die out, leaving the underlying pain exposed. That pain is far more difficult to endure than is the anger that diverts one from his pain. Yet, when anger subsides, truer thinking and feeling can no longer be avoided. Without his anger, the king had to seek true relief through repentance and reconciliation or pursue another diversion.

Monday, June 29th - Esther 2: 1-4

The painful problem of Ahasuerus is briefly set out in v.1. A solution for his problem is offered in vv.2-4. The proposed solution is typical of the false remedies that men concoct for themselves. Not all purported remedies heal our wounds, nor are they commended to us by caring and competent physicians. None of the components of the truly healing balm of our Great Physician appear in the remedy offered to the suffering King Ahasuerus. Let us learn to detect and refuse such false solutions as we would refuse to drink poison.

Tuesday, June 30th - Esther 2: 1, 2

At least some of the pain that Ahasuerus was feeling was due to his sinful treatment of his wife. Such pangs of guilt are good and right. If we face such pains as fruits issuing from deeper roots, we shall find sin and guilt to be those roots; if we regard our moral grief as our only problem, we shall seek only quick, simple, and pleasant treatments. Such treatments are readily available and seem for a time to bring relief. Yet, because they do not touch the underlying roots, but simply mask the painful fruits of our sin, such treatments complicate rather than cure our guilty condition. Ahasuerus stands at the crossroads of remorse and repentance.

Wednesday, July 1st - Esther 2: 1, 2

Remorse, or worldly sorrow, is when one grieves over the bitter consequences of his sin. With repentance, or godly sorrow, one grieves more over his sin than over the misery which is a consequence of sin. Those who repent turn from their sin and to their Lord. Those who are only remorseful seek to turn from their pain to pleasure. In v.2, we see how readily promises of pleasure are presented to those filled only with remorse. Counterfeit gold lies scattered on the ground while true riches must be patiently mined beneath the surface. The first solution presented to us as a remedy for our pangs of conscience is usually a false solution.

Thursday, July 2nd – Esther 2: 1, 2

Ahasuerus feels his pain but does not exert himself to search his own soul for the true cause of that pain. Instead, he expresses his sorrow in mood and action, if not in word, and waits for others around him to offer relief. Repentance is costly, calling for a personal probing of one's pain, as one searches himself and tests his motives and actions in the light of the truth. Remorse, rather than leading one to do the work of self-examination, inclines one to whine and to wait for others to bring relief that is quick, easy, and desirable.

Friday, July 3rd – Esther 2: 1, 2

The king's attendants served him with flattery rather than faithfulness. They therefore seek to ease the king's sorrow by diverting him from the pangs of his guilty conscience with the promise of pleasure. This pleasure is to be enjoyed by the king's receiving a replacement for Vashti rather than through his working toward reconciliation with her. Our Lord redeems, saves, and reconciles to Himself those who have truly sinned against Him. Men of the world do not redeem but dispose of those who sin against them, or even only appear to have sinned against them. Then the worldly seek a replacement they imagine may as easily or even more easily fill the void left by the one they have discarded.

Saturday, July 4th – Esther 2: 1, 2

Ahasuerus clearly delighted in Vashti's physical beauty (Esth. 1:11). It may have been only her physical beauty for which he pined. His servants may have keyed off this and proposed a replacement that would appeal to this base fondness of the king. It is a tell-tale mark of false solutions for the painful consequences of our sin that such solutions pamper our flesh while ignoring our soul.

Sunday, July 5th – Esther 2: 2-4

The king's attendants spiced the appeal of their proposal by focusing on a replacement that would be more physically beautiful than Vashti and, because she was to be younger than the erstwhile queen, the beauty of the replacement would outlast that of the king's ex-wife. In order to ensure that such a prime and, at least physically pure, beauty would be found, the king's minions would be dispatched to cull the empire for every beautiful young virgin, and all of these women would be brought to the king for his selection. These flattering courtiers make it sound as though where the king's sin against Vashti had increased, at least his gladness (if not grace in his life) would abound all the more. Something so low in its focus and so overarching in its promise is too gaudy to be good, right and lastingly satisfying.

Monday, July 6th - Esther 2: 2-4

The young virgins were not to be presented to the king in a state of their natural beauty. The artistry of Hegai—presumably an expert in cosmetics—was to add supposed improvement to the physical beauty of the women. It is a carnal impulse that values artifice above authenticity, and ranks outward beauty above the enduring beauty of a godly character.

Tuesday, July 7th - Esther 2: 2-4

This replacement proposal pleased the king. His delight, however, was not in anything right, good, or holy. Instead, the anticipation of a protracted selection process, wherein a host of female beauties would be paraded leisurely before Ahasuerus and added to his harem, aroused in

the king base and carnal excitement. He must also have delighted in the thought that the lasting fruit of the selection process would be a new queen for the empire and, for Ahasuerus, a new wife. In short, Ahasuerus was typical of all men and women in their fallen, natural, sinful state. They seek to discover loveliness to gratify themselves. However, our God, the King of kings, deposits loveliness in unlovely sinners by His first loving them. Those who are accepted by God in His beloved Son have an authentic beauty that shines from within and endures through time and eternity. No mere transient, outward beauty can ever compare to the lasting beauty of God's beloved children.

Wednesday, July 8th – Esther 2: 5-7

These verses introduce us to the central characters of this book. Mordecai and his cousin, Hadassah (a Jewish name meaning *myrtle*), whose Persian name was Esther, both were descended from Jews who had been exiled to Babylon. The Jews had been exiled because of their sins against God. Most of them were allowed to return to the land of Judah after 70 years in captivity. However, Mordecai and Esther, like Daniel and others, had stayed as sojourners in the land of their exile that had been itself conquered by the Medes and Persians. These two lowly Jews will prove to be the most significant members of the empire of Ahasuerus, Esther becoming his queen and Mordecai becoming the savior of his people and of Ahasuerus himself. It is infinitely better to be humble and faithful believers, even under chastisement, than to be rulers of worldly empires.

Thursday, July 9th - Esther 2: 5-7

With the introduction of Mordecai, Scripture shows us a clear contrast between Ahasuerus and this humble Jew. The debauchery of Ahasuerus has been shown to us in Chapter 1 and part of Chapter 2. In contrast, Mordecai is within three verses shown to be a man of discipline. While the king drew the attention of a great empire to himself, the Jew was giving himself to the task of raising his cousin. Ahasuerus was a rich and powerful king over a great empire, while Mordecai was a poor exile responsible for his tiny family. The king lovelessly abused his wife; the Jew lovingly provided for his cousin not only materially but especially, as we shall see, through the way he raised her in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In sum, the king is a rich and powerful ruler only in appearance, while essentially he is a slave to his carnal passions and a dupe to his flattering servants. The Jew is outwardly an exiled subject to this king, but in reality he is rich with the treasures of salvation and more than a conqueror through his faith in his God.

Friday, July 10th - Esther 2: 7

We are told several significant things about Esther in this verse. First, she had no natural parents. In place of parental love and provision she had her presumably older cousin, doing his best to be both mother and father to her. Mordecai loved her, as he made her to be his adopted daughter. In compensation for her apparent familial disadvantages, Esther did possess physical beauty. Yet even that, as we shall see, serves to bring her to the godless, loveless king and the dangerous intrigues of his godless court. However, Esther had the one true treasure, namely, her faith in the Lord, the one thing necessary.

Saturday, July 11th - Esther 2: 8

The king would appear to have all that any man could desire. He possessed unsurpassed power, riches, and glory, and even though he missed his beautiful wife, Vashti, he had sure prospect of a replacement. Yet, even the greatest rulers on earth have their political vulnerabilities. What Ahasuerus did not realize was that a plot would be formed against his life, and it would be the Jewish exile, Mordecai, who would discover it and report it in order to save the king (Esther 2:21-23). Who but God could know what vital service the exile would perform for the king? Therefore, we find the Lord graciously and sinlessly superintending even the sinful lusts of the king in order to bring Mordecai close enough to him through Esther to perform his saving service. What gracious and vital blessing is our Lord preparing for us, His beloved children, to receive and to give through the incidental and even sin-laced circumstances of our lives?

Sunday, July 12th - Esther 2: 8, 9

Esther's physical beauty rendered her a candidate for Vashti's replacement. The prospect of becoming queen of a great empire and the wife of a rich and powerful man would be appealing to many women. However, Esther's godly character, which shows and shines throughout this book, would incline her to regard such things as trinkets in view of the saving love of the glorious God of heaven that she already possessed and enjoyed. Therefore, she would have considered her selection to be part of the parade of beautiful candidates before the godless Ahasuerus as a curse more than a blessing. Yet, her Lord had great blessing in store for her and all of her people through this providence that surely was to her somewhat painful and perplexing. Similarly do our painful providences serve for our blessing (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

Monday, July 13th - Esther 2: 8, 9

Although Esther's physical beauty was the singular feature that commended her to the servants of the king who were implementing their base and carnal project, the more substantial and significant aspect of her good and godly character outshone her outer attractiveness. The king's servant, Hegai, had eyes to see this deeper quality, as we gather from the wording of v.9 which says that Esther not only pleased him but also found favor with him. Because Hegai perceived something more profound and precious than skin-deep beauty in Esther, he treated her as the special treasure that she was. Here is a lesson for all women (and men too!) not to become obsessed with their outer attractiveness but rather to cultivate the true and lasting beauty of inner holiness (1 Pet. 3:1-6).

Tuesday, July 14th - Esther 2: 10, 11

Part of the beauty of Esther's character—whether the godless could define it or not—was her humble and submissive spirit. These verses indicate to us her humility in that she submitted to and obeyed in the royal palace the instructions her adopted father, Mordecai, had given to her prior to her having left home to be brought before the king. There is something impressive to all observers about any woman or man who submits with sincere and loving devotion to godly authority.

Wednesday, July 15th - Esther 2: 10, 11

If godliness is a believer's true beauty and if we are to let the light of our gracious attitude and actions shine so that men might see our good works and glorify our heavenly Father, we

must surely wonder why Mordecai instructed Esther not to disclose to the servants of Ahasuerus that she belonged to the Jewish people. Since we are charged by God's Word to speak the truth in love, we ought to know that there is a right attitude, time, place, and way in which we should communicate the truth. This is called godly discretion, and it is one of the key and critical characteristics of both Esther and Mordecai. In essence, they both realize what we should understand and practice, namely, that there are times when it is not only most effective but also right and necessary for us to seal our lips and let God do the speaking to others through His Word and providential works. The necessity and wisdom of this policy will become abundantly vindicated by the fruits it will produce, as we shall see as the events in the Book of Esther unfold.

Thursday, July 16th - Esther 2: 10, 11

While Esther demonstrates her loving submission to Mordecai when she obeyed his counsel not to reveal her Jewish nationality and religion to her virtual captors, Mordecai demonstrates his loving sense of responsibility for and caring commitment to his cousin when he kept vigilant watch over her while she was in the court of the harem. Godly love bound this man and his adopted daughter together and directed all that each would do here and hereafter that would have such saving effect for all of the Jews, as well as for King Ahasuerus' life. Those who are most heavenly minded prove to be of most earthly good; and those having a loving care for their families prove to be the best lovers of their neighbors and citizens in their nations.

Friday, July 17th - Esther 2: 8-11

We have noted godly virtues in both Mordecai and Esther. However, the account Scripture gives us to this point simply makes clear to us that they were Jews living in the land of their exile some years after they could have returned to the covenant land of Judah. We are given no explanation regarding why they were still living in Persia. Were they there for godly or self-regarding reasons? Clearly, had they returned to their own land Esther would have avoided becoming a virtual captive of a godless king. Does this mean that they were not where God had called them to be? In answer we may say that if they were in Persia for worldly reasons, they soon were led to grow in their faith and found their blessing and security in the Lord. If they were in Persia because they had been among the few compelled to stay, like Daniel, they learned and demonstrated to all believers that worldly men can never deprive believers of their security, freedom, and holy usefulness in Christ. If they were in Persia by clear divine calling, they were sustained through all tribulations and led to triumph in their Lord. Our God is ever good and gracious to His people wherever they are and whatever the reason might be for their being there. At any place in the world we will always have tribulation, but we have cause for confidence and joy, knowing that our Lord has overcome the world.

Saturday, July 18th - Esther 2: 12-14

These verses inform us of the elaborate provision made for the artificial enhancement of the natural beauty of the many young virgins that had been gathered to the king's palace. No products were withheld; no detail of training in deportment was omitted as these young women were glamorized in preparation for their presentation to Ahasuerus. All of this lavish provision was not to bless or better these women but all served only to maximize the gratification of the king. By the fact that these women were gathered to the palace by royal decree, and that after each one was presented to the king she was compelled to remain in his harem as his concubine, we learn that all of these young women had become virtual prisoners of the lustful king. Base

men desire and demand for their own sinful pleasure that women paint, powder, and dress (or undress!) themselves and so improve (or disguise!) their beauty according to the man's carnal taste. It is a shame that these captive young virgins were compelled to do this; it is a worse shame when free women volunteer to make themselves immodestly attractive to such loveless male brutes.

Sunday, July 19th - Esther 2: 15

The implication of this verse is that Esther was no willing participant in the glamorizing endeavor. When her turn came to be presented to the king, she who had impressed Hegai with her character more than with the application of cosmetics submitted to that servant's guidance in preparing herself for her royal interview. It is evident that godly character was the jewel in the crown she already possessed in the Lord. The mention at this critical point of her deceased father, Abihail, and her adoptive father, Mordecai, indicates that the true beauty of this young woman was her godly heart that had been nurtured not in worldly glamor but in vital godliness conveyed to her by these godly men. Such purity of heart shone from Esther with a beauty that all of the other women and king's servants—however jaded—could not deny.

Monday, July 20th - Esther 2: 16, 17

These verses speak of Esther's success and her security. All that the other virgins had failed to achieve through their cosmetic embellishment, Esther attained by her reliance upon her sanctified character. However, was this true success for this godly young virgin? Had she not succeeded only in becoming the prized possession of a godless, lustful, and loveless potentate? The answer to these questions is found in Esther's security. Although she was compelled to go in to this king, she, like David before Goliath, trusted not in worldly artifice but rather in the name of the Lord. Accordingly, she, unlike David, did not slay her Goliath but transformed him. We note this when Scripture reports that the king loved Esther and treated her with supreme kindness. Therefore, she who loved with godly love conquered and civilized this king and caused reciprocating love for her to issue from him. Our greatest security is ever in our accepting our Lord's love and giving godly love to others.

Tuesday, July 21st - Esther 2: 17, 18

King Ahasuerus may have lusted after physical beauty, but when he beheld the godly loveliness of Esther his lust was extinguished and true love and respect issued from him. We detect this from Scripture telling us that the king *loved* Esther, and that he showed her *kindness*. He demonstrated practical deeds of respect and cherishing devotion when he crowned her with royalty and exalted her as his queen, thus taking her not only as his wife, but also as his co-laborer in his work of ruling the empire. Great and transforming is the power that godly love has on those who receive it.

Wednesday, July 22nd - Esther 2: 17, 18

In contrast to the lavish and excessive celebration the king had earlier given to display his royal glory, Ahasuerus now gives a modest and simple banquet in keeping with the modest and pure character of his new wife. Through this banquet, others were also truly blessed by the gifts

they received and the holiday they enjoyed. Carnal joy drowns out all blessing, but godly rejoicing issues from the root of holiness and produces the fruit of pure and lasting happiness.

Thursday, July 23rd - Esther 2: 19, 20

With Esther's marriage to the king and her exaltation to her new station as queen of the empire, her life was greatly changed. Yet all seemed to be the same for Mordecai. He remained at his post of devoted watchfulness over Esther. Love led him to keep that lowly position, and that position would prove critical in due course (cf. vv.21-23). Meanwhile, Esther remained silent regarding her Jewish nature and kindred. Lest we think her silence on this point now became for her the hiding of an inconvenient truth that might threaten her new exalted position had it been known, we are reminded that she did this according to Mordecai's instruction. Why he had so instructed her must remain a mystery to Esther and to us until the time when her revealing all to Ahasuerus would vindicate this policy of discretion (Esther 7:1-8:8). Carnal curiosity and proud exhibitionism can don a guise of pious candor and lead one to feel obligated to know and tell all to the ruin and not the help of many.

Friday, July 24th - Esther 2: 21, 22

Esther was exalted as queen over a great empire. She sat on a royal throne while her cousin who had adopted and raised her sat as a lowly and lone man at the king's gate. Perhaps only he knew why he was there, and even if others did know that he was keeping loving watch over Esther, they could easily think the man foolish for thinking that she needed or wanted his feeble care when she was married to the glorious king of the Persian Empire. Yet, loving devotion is never wasted, nor is it impractical. We see in these verses how Mordecai's keeping himself in the path of such loving devotion placed him also in a strategic position to discover a plot to kill King Ahasuerus. This discovery and its disclosure to the king through Esther served for the good of the whole empire. We never can tell what great services we can render collaterally as we determine lovingly to serve the members of our own families.

Saturday, July 25th - Esther 2: 22

This verse shows us a chain of blessed communication that was forged by the Lord. Who but our infallibly wise God could position humble descendants of exiles to render service of the most vital and significant character for the king of the empire that ruled over them? By our loving trust of our Lord and our loving devotion to our brethren we, too, will find ourselves placed in positions of vast strategic importance far beyond what those obsessed over their careers could ever imagine, let alone occupy.

Sunday, July 26th – Esther 2: 22, 23

Mordecai rendered a service that was vital to the welfare of the empire. His singular service in saving the king's life was reported to Ahasuerus. The assassins were caught and hanged and although the matter was recorded in the royal history book, no reward was given in royal gratitude to Mordecai. This recording of the matter as well as the oversight and neglect of the king in his rewarding his loyal subject were both superintended by the Lord as factors that would in due time prove critical for the salvation of all the Jews and provide greater reward for Mordecai. Our God will always see to it when we are denied due honor that it only prepares the way for our greater reward.

July 2009

Monday, July 27th – Esther 3: 1

We have observed how the Persian king Ahasuerus made a show of power and glory while his personal character was weak and corrupt. We have observed how the descendants of Jewish exiles, Mordecai and Esther, concerned themselves with being godly and doing things that issued from their godly character while hiding, for a time, their outward religion. Now we are introduced to a new character, Haman, whom we shall learn was a wicked man. It is not mere coincidence that Haman draws close to Ahasuerus soon after the king had been favorably impressed with the godly Esther, whose beauty was deeper than outward glamour, and whose godly purity and love caused Ahasuerus to love her. Esther was letting her light so shine that her royal husband was being drawn to glorify himself no longer, but rather to give glory to Esther's heavenly Father. When such spiritual stirrings toward the godly and their God awaken in a man, the satanic enemy of God and man has his dupes to draw that man back into his old, godless ways.

Tuesday, July 28th - Esther 3: 1

Haman was not simply a politically grasping and godless individual. He was an Agagite, meaning that he may have been a descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites, whom Saul, in disobedience to God, had spared but whom Samuel hewed to pieces (1 Sam. 15:1-3, 7-9, 32,33). The Amalekites were ancient enemies of the Jews (Num. 14:39-45), and it is not surprising that Satan would choose an instrument who bore within himself the bitter fruit of generations of hatred and animosity toward the people of God. This volcano of hate will soon erupt from Haman as he will determine to exterminate the Jewish people for what he regarded as an offense from a single Jew, namely, Mordecai. Worldlings and the redeemed children of God may co-exist in relative peace for generations. However, the seeds of ancient hatred may spring forth at any time, bearing poisonous fruit.

Wednesday, July 29th - Esther 3: 1

King Ahasuerus loved Esther but he leaned almost entirely upon Haman for the administration of the empire. These choices would prove to be the two most critical ones that Ahasuerus would make in the course of his reign over his expansive kingdom. There is great inconsistency in this man drawing so close to himself two such diametrically opposed characters as the godly Esther and the wicked Haman. Such inconsiderate and inconsistent choices are common, even for Christians. However, although it may appear that the choice and empowering of wicked Haman would prevail, it would be godly Esther, a weaker vessel who was strong in her Lord, who would triumph over Haman and prove the greatest blessing for her people, for her king and husband, and for the Persian Empire. Thanks be to God that our godly choices ultimately prevail over our sinful choices.

Thursday, July 30th - Esther 3: 1

The rapid rise of Haman to such an exalted position that made him the practical ruler over the entire kingdom of Ahasuerus is explicable only when we bear in mind the weakness and passivity of the king. Ahasuerus has demonstrated a propensity to let himself be directed by his servants. This propensity is a direct effect of the king's failure to rule his own passions. Such moral passivity and weak administration of civil authority invites exploitation from wicked men

who are arrogantly aggressive in their lust for power and position. If we do not stand strong in our Lord, we, too, invite satanic attention and consuming exploitation. Such a rule has been repeatedly demonstrated since Adam's wavering resolution to trust and obey God enabled Satan to wrest dominion of the world from him.

Friday, July 31st – Esther 3: 1

There was in Haman's exaltation a most sinister significance for the people of God. The king had given to Haman practically absolute power over the entire empire. Almost immediately after his rise to such power, Haman turned with murderous anger toward all of the Jews. Who could stop a man so full of malice and having almost unlimited resources to effect his desired extermination of all the people of God? The answer is not that it would take a man mightier than Haman or an army greater than that of the Persian Empire. It would take one godly woman prompted by her godly uncle to rout this mighty and menacing foe. For it only takes one faithful soul calling upon the only true and absolutely sovereign and almighty God to be instrumental in bringing deliverance to the oppressed.

Saturday, August 1st – Esther 3: 1, 2

Not only was Haman exalted by Ahasuerus, but the king also commanded that all of the servants and subjects of his empire should bow down and pay homage to the Agagite. These decrees concerning Haman took place after the event described in the previous chapter, where Ahasuerus had chosen as his bride and queen the godly Esther and loved her, and where Mordecai had faithfully employed himself in a devoted watch over Esther and served the king by exposing an assassination plot against him. What was Haman doing prior to his advancement? How did he commend himself to his high office? We do not know what he did to be preferred before the godly and usefully serving Esther and Mordecai or even before all the princes of the realm. What we can gather is how Haman attained his office. The king's acts of exalting Haman and humbling all of his servants and subjects before him must have resulted from the unbounded pride and vaunting ambition of Haman that display themselves hereafter in this account. The passive Ahasuerus would not have taken these steps unless he had been moved to them by the arrogant Agagite. No doubt, Ahasuerus believed that his own glory as king would have been advanced and served by his making the imposing Haman his exalted right-hand man. But, in fact, Haman's pride was aimed at his reducing the king to be his puppet. Not all candidates for exalted and entrusted service are as commendable or competent as Esther and Mordecai and, before them, Joseph, by whose high state service the lives of the Hebrews as well as the Egyptians were saved.

Sunday, August 2nd – Esther 3: 1, 2

Except for Mordecai, all the servants and subjects of the empire obeyed the king's command that they should bow in homage to Haman. Of all the king's servants, Mordecai alone defied the royal directive. Was this refusal criminal or commendable? The answer would depend upon the reasons for Mordecai's defiance. Further, if it is fair to inquire into his reasons, it is equally fair to inquire into the reasons why all others bowed to Haman. But apart from their motives, it is most common that when one man stands against a large majority, that man is considered wrong simply because of his minority status. It is part of the scandal of the gospel in the world's eyes not only that eternal life should be found in a Man who was executed as a criminal, but also that eternal life should be had only through that one Man. Despite majority opinion, quality not

quantity is always the decisive factor. It is better that one stand alone for the Lord than to join a mindless multitude in bowing before the wicked.

Monday, August 3rd – Esther 3: 3, 4

These verses inform us how the defiance of Mordecai came to Haman's attention. The news had to be delivered by the servants of the king who wondered at Mordecai's transgression of the king's command. The fact of Mordecai's refusal to bow had apparently escaped Haman's notice as he passed through the prostrate servants. Perhaps the Agagite was too elated with the near universal homage that was offered to him. Perhaps he noted the single standing figure and dismissed him as being insignificant. However, when the wicked fail to perceive the righteous, the Lord sees to it that His righteous servant is identified as a clear target for Satan's ire, as was the case with Job. The divine purpose in this is not to cast His servants down but ultimately to exalt them through the prevailing power of the Rock of Ages upon whom they stand.

Tuesday, August 4th – Esther 3: 3, 4

These verses also tell us the reason why Mordecai did not bow down to Haman. While it is clear that the king's compliant servants were scandalized by Mordecai's solitary stand and had repeatedly attempted to persuade and cajole him into conformity with their practice, it is equally clear that Mordecai always answered them by giving a reason for the hope that was within him. The reason Mordecai gave for his stand was that he was a Jew, a member of the covenant people of God, who had graciously redeemed His people from their bondage in Egypt and had commanded them to bow to no other gods before Him. Therefore, as with Daniel's friends who had refused to bow before Nebuchadnezzar's statue (Dan. 3) and the apostles of Christ who would determine to obey God rather than man when their commands were in conflict, so here Mordecai was standing by his saving God's grace and for his heavenly Lord's glory even though it would cost him the ridicule of men and threats against his life.

Wednesday, August 5th – Esther 3: 3, 4

Why would it have been wrong for Mordecai to bow to Haman? The required prostration was merely a physical act that would have been easy for the Jew to perform, while his refusal to do so made him appear to be a proud violator of civil law. The reason that Mordecai refused to obey the king's command was that had he done so, he would have violated the law of his God, who was the King of kings. It would have been right for Mordecai to have shown honor and respect for Haman as a duly appointed governmental official, yet the king's decree called for the offering of homage, which was virtually an act of worship, that would be sinful to offer to any man. The ground of Mordecai's stand against Haman was his commitment to obey the First Commandment. Such a commitment can often land a man in a world of trouble with men in high position who demand that they be acknowledged as gods. Yet, we shall see in this matter that it is better to offend boastful men at any cost than to offend the one true and living God who will not share His glory with arrogant would-be usurpers. When evil ascends to the highest level of civil authority, the righteous must appear as outlaws, when in reality they regard and keep the Law of the Lord.

Thursday, August 6th - Esther 3: 5, 6

These verses tell us not only about Haman's response to Mordecai's defiance, but also provide us with insight into the character and attitudes of Haman. The Agagite's towering rage

and the murderous magnitude of his determination to destroy not only Mordecai, but all of the Jews, reveal to us a titanic pride. His exaggerated sense of being offended indicates clearly that Haman's pride reached to the height of his thinking himself a god who deserved worship. Rightly, did Mordecai read this arrogant, blasphemous man, and rightly did the faithful Jew refuse to worship the posturing Agagite. Let us pray that our Lord would fill us with such holy discernment and determination not to worship false gods.

Friday, August 7th - Esther 3: 5, 6

These verses further inform us of the costly tribulation that the faithful must bear in the world as they stand for their Lord. Scripture is here teaching us to realize that false gods are sinfully jealous for their own supposed rights, and that they will seek to make those who turn from them to the one true God pay dearly for their supposed audacity. Recall that when Moses asserted the prerogatives of the Lord before Pharaoh, the king of Egypt made matters worse for the people of God, at least initially. The lesson here is that our faith wrought out in love for our Lord will provoke against us many tribulations. Yet, it is through these tribulations that we become, by our Lord's enabling and sustaining grace, more than conquerors.

Saturday, August 8th – Esther 3: 5, 6

Haman's rage was no mere passionate outburst. His was the worst kind of rage, namely, a cool and calculating ire that patiently plots ways to exact a revenge many magnitudes beyond what the real or imagined offense should deserve. Such cool and calculating rage is fed from the murderous anger of Satan, and presses the powers of perception and execution of anyone possessing it into exaggerated determination to destroy not only those who have ignited it, but also those close to the offender. Infinitely different is our Lord, who has come to seek and to save those who have actually sinned grievously against Him. We, too, like our saving Master, ought to be ready and studious of ways to forgive those who sin against us (Mt. 6:12; Eph. 4:32), and not be like this Agagite who burns with wicked vengeance.

Sunday, August 9th - Esther 3: 7

This verse indicates to us the patient persistence of wicked Haman. For an entire year he contained his rage against Mordecai while lots were cast before him, presumably, in order that he might determine the perfect time to launch his genocidal plans. While such action could be considered the frighteningly meticulous planning of an evil genius, in reality it reveals a superstitious anxiety, if not fear, in Haman and a ridiculous yielding of himself to blind chance. Therefore, while he postures like a god, he shows how far removed he truly is from the true and living God of omnisciently infallible wisdom, absolute authority, and almighty power, in whose care Mordecai entrusted himself.

Monday, August 10th - Esther 3: 8-11

After a year of containing his rage and having lots cast to determine the most favorable day on which to launch his plan, Haman awaited that day to arrive in the following year. When that day arrived, he confidently put his genocidal plans in motion. From the response of the king to Haman's wicked request that all the Jews be exterminated, we might think that all of Haman's cunning planning and wicked working paid off in a quick and relatively easy and complete success. Yet, despite all appearances of success, the God of heaven who ever overrules the affairs of earthly rulers, had set Haman's feet in slippery places (Ps. 73:18), as he would soon

discover. Initial appearances of success are infinitely removed from actual prevailing, just as the daily mortifications of believers signify not their deaths but their resurrections.

Tuesday, August 11th - Esther 3: 8

The fact that Haman restrained his rage that strongly prompted him to kill Mordecai and all of his Jewish brethren was due to a restraining power *over* him, not to any restraining principle *within* him. Haman's exaltation was great but not absolute. He remained accountable and subservient to King Ahasuerus, and this was due to the wise and gracious providence of the Lord who is supremely sovereign over all of the world's rulers and people. Therefore, we find Haman compelled to go to his earthly lord, as Satan was compelled to ask permission from the Lord of heaven to afflict righteous Job. Both Satan and Haman were compelled to request permission to do their sinful worst. But as the God who ultimately determined whether such requests would be granted is good, wise, holy, and mercifully loving, the permitted sinful plans for evil against the Lord's people will only be turned by the Lord sinlessly to serve for their good (Gen. 50:20).

Wednesday, August 12th - Esther 3: 8

Here Haman begins to make his diabolical request. Part of the reason that our God allows wicked men to have their say and, for a time, their way is to demonstrate to His people how thoroughly callous are the hearts and cunning are the minds of the wicked. But above all, our Lord would have us to see how His apparent weakness is stronger than the strength of wicked men and devils and how the apparent foolishness in His patient allowance is wiser than the wisdom of His enemies.

Thursday, August 13th - Esther 3: 8

Haman begins by reducing and vilifying the Jews in the king's sight. He does not mention them by name but merely refers to their scattered situation that would render them incapable of resisting effectively their extermination that Haman was about to request of Ahasuerus. Haman also emphasizes the distinctiveness of the Jews to arouse the king's suspicion of them, since men naturally assume that anyone different from themselves must be in error if not in league against them. The Agagite further asserts that the Jews disobeyed the king's laws. Thusly, the Jews are presented as obnoxious pests that could and should be easily destroyed for the king's benefit. The fact that all of these points made by Haman are built on grains of truth, although distorted into accusations against the Jews, shows the impressive cunning of satanically inspired argumentation. Who but the pure in heart can discern such deception?

Friday, August 14th - Esther 3: 8, 9

The oily persuasiveness of Haman builds in these verses. In v.8, he presented the Jews as pests obnoxiously exalting themselves above the king, and therefore staining his honor and eroding his authority. In v.9, the proposal for dealing with the Jews is presented in such a way that the king would not only be relieved of a costly pain but also rewarded by the payment of money from Haman. Who but those committed to truth and equity could resist such apparently enticing benefits?

Saturday, August 15th - Esther 3: 8-11

In v.8, Haman accuses the Jews by spinning out deceptive accusations from their commendable devotion to their God, as though such ones who were heavenly minded were

earthly pests, when the truth was that the heavenly-minded Jew whom Haman hated had done earthly good by his having saved the king's life. In v.9, Haman moves from deception to a proposal for mass murder. By his consummate use of lying and murder, Haman shows himself to be a true son of the devil (Jn. 8:49). In vv.10,11 the proposal advances when the king glibly handed Haman the royal signet ring with which decrees were sealed by the king's authority. Satanic scheming hereby succeeds in making an earthly king into a demonic dupe. Ahasuerus in ignorance and blinding self-regard gives allowance for an ill-defined and undetermined number of his subjects to be slaughtered because of the deceptive accusations brought against them and his own facile and uncritical acceptance of those accusations. Such satanic accusations can lead us to despise and speak and act injuriously toward our own brethren in Christ if we are not on guard to test the spirits that seek to move us.

Sunday, August 16th - Esther 3: 10, 11

The superficial consideration and blinding self-regard of the king prompted him to accept Haman's proposal and return it to the Agagite with royal authority and power for its execution. At this point, the fate of the Jews seemed sealed in the murderous hand of Haman. In reality, Haman was not *for* the empire, he was not *for* Ahasuerus, but he was *against* the Jews as their enemy. Haman's destructive rage against the Jews guided all that he thought and intended to do. However, the enemy of God's people will find himself to be the enemy of God. Think of the Pharisee Saul's discovery of this when in his persecuting pursuit of Christians the glorified Christ confronted him with the question: *Why do you persecute Me?*

Monday, August 17th - Esther 3: 8-11

Haman presented his murderously wicked plan to the king as though its execution would be doing Ahasuerus the favor of removing costly pests from his empire while enriching his royal coffers through the Agagite's gift. Yet the king refused the money and gave the Jews into Haman's power for their annihilation. The money was a trinket but the people were a treasure not only of productive subjects of the king's empire but especially a beloved treasure of the King of kings, who was neither ignorant of their plight nor heedless of His covenant pledge and promises to be their redeeming Savior and strong Deliverer from all of their enemies. The king's facile acceptance of this satanic proposal would be more costly to Ahasuerus than he knew, for he had just empowered the enemy of the Jews to sign the death warrant for his beloved queen and wife. Sin always costs us far more than we realize.

Tuesday, August 18th - Esther 3: 12-14

These verses contain a number of details, but the sum of them shows clearly how carefully and extensively Haman worked to ensure that his genocidal order would be completely accomplished throughout the empire. No Jew would be left alive, even in the most obscure or distant village from Persia's capital, Susa. In an evil day, even the weakest and least committed followers of Christ will be carefully targeted by Satan's murderous ire.

Wednesday, August 19th - Esther 3: 12, 13

Clearly, Haman conceived and authored every aspect of this malicious decree. He with subtle and wicked skill managed to attach royal sanction to the decree when he persuaded Ahasuerus to abdicate his responsibilities and to rely uncritically and totally upon the scheming

Agagite who had cast himself as the king's most loyal and beneficial advisor. What the king did not perceive, because Haman's guise covered it, was that this decree would result in the death of Mordecai, who had saved the king's life, and in the death of a multitude of the king's subjects, including his beloved wife and queen. Cunning and capable is our satanic foe. He can persuade us that he is our indispensable ally and advisor, when in fact he is obsessed with his own malicious and carefully prepared hidden agenda that, if effected, will cost us enormously. Recall how the serpent's guile cost our unvigilant first father his life, his dominion over the world, his wife, all of his descendants, and, above all, his fellowship with his God.

Thursday, August 20th - Esther 3: 12, 13

Part of Haman's proposal to the king included an offer of money to be paid by Haman into the royal treasury (v.9). This was a wicked enticement designed to lure the king's agreement rather than to win it with righteous reasoning. Now as the decree is written and distributed throughout the empire a large measure of wicked enticement is included in it. As the king had been lured, so the people were lured to fulfill this genocidal decree with a thorough diligence that would be driven by the prospect of their personal gain. God made us all to be our brothers' keepers, not their killers for the sake of our material gain from their murder.

Friday, August 21st - Esther 3: 13

This verse emphatically tells of the swiftness and thoroughness of the distribution of the death decree against the Jews. *All* of the king's subjects in *all* of his provinces were to attack *all* of the Jews. The Jewish culture, societies, and religion were to be destroyed by the killing of every Jew and the annihilation of them as a people. Not any of them were to be spared by consideration for their tender infancy or aged infirmity. The slaughter was to be complete and done in one day. Thus does Haman, in a fashion that wickedly apes the Lord, set a day of judgment and execution for his enemies. However, those enemies were the friends of the God who has set His day for righteous and truly thorough judgment, and they had been saved by the Lord from all earthly and heavenly judgment.

Saturday, August 22nd - Esther 3: 12, 13

These verses speak of significant dates. On the 13th day of the first month the decree against the Jews was written. The day for their execution was set for the 30th day of the 12th month. Therefore, the death sentence would hang over the heads of the Jews for 11 months without a hint of merciful reprieve in sight. Yet, the decreed day was determined by a wicked man's dependence on the luck of the lots he had thrown. Such a shaky foundation would prove no match for those who stood upon the promise and power of the Lord.

Sunday, August 23rd - Esther 3: 14

We have in v.13 noted the wicked incentive given to the people of the empire to kill the Jews and seize their possessions. Now to this enticement is added the force of law. The edict was not suggestive or permissive but was commanded. Haman had endeavored to bring every thought, feeling, and action of the people of the empire captive to his wicked will. But events are never determined by the will of the wicked but rather by the will of our righteous and gracious Lord.

Monday, August 24th - Esther 3: 15

This chapter concludes with a note of incongruity between the actions of the king and Haman and those of the people of Susa. Wicked Haman and his dupe, Ahasuerus, thinking that their work was as well as finished, sat down to celebrate their anticipated success. Yet, the general population, being less intoxicated by the irrational hatred and deluded pride of Haman, sensed that something was badly wrong with the royal decree to annihilate the Jews. They sensed rightly, however vaguely, that the Lord sets the feet of the wicked in slippery places, and that He would destroy them thoroughly and swiftly in His appointed time (Ps. 73:18-20).

Tuesday, August 25th - Esther 3: 1-15

What we see in this chapter is the insufferable pride of a wicked man being resisted by one righteous man. The fury of Haman against Mordecai bore its bitter fruit in a massive scheme to destroy Mordecai and all of the Jews. We have seen the apparently assured success of this monstrous scheme which, had it been carried out, would have threatened the promise and provision of the God of salvation through His Messiah, who was to be born of the seed of Abraham. Mordecai seemed to bring this massive curse upon himself and all of God's people by his refusal to worship wicked Haman. Yet, we shall see this Jew honored and reigning in the end, rather than being ruined by the schemes and threats of the wicked Agagite. What King Saul failed to do in his victory over Agag in his day, Mordecai was set to do in his apparent defeat and vulnerability. Saul bowed to his Agag by sparing him, and it cost him his kingdom and estranged him from God. Mordecai, as a vanquished exile, takes his stand against his posturing Agagite and against his evil pride and intimidation, and, because he took his stand by God's grace and for God's glory, Mordecai gained victory, new life, honor, and an exalted position wherein he would serve for God's glory and for the good of the Jews and all the people of this empire. To whom are we bowing and for whom do we stand this day?

August 2009

Wednesday, August 26th - Esther 3: 15 – 4: 1

The weak King Ahasuerus and the wicked Agagite Haman forged an evil alliance to do the devil's work. While Haman gave himself to the lying and murdering devil, Mordecai maintained his adamant allegiance to his God. Between these two highly committed men stood the mass of the people who were in confusion, no doubt halting between two opinions. Furthermore, Haman and the king celebrated their edict of death, and drew closer to each other as friends, the way that Herod and Pilate became friends on the day they both turned Jesus over to the executioner, not because they found guilt in Him, but because they both were too weak to resist the Jewish leaders and the crowd that called for His death (Lk. 23:12-25). For his part, Mordecai cried and publically displayed his grief and anguish over such a monstrous edict, and his was a far more appropriate response to the death decree than was celebrating or living in confusion over it. One day the wicked will cry without consolation (Rev. 6:12-17), while the righteous who weep for a season will be comforted (Mt. 5:4) and have lasting joy (Ps. 126:5,6).

Thursday, August 27th – Esther 4: 1-3

As Mordecai led the stand against Haman's idolatrous pretensions, so we find him leading

the chorus of cries issuing from all the Jews. While the king and Haman were glad over the thought of the annihilation of the Jews, Mordecai led his fellow descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the only appropriate response to their death decree: grief. Nor was Mordecai's grief merely inward; he expressed it with the tearing of his regular garments, with his donning of sackcloth and ashes—emblems of humiliation and anguish—and he raised his voice in cries of lamentation. This sparked similar responses among the Jews. While the worldly rejoice at the thought of their plans to extinguish the living sources of testimony to God and His salvation, the righteous cannot contain their grief. But great reversals will come in the end (Rev. 11: 3-13).

Friday, August 28th - Esther 4: 1-3

Neither Mordecai nor the most spiritually keen among the rest of the Jews wailed in grief only because they were marked for death. As the living lights of God in the dark world of sinful men, their sackcloth and tears bore testimony against the wickedness of the decree. That is part of the reason why Mordecai went in his sackcloth weeping and wailing as near to the king's palace as he could approach. Furthermore, these Jews cried out not only in protest against the wicked decree of a weak earthly king; they also raised their cries as appeals to the highest court of their heavenly King. The Word of God and the faith of the people of God teach the Lord's children to make their afflictions productive of their ultimate glory as they direct their cries to and anchor their hopes upon the Lord of their salvation (Ps. 5:2; 18:6; 27:7; 28:2; 57:2).

Saturday, August 29th - Esther 4: 4

When Esther learns about Mordecai's open display of grief, she grimaces and proposes to send him garments. Was her anguish deep and irrepressible as was that of Mordecai, or was she simply embarrassed over what might have seemed to her an extravagant and perplexing display of indecorous grief? When we consider from vv. 7,8 that Esther apparently knew nothing about Haman's machinations to exterminate the Jews, her writhing appears more likely to have resulted from her embarrassment than from her informed empathy with her apparently doomed people. When the actions of our brethren appear to us at times to be extreme and unreasonable, we do well to consider that they know something which, if we knew it too, would prompt us to join them with hearty agreement based on more informed understanding.

Sunday, August 30th - Esther 4: 4

The worst construction we could put on Esther's action in her sending fresh garments to Mordecai is that she was embarrassed by his demonstrated grief and sought to clean him up and extinguish her humiliation. The best construction we can place on her action is that she was trying to make it possible for Mordecai to enter the king's gate, being properly attired, and inform her about the cause of his actions. Scripture does not make clear which construction is right. It may have been that the glories of the place were starting to turn Esther's heart and head away from her people. It may have been that she wanted information from Mordecai's words to her rather than through the perplexing message he was conveying with his wailing and grim attire. In either case, Mordecai declined to remove his sackcloth and put on the garments Esther provided. By his refusal, Mordecai demonstrates that his grief arose from such a serious cause that he could not and would not suspend it or any of its manifestations for any time or reason except the lifting of the death sentence against the Jews. There are times when the wounding of the people of God is so deep that no amount of worldly covering can dress it, but only the hand of God can heal it. During such times, it behooves the faithful to choose to endure ill treatment

with the people of God and to weep with those weeping, rather than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. (Heb. 11:25,26).

Monday, August 31st – Esther 4: 4

Whether she intended to or not, Esther here proposes to deal with Mordecai's grief symptomatically. She offers to cover its outward manifestation rather than to inquire into its deeper cause. When we get a taste of the world's comforts we can, at least for a time, delude ourselves into thinking that no problems are serious and that all solutions are easy. The world would cover our mortal wound and let us die; the Word of God makes clear to us that our wound is incurable and our cause for grief unceasing until we are covered in the righteousness of Christ and healed by His mortal wounds.

Tuesday, September 1st – Esther 4: 5

Esther sought to have Mordecai change his garments. Yet, Mordecai was in a state of perfect response to the death decree against him and all the Jews. It was no time for him to change. However, Esther was the one who needed to change by having her mind filled with the facts that had prompted the grief of her adoptive father. The fact that Mordecai refused the provision she offered served, no doubt, to whet Esther's appetite for the knowledge of the cause of Mordecai's unceasing grief. Accordingly, she sends one of her servants back to Mordecai, this time not to offer him something unnecessary but rather to seek from him an explanation for the cause of his grief. We do well to listen to people in pain to learn from them what they require, rather than glibly to offer them inadequate consolation.

Wednesday, September 2nd – Esther 4: 6, 7

While Mordecai had refused Esther's provision of clothing, he does not refuse to provide her with a full, detailed, and accurate explanation for the cause of his grief. Scripture directs us to be prepared to give to those who ask of us an account for the hope that is within us (1 Pet. 3:15). The Word of God also indicates to us that we should be able to have an accurate grasp of those things that afflict us, so that we can cry out to our Lord in prayer and report to His instruments of help in our lives what are our needs (Gal. 6:2).

Thursday, September 3rd – Esther 4: 8

The account Mordecai gave to Esther's servant, Hathach, was not simply a telling of his woes and a venting of his feelings. Mordecai sets out undeniable and open facts in support of his contention. He did not delude himself with denials of his plight, nor did he let his feelings run riot and prompt him to tear up his copy of the king's edict in vain rage. Instead, with a steady eye and a cool head he studied his enemy and determined to reveal and deal with him as he truly was, not as he might have been made by hysterical accounts. We do well to know our demonic foes and familiarize ourselves and others with their wiles.

Friday, September 4th – Esther 4: 8

Not only did Mordecai provide Esther with a full, accurate, and verifiable report of the plight of all the Jews, but he also prescribed actions that she should take in response to this grim reality. This shows the practical wisdom of those who are truly pious. Mordecai surely was a man of prayer, but he rightly puts feet to his praying by the actions he took and ordered Esther to take. Similarly, Nehemiah prayed to the God of heaven, then he also spoke to his king regarding

the cause of his grief (Neh. 2:4). Our prayers to God often receive the first fruits of their answer when our minds are cleared and quickened and our hearts purified so that we might conceive and execute measures effectively to meet the challenges that drive us to prayer. We Christians are not spectators of life or curious collectors of information; we are to be more than conquerors by our acts of faith.

Saturday, September 5th – Esther 4: 8

Mordecai ordered Esther to act according to his directives. Although she was his queen, his greater knowledge of the machinations of Haman as well as his consequent greater dependence upon his God made Mordecai the master of this situation. Those who best know their Lord are best able with most authority to lead in any situation. Recall how Paul's spurned advice regarding the timing of his voyage to Rome reduced the men on his ship to the realization that they should have listened to him, though he was at that time a prisoner (Acts 27:9-21).

Sunday, September 6th – Esther 4: 8

The orders Mordecai gave to Esther were extraordinary in their character and in their potential consequences. First, he ordered her to go to the king. This action could have proven fatal to Esther, as v.11 informs us. Yet, costly though it may have been, it was and is in any society in any age the right thing for an aggrieved party to lodge his complaint first with the party considered to be in the wrong. Jesus tells us that if our brother sins against us we are to go first to him before we resort to any other means of redress (Mt. 18:15). Even if the man who sins against us is a king and our going to him would seem to condemn us to death, we should go to him because it is right to do so.

Monday, September 7th – Esther 4: 8

Esther was instructed not simply to appear before the king, but to do so with supplication for his favor. The specific favor she was to request was that she might be heard by the king, rather than be killed by him as the law directed for those coming to the king without his having summoned them (v.11). There was, of course, a possibility that she could be put to death. However, she was the queen and both Esther and Mordecai surely knew that Ahasuerus loved her and would likely regard her favorably. This cherished status of Esther's was a result not of her cunning but of her godly character. Many vital doors will open for those who please the Lord and let their lights shine in such a way that men would regard them with pleasure (Prov. 16:7).

Tuesday, September 8th – Esther 4: 8

Based upon the hope and reasonable assumption that Esther's going to the king would be accepted by the king with favor, Mordecai's orders come to the crux of the matter. He tells Esther to plead for her people. With this order, Mordecai implicitly changes his previous instruction that Esther not make known her people or kindred. What necessitates this change is the desperate plight of the Jews under the edict of death. And yet, with this order, Esther is being required to remove a veil that could seemingly have preserved her from being slaughtered with her people and to clothe herself in garments of condemnation and death. Only faith in God could enable her to regard the reproaches and cross of Christ as being greater riches than her newly acquired wealth and high position in the world (Heb. 11:26).

Wednesday, September 9th – Esther 4: 8

By most ways of reckoning, these orders that Mordecai sent to his beloved adopted daughter would seem desperate and doomed. But to a man of faith, like Mordecai, though they were but crumbs of hope they were regarded as crumbs from the table of his heavenly Master, who had promised and at the right time would give his beloved only-begotten Son to die for these Jews and for all of his elect people whose lives had been forfeited by their sins. Faith magnifies slender means, making them to prevail for a godly purpose under the sovereign and saving hand of the King of heaven.

Thursday, September 10th – Esther 4: 9

Why does Scripture record for us the name of this eunuch? What we know of him is that he served with fidelity and discretion not only Esther and Mordecai but all of God's people. Surely none of us should be surprised to meet Hathach in heaven's glory, although we might have to ask for him by his name!

Friday, September 11th – Esther 4: 10, 11

In these verses, Esther counts the cost of what is being asked of her. She reckons on the real possibility of her death. Hence, she implicitly asks that, if possible, Mordecai would let this assignment pass from her. Esther may even have resented that Mordecai had ordered her to accomplish this mission. After all, it was Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman that had resulted in the death edict against the Jews. Now Mordecai's sackcloth and orders to Esther threatened to hasten this coming of the day of her death. Had Esther's time in the king's palace begun to confuse her priorities? Perhaps. However, there is always something initially repulsive about the cross. Once Esther surrenders to it, she will see clearly that Mordecai and all the Jews had been forbidden by their Lord to worship other gods. By trusting and obeying our Lord, we will be hated and persecuted by the world. But the God whom we trust and obey is greater than the world and He laughs His enemies and ours to scorn, as we have been told by the psalmist (Ps. 2:1-5), and as well shall see in this Book of Esther.

Saturday, September 12th – Esther 4: 12, 13

The hesitation of Esther to carry out Mordecai's orders might have seemed reasonable to her. She had reasons drawn from her inside knowledge of the workings of the glorious court of the great imperial king. Yet, her knowledge of the palace operations had apparently instilled fear and dulled faith in Esther. Therefore, Mordecai counters with reasons he had drawn from his understanding of good and evil and the ways of imperiously wicked men—all as seen in the light of God's Word. Accordingly, he challenges Esther to snap out of her imaginary world and realize that her silence and continued hiding of the fact of her solidarity with the Jews would not save her. Faithful are the wounds of a servant of the Lord when he reminds us that our trusting in anything other than God's mercifully provided Mediator will not deliver but rather doom us to death.

Sunday, September 13th – Esther 4: 13, 14

Mordecai's admonition to Esther began with him telling her not to be guided by her imagination. The glitter of the palace and the guise of her silence respecting her religion and people must have been a temptation to Esther not to go to the king and plead for the lives of the Jews. As alluring and seemingly reasonable as this temptation may have been, and as hard as the

course that was being urged upon her must have seemed to Esther, Mordecai was right to declare the reason for her reluctance to be but a figment of her imagination that was charming her. The reality was that she was a Jew, and that truth would ultimately prove a blessing and not a curse to her and to her people. It is the truth of who we are in Christ and in fraternal and loving bonds with those who are also in Him that sets us free and makes us secure.

Monday, September 14th – Esther 4: 13, 14

Mordecai further pulls down the false imaginings of Esther when he declares that apart from her taking the course of action he had prescribed there would be for her no escape from the death decreed for the Jews. There could be no escape for her if she trusted in her position in an earthly king's palace when such kings and rulers are in concerted league against the King of kings (Ps. 2:1-3). The only escape from the wrath of that divine King is through the salvation He offers through His Son, the King He has installed on His holy mountain (Ps. 2:6,10,12).

Tuesday, September 15th – Esther 4: 13, 14

Esther was being tempted not only to trust in her preferred position in the king's palace but also in her silence regarding her religion and her compassion for her people. To this aspect of her temptation Mordecai rightly declares that there could be no salvation for anyone who keeps a shameful silence regarding one's union to the God of heaven through faith in His redeeming Son. Such fearful and shameful silence is condemned by Jesus (Lk. 9:26), and has as its bitter fruit the perishing of the one practicing it. Mordecai further threatens not only Esther with the prospect of her perishing, but he adds that her father's house would perish as well. As her father was already dead, this reference could be to the fact that in her death, her father's line would end, or it could refer to children whom Esther might have, into whom she would naturally inculcate her own fears in place of a saving faith.

Wednesday, September 16th – Esther 4: 13, 14

Not all of Mordecai's remonstrations with Esther were negative. In addition to his demolishing her imagined security, he positively points her to her saving and almighty God. In her imagined security, Esther was under the threat of perishing; yet in her union with the Lord by faith she could have sure hope of relief and deliverance in company with her people. Mordecai was sure of this due to his knowing and believing in the many great and precious promises of God to His people by which they could be certain that He would never forsake them (Deut. 31:6). Mordecai also rightly reckoned on the repeatedly demonstrated power of God to relieve and deliver His people when they seemed to be doomed, such as when He delivered them from Egypt (Ex. 20:1,2). This God is our fortress too.

Thursday, September 17th – Esther 4: 13, 14

In addition to his pointing Esther to the promises and power of their God, Mordecai mentions the divine wisdom of providence when he tells her to consider the significance her being placed in such a royal position from which she could render vital service for her people. The edict that decreed the Jews' death seemed to indicate God's forsaking His people. Yet, Mordecai rightly reasons that the Lord's wisdom and sovereign control over all things were such that He could and would deliver His people through the seeming weakness and foolishness of a Jewish woman who had been exalted to royalty, not to be doomed in it, but to be saved and to be instrumental in the saving her people in it. Our promotions call for us to perform godly duty, however

dangerous and difficult that duty might be, knowing that our service may well save our brethren and ourselves from great peril.

Friday, September 18th – Esther 4: 15, 16

These verses record Esther's reply to the faithful exhortations of Mordecai. What she says in response to his challenging words is full of strength, sweetness, and significance. In sum, Esther was convinced by Mordecai's challenge, and she formed a determined commitment to act according to his orders. Through her commitment she would be instrumental in manifesting the Lord's delivering grace to His people. We always do well to obey godly counsel whatever the cost.

Saturday, September 19th – Esther 4: 15, 16

Esther not only communicates to Mordecai her determination to obey his orders, she also requires of him something that is always a vital component in any godly endeavor. Esther instructs him to gather all of God's people in the capital city that they might fast and, by implication, pray for her. In her priority scheme, praying must come before performing. We do well to adopt this vital priority.

Sunday, September 20th – Esther 4: 15, 16

Esther shows from her words, *if I perish, I perish*, that she consciously counts the cost of her obedience to Mordecai's orders. She will go to the king hoping for the best, but prepared for and at peace with the worst that might come. She rightly chose to die trusting and obeying her God rather than to shirk her duty and perish with her brethren. The doing of our godly duties may at times be very costly, but our Lord's promises and power to preserve us far exceed the highest cost.

Monday, September 21st – Esther 4: 15, 16

Although Esther indicates that she is willing to perish in her service for God and His people, the event will show that she would not perish. No one who by faith trusts in and follows the Lamb of God, who gave Himself to die for the salvation of His people, will ever perish (Jn. 10:27-29; 17:1-3,12). If we are in Christ, whether we live or die we are the Lord's who has triumphed over death for us (Rom. 14:8).

Tuesday, September 22nd – Esther 4: 15, 16

There may come times in our service for our Lord, when we may actually seal our testimony of faith in Him and obedience to Him with our own blood. But even then, when we by faith stand and serve in Christ's cause we need never fear that we will perish. This is so because our Savior has tasted and triumphed over death for us, so that we are freed from the fear of death that had kept us in its bondage before we had faith in Christ (Heb. 2:14,15; Rev. 1:17,18).

Wednesday, September 23rd – Esther 4: 15, 16

Mordecai had threatened Esther with a perishing that eventually but surely would have resulted from her refusal to act in faithful trust in her God (v.14). Yet, by the course she was now choosing, she seemed to be embracing a more imminent perishing at the hands of her Persian husband and king. The difference between these two perishings is that one would result from sinful fear and would be followed by divine judgment (Heb. 9:27), while the other would

be a faithful embracing of the cross of Christ by which the one losing his life for the Savior's sake would find eternal and glorious life (Mt. 16:25).

Thursday, September 24th – Esther 4: 15, 16

Esther agrees to violate the law of an earthly empire that should have resulted in her death. She did this in order to obey the law of her heavenly King, who commanded His people to do all in their power not to kill but lovingly to preserve life (Ex. 20:13; Lev. 19:18). In her obeying God rather than men, she does not die but lives and serves instrumentally to save her people from death. We do well to heed God's laws that preserve life, even when His laws cause us to run contrary to man's laws that kill.

Friday, September 25th – Esther 4: 17

As Esther had determined to do all that Mordecai had ordered her to do (v.8), so now Mordecai submits himself to carry out the commands of Esther (v.16). In all relationships guided by the Word of God and empowered by the loving Holy Spirit of God, there will be a mutual subjection to one another in reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21). Even in the life of a family, where the father leads and his children follow, and especially in the intimacy of a marriage, where the husband is loving head and the wife gives respectful submission, there will be times of give and take, commanding and compliance, that will be mutually exchanged according to who most truly apprehends the Lord's leading at a given time. As Esther and Mordecai blessedly cooperated rather than cursedly competed—he rightly directing performance, she rightly requiring prayer—so should our friendships, families, and marriages in the Lord be characterized by sincere and loving cooperation in our knowing and doing the good and glorious will of our saving Lord.

September 2009

Saturday, September 26th - Esther 5: 1

In the fifth chapter of Esther we begin to see the first fruits of prayerful fasting and faithful action. We are told that Esther donned her royal robes and entered the inner court of the king's palace, standing in view of the king as he sat on his throne. Her reliance was upon neither her royal position nor her relation to the king, for although she was the queen and the wife of her king, she still was in violation of the law of the empire when she appeared before him without the warrant of his royal summons. Had Esther relied upon her royal robes and marriage alone, she may well have perished. But she came to this earthly king dressed in the fasting prayers of her people—prayers that she, Mordecai, and the Jews had offered to the King of heaven for three days (4:16), and it surely was through those prayers that she lived and succeeded in her doing her godly duty. Faithful prayers form an essential part of the armor of God that enables those who are clad in it to stand in the face of any challenge (Eph. 6:10-19).

Sunday, September 27th – Esther 5: 2, 3

The favor that Esther obtained in the sight of the king was the fruit of the faithful prayers of God's people. She prevailed with Ahasuerus, in spite of her violation of Persian law, because she and her saving cause had been saturated by the imploring cries of the Jews that ascended to the King of heaven. We should see in this favorable reception of Esther an encouragement for us

to believe that the fervent prayers of faithful people can accomplish more than the art, cunning, and manipulation of faithless men (Jas. 5:16).

Monday, September 28th - Esther 5: 2, 3

The favor obtained by Esther was no small consolation granted with cold civility or begrudging resentment. The king with apparent gladness and affectionate acceptance of Esther makes to her a lavishly grand offer—to the point of half of his extensive empire. This shows us that our God always answers our prayers above what we ask or think (Eph. 3:20). We may also note that while earthly kings at times may be moved to make generous gestures, our heavenly Father does not pour upon us merely half of His glorious blessings, but has given to us in Christ every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3).

Tuesday, September 29th - Esther 5: 4

In response to her favorable reception by the king and his lavish offer, Esther expresses a request that is perplexing. In view of the express offer of up to half of his kingdom, and the fact that the sparing of the lives of the Jews would have been a favor well within the bounds of this offer, it would seem the right and obvious thing that Esther should strike while the iron is hot and plead for her people as Mordecai had ordered her to do (4:8). Instead, she invites the king and, of all people, wicked Haman, to a picnic. Why does Esther do this? The unfolding of events will shed light on that question. For now we should note that not all of the results of prayer are immediately apparent, even to the faithful, as answers to their prayerful asking.

Wednesday, September 30th - Esther 5: 4

The effects of Esther's request in response to the king's offer were that she delayed expressing her pleading for her people, she shifted the venue for her pleading from the palace to a more domestic setting, and she included Haman as a witness to her planned pleading. Does this request represent faithful and wise preparation for her asking for the lives of the Jews, or is it the result of Esther losing her nerve as her faithful resolve was exhausted? It could be either of these and we do well to track both possibilities to the final resolution of this matter. We shall see that our God works graciously for us either in response to our faith or in spite of our lapses of faith.

Thursday, October 1st – Esther 5: 4

With such an open invitation, why did Esther delay her pleading for her people? It could have been that doubts and fears began to drown her faithful resolve, as the wind and waves on the stormy sea displaced Peter's faithful focus on Jesus and thereby caused him to sink. Such a failure of faith could have prompted Esther's stalling. However, the outcome of events will show that even if her fears gained ascendancy for a time, the Lord was committed to working in such a way as to show all of his children that their fears are unfounded in light of His great and precious promises and in view of His wise, loving, and almighty operations for us (Rom. 8:28).

Friday, October 2nd – Esther 5: 4

There is another reason that could have prompted Esther's request, and it is a reason that comports with the operations not of fear but of a strong faith. It is possible that Esther rightly and wisely perceived that the timing was not right for her to make her vital request of the king. Timing is a critical factor in almost everything we do. If events and men's capacities and

dispositions are seen by the faithful not to be ripe for a godly mission, such faithful ones wisely resist the temptation to act in rash presumption and, instead, wait upon the Lord to bring all things to the required degree of ripeness. Principled patience is the opposite of fearful procrastination.

Saturday, October 3rd – Esther 5: 4

Esther does not only delay her pleading for her people, she also shifts the place where she will plead for their lives. With her request in this verse, Esther buys herself more time for praying and godly thinking, and shifts the place to her own turf. Right time and place are critical for most matters. More than once Jesus avoided a death that would have been not in His appointed time or in His chosen place of a cross in Jerusalem. We do well to consider with due thoroughness all of our words and actions. Comprehensive thinking is a mark of faith, whereas impulsive and inconsiderate words and deeds bespeak folly.

Sunday, October 4th – Esther 5: 4

Another factor that Esther's request in this verse incorporates is the presence of Haman. It would seem that his personal attendance, when Esther was going to make her appeal that the king overturn Haman's decree, would fearfully complicate an already delicate and potentially dangerous interview. And yet our God often prompts His people to face, if not precipitate, a showdown with evil, calling the wicked out of their lairs in order decisively to deal with them. Backbiters are always condemned in Scripture (Prov. 25:23), whereas the Word of God commends those who face well-armed, defiant, and blaspheming giants in the name of the Lord (1 Sam. 17:45).

Monday, October 5th – Esther 5: 4

A final feature of this initial request is that it would serve to disarm both the king and Haman that a woman, a weaker vessel, was simply inviting them to a banquet. Thus, either wittingly or unwittingly, Esther disguises her ultimate aim with this preparatory disarming tactic. Her pleading for the Jews would run counter to Haman's murderous hatred and to the king's pride, since he would be asked to acknowledge his mistake in his reliance upon Haman and his approval of his edict of death. Esther had some hard-to-swallow pills to serve these men at her banquet, but their foolish underestimation of this weaker vessel and of her God would serve to catch them unprepared to resist these pills. When we are weak, we are stronger than we or our enemies know (2 Cor. 12:10).

Tuesday, October 6th - Esther 5: 5-8

These verses summarize for us what occurred at Esther's banquet. The king eagerly and favorably responded to her invitation, bringing Haman with him as Esther had requested. The weak king and the wicked administrator of his empire enjoyed the food and, as is especially noted, the wine that Esther provided. Finally, the king repeated his most generous offer to grant Esther's request to the magnitude of half of his kingdom. Seemingly, all that Esther could have desired to achieve from her previous delay in pleading for her people in response to the king's first request had been achieved at this banquet. However, for no apparent reason, Esther delays further by inviting the king and Haman to another banquet on the following day. There are only two possible reasons for this further delay: either her fears continued to paralyze her; or her faith prompted her wisely to wait until some clear divine initiative signaled to her that the time was right for her to ask for the deliverance of her people. Esther is either a shaky reed or a faithful

soul masterfully attuned to God's will and ways. Whatever was actually the case with her, these things are written in Scripture to make us more attuned to the perfect timing and trustworthiness of our God.

Wednesday, October 7th - Esther 5: 5-8

If Esther's weakness of faith prompted her delays, then the lesson we learn is that God can and does use weak and wavering instruments in His service. Recall the apostle Paul's fear and trembling when he first arrived at Corinth, and what great things he produced there when his fear was replaced by a revived faith (Acts 18:9-11; 1 Cor. 2:1-5). Furthermore, if Esther's faith is here in fact weak, we see it growing, however gradually. A new feature in her second invitation is that she commits herself to making her request in response to the king's offer. Whether she realized it or not, her commitment to act committed her God to act in a way that would not smother her faith but fan it to brightly burning intensity.

Thursday, October 8th – Esther 5: 5-8

If Esther's faith, rather than fear, prompted her delays, we then see how wisely she was acting to wait upon the divine initiative. For it is very likely that had she expressed her pleading for the Jews at the first or second time the king had asked her to tell him her desire, he who had come so fondly to rely on Haman would not have so easily overturned the edict that the Agagite had drafted and the king had approved. Still less would Ahasuerus have reversed himself and offended Haman at the request of a wife who had hidden from him the fact that she was of the despised and doomed Jewish people. Ahasuerus had already angrily put away one wife when he perceived an insult from her. Much humbling and educating of the king and breaking of Haman's power and hold on him needed to be accomplished before Esther's request would receive a fair hearing and reasonable consideration. Esther's untimely asking could not have accomplished that, but the Lord could and would accomplish it on the very night before Esther's second banquet. It is wonderful that God graciously blesses His people in spite of their weak faith; it is more wonderful and satisfying to the faithful and honoring to God when we trust and obey the Lord, knowing at every turn that He can and will orchestrate all things for our good (Rom. 8:28).

Friday, October 9th - Esther 5: 9-14

These verses reveal to us how the wicked misconstrue and seek to exploit the delays of the faithful and the patience of the Lord. It is helpful for our understanding if we read through chapters 6 and 7 to learn of the outcome of the wicked plans that are formulated in these verses. It is invariable that God uses for the good of His people even what the wicked plot against them, while the same harms the wicked plan for the righteous rebound upon their own heads. We never need fear the threats of evil men, whose opposition will ultimately prove to work their own destruction but to work our salvation (Phil. 1:28).

Saturday, October 10th - Esther 5: 9

As Haman left one banquet with the king and queen and anticipated another, we are informed that he was outwardly *glad* and inwardly *pleased of heart*. To all appearances, this wicked man was completely filled with joy. But his joy was a brittle counterfeit of the joy in the Lord that is the believer's strength and a component of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The counterfeit quality of Haman's joy may be perceived when we consider its cause. Haman was an evil man who had a

blasphemous pride and had wickedly managed to consign all the Jews of the empire to death. The delays of Esther that were superintended by God were, even for a man like Haman, gracious divine provision that gave him time to reflect upon his evil ways and repent of them. The patience of the Lord is ever intended—whether men realize it or not—to bring the sinner to repentance from his sins, not to allow him to rejoice in and compound them (Rom. 2:4).

Sunday, October 11th - Esther 5: 9

Haman's joy is further seen to be counterfeit when we see how easily his gladness is replaced by gloom and grim hatred. There is not only no good foundation for his joy, such as believers have in their salvation in the Lord, but there is also no substance to this man's gladness. It is easily shattered by the appearance of Mordecai, whose refusal to bow to Haman pricked his inflated pride and drained him of all the counterfeit joy that puffed him up with its vacuous giddiness. In contrast to Haman's quickly vanquished joy, we should recall the enduring and substantial joy that Paul and Silas manifested in their Philippian dungeon (Acts 16:22-25).

Monday, October 12th - Esther 5: 9, 10

Although Haman burned with anger when he saw Mordecai, the Agagite restrained himself from displaying his anger. We must not mistake this restraint for true self-control that is another component of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Instead, Haman imposed upon himself a temporary containment of his hatred until he could get himself away from the man he must have feared as well as hated and surround himself with his fawning family and friends to whom he looked to shore up his flagging happiness. True self-control is practiced by those who bring all of their thoughts, intentions, feelings, words, and works captive to the good and loving will of God in Christ. True peace and joy are found only through the sweet fruit of the Spirit.

Tuesday, October 13th - Esther 5: 11, 12

Amidst his friends and family, Haman seeks godless counsel and comfort. He rehearses all of his natural endowments and attainments in order to remind them and even more to remind himself of his worldly greatness. Nor had his greatness ceased to grow to ever increasing heights, as his newfound intimacy with the king and queen would appear to indicate. What Haman was really boasting in was a growing pile of rubbish, as Saul the Pharisee learned about himself after he came to know true and glorious treasure in Christ (Phil. 3:4-8). In fact, it was Haman's guilt before God that was increasing in his life, not his glory.

Wednesday, October 14th - Esther 5: 11-13

As Haman was boasting of his riches, he was compelled to confess his true poverty. One man, standing in the strength of the Lord, was enough to expose the empty glitter of Haman's glory and the gossamer flimsiness of his joy. The refusal of Mordecai to bow to Haman was all it took to ruin completely the satisfaction and joys of this arrogant Agagite. How infinitely different it is with the solid joys and lasting pleasures that the poorest and most afflicted Christian possesses in Christ and in the sure and substantial hope of a glory with which all earthly sufferings cannot begin to compare (Rom. 8:18).

Thursday, October 15th - Esther 5: 11-14

Haman begins by listing his worldly fortunes for his family and friends but he ends with a lament that dissipates all joy he thought he had in his fortunes. For the believer, weeping lasts

for a season but joy comes at the last and eternal day. For the believer, glorious resurrection follows death. For the unbeliever, the reward of common grace comes before the eternal condemnation of divine justice. We can endure our crosses for the joy set before us; the unregenerate find even what joys they have in this life spoiled by the faintest reminder that there is a God to whom they must answer for their refusal to bow to Him and find true blessing in Him while they persist in their quest for the guilty and fleeting pleasures of sin.

Friday, October 16th - Esther 5: 11-14

The relief Haman seeks for his dashed joy is from his fawning family and friends, not from the faithful wounds of the godly or the saving Lord of the godly. Haman, like all of the wicked, does not desire true healing and happiness that come only when one repents of his sins and turns in trusting faith to God in Christ. He does not seek peace in his being reconciled to God and joy in his being a new man who loves God and his neighbor. Instead, he seeks condolences from flatterers and counsel that will encourage him to do more evil that would compound his guilt before God. Those who flatter are sorry comforters, whereas those who speak the truth in love serve to minister true help and healing.

Saturday, October 17th - Esther 5: 14

The death of Mordecai had previously been determined by the edict that decreed the death of all Jews in the empire. The flimsy nature of Haman's joy can be gauged not only by the fact that a single man could ruin it, but also by the fact that the mere delay of that man's death was enough to destroy this wicked Agagite's counterfeit joy. Also, the vile and evil character of Haman's family and friends is made evident to us when we consider that they gave counsel to have Mordecai immediately executed simply so that petulant Haman could have his easily demolished pleasure restored. When a man who has done nothing except worship his God must be killed to rekindle joy in another man's life, something is monstrously wrong and wicked in those who counsel the godly man's death and in the one who is pleased to accept such counsel. Men given over by God to the power of their sins will always try to kill the godly and God Himself if they think it would enhance their idolatrous pleasure.

Sunday, October 18th - Esther 5: 14

The counsel given to Haman was apparently expressed by his wife, Zeresh, and seconded by his friends. What a grim and wicked helpmeet Zeresh must have been to conceive of and offer to her husband such counsel. But as shocking as this murderous counsel may be, it was far less devastating than the counsel the first wife, Eve, gave to her husband, whereby our first parents accomplished the judicial death of the entire human race. Only our gracious, wise, sovereign and omnipotent God can rescue His people from such infernal counsels of death.

Monday, October 19th - Esther 5: 14

The counsel that Haman's wife and friends gave to him called not only for Mordecai's death but also prescribed a most ostentatious mode for his execution. A special gallows of exaggerated height was to be erected just for Mordecai's hanging. The measure of a cubit was varied in ancient times from 18 inches to 27 inches. Accordingly, the gallows would have stood anywhere between 75 and 112 feet high. Such a prominent instrument for hanging indicates the titanic arrogance of one ordering its construction, although Haman surely thought that it would indicate his supreme ascendancy over his enemy, Mordecai. Little did Haman suspect that he was calling

for the erection of an instrument for his own execution. God causes that which the wicked intend to harm the righteous to help and honor the righteous, while He makes all harm in the intended evil to rebound upon the head of the wicked.

Tuesday, October 20th - Esther 5: 14

The murderous counsel pleased Haman and he hastened to have the gallows built. Men hasten in accordance with their loves. The sinner, who loves evil, hastens to do evil; the children of God, who love their saving Lord, hasten to do His will. Both the wicked and the righteous move in accordance with the pleasure they take in either killing others to please themselves or in lovingly serving others to please their God who first loved and savingly served them through His death for them.

Wednesday, October 21st - Esther 5: 14

Haman was pleased with the apparently certain prospect that he had of hanging Mordecai before his banquet with the king and Esther. The gallows were made and the only thing Haman had to do to ensure Mordecai's hanging was to ask the king to order it. Ahasuerus, who had already ordered the death of all the Jews, would hardly have refused to grant the early execution of one Jew at the request of the man he had exalted to practical sovereignty over the empire. Worldly eyes take pleasure in apparent certainties that align with their sinful desires. Yet, Scripture says and the faithful believe that God has set the worldly in slippery places (Ps. 73:18), while the Lord has given Himself to the faithful as their refuge and their source of eternal joy and holy pleasure (Ps. 16:1,11).

Thursday, October 22nd - Esther 6: 1, 2

The desire and determination of Haman was to hang Mordecai. The directive of Haman, who was exalted to an eminence in the kingdom only surpassed by the king, was to have a tall gallows built for Mordecai's execution. We can see how busy Haman was, after his picnic with the king and Esther, plotting and working to achieve deadly evil against one of the Lord's servants. No power or person on earth seemed available or capable of stopping Haman's hanging of Mordecai. Yet, Mordecai, who may have been at this point unaware of his own mortal danger, did not rely on any earthly power for his help (4:14). The God of the Jews would not only deliver His people from their decreed death, but He would spark that deliverance through His salvation of this one lamb marked by Haman for slaughter. If our God is for us, who can prevail against us (Rom. 8:31ff)?

Friday, October 23rd - Esther 6: 1, 2

The infinite greatness of our God's wisdom and the absolute authority of His sovereignty enable Him to accomplish stupendous feats with the most slender and unlikely instruments. In this matter of stopping Haman's murderous juggernaut, the Lord does not employ an army or even His own almighty arm. So completely do all things ever remain in His sovereign control, despite appearances to the contrary, that our Lord can transform Haman's imposing plans into a toppled string of dominos simply by His disturbing the sleep of one man. The Lord would not let Ahasuerus sleep on this critical night. What God would begin by His opening of the king's physical eyes, He would complete with the opening of the eyes of the king's understanding. Then Ahasuerus would perceive the good character and service of the Jews, the wicked character of Haman, and the fact that the Agagite had duped the king into a monstrous

and murderous conspiracy. Behold what wonders our God can perform through His strategically employed denials of something as natural and seemingly innocuous as sleep.

Saturday, October 24th - Esther 6: 1-3

The specific cause of the king's insomnia on this critical night appears to have been that Ahasuerus sensed some forgotten service that had been rendered to him and never rewarded by him. That could explain why the king ordered the historical records to be read to him. It could also have been the case that the king was simply mentally and physically agitated and sought the soothing and sleep-inducing reading of the history books. Whatever the case, when the royal failure to reward Mordecai's life-saving service to the king was discovered, Ahasuerus rightly determined to rectify the omission. The timing of this discovery could not have been more perfect, and the determination of the king could not have been more opposed to the plans of Haman, who was hastening to the king to request Mordecai's hanging. Will Mordecai be honored or hanged? That matter will be determined in accordance not with Haman's murderous might but with the Lord's standard and determination of right.

Sunday, October 25th - Esther 6: 1-3

The king had forgotten Mordecai and his godly service; the King of kings constantly had His servant in mind and embraced him in heart. Therefore, the Lord put Mordecai and his service into the king's mind at this vital time. Given the intensified focus of Haman's murderous plan for Mordecai, we may imagine how disappointed Mordecai would have been with Esther's delays had he known of them. But Mordecai would have no cause for disappointment in the plans, timing, and provision of his God. If we forget God, He never forgets us; and when He brings His exalting blessing upon us, we shall see how we had no cause to doubt or be disappointed in Him, or His way, or His instruments, or His timing throughout the course of when we regarded ourselves to have been forgotten and forsaken by Him.

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Monday, October 26th - Esther 6: 1-4

Although the king commanded 127 provinces, he could not command a single night's sleep. Although Haman had drafted an edict and had it sealed with the king's signet ring, his plans and wicked work would fail to destroy any of the Jews, especially Mordecai. The king could not sleep because God had work for him to do. It was a work of discovering Mordecai's loyal service and honoring him for it. Haman did not want to sleep as he hastened to secure Mordecai's hanging. But God had other work for him to do, namely, pressing Haman into the work of honoring the one Jew that the Agagite hated above all others. Surely we can see in this how, despite what men propose, it is God who disposes all things for the good of His people.

Tuesday, October 27th – Esther 6: 3, 4

However strongly men may join themselves together in a wicked confederacy against God and His people, the Lord easily and effectively breaks them asunder. With a disturbance of the king's sleep and the bringing to his mind of a good service that he had failed to reward, the Lord prompted the determination of Ahasuerus to honor Mordecai. At the same time, the Lord let Haman's hatred and arrogant presumption prompt him to assume that Mordecai would be hanged. Here we see how the Lord divides and conquers His enemies. The unions and the

separations of the wicked are ordained by the Lord and serve His determination to exalt His people and to vanquish their enemies (Rev. 17:16,17).

Wednesday, October 28th - Esther 6: 3-6

The king had discovered his neglect to reward Mordecai, and it was at the time of that discovery that Haman entered the scene. These men of high position and great power, who had a close working relationship, are now unknowingly in opposing courses. Neither was aware of the fact that God was opening the eyes of the king's understanding while at the same time letting Haman go further into the blindness caused by his pride and anger. Accordingly, the king was humbled and determined to correct his fault, while Haman continued to swell in pride and determination to achieve his murderous intention. The king's desire to honor Mordecai would prevail because the King of heaven gives prevailing grace to the humble while He opposes the proud.

Thursday, October 29th - Esther 6: 5, 6

The king was pleased to learn that Haman had entered the palace court; Haman was pleased to be so eagerly welcomed by the king. Each man would have been shocked to learn how radically different the reason for his own pleasure was from that of the other man. Haman had come wanting to hang Mordecai on a high gallows and assumed the king would permit this. Haman's delight was also heightened by his mistaken supposition that the king intended to exalt him to even higher position than he already had. Opposed to this, the king's delight was in his having his most respected advisor at hand to help him formulate a fitting honor for the man Haman was determined to hang. Sin and sinful ventures contain within themselves the seeds of their own destruction, but the Lord adds to such consequences the hand of His confusing judgments whereby each wicked man's sword is turned against his fellow.

Thursday, October 30th - Esther 6: 6

In answering the king's question, Haman does not ask the identity of the man who was to receive the honors, nor does he seek to know the nature of the man's service that had prompted the king to reward him. Instead of his asking to learn more, Haman assumes that he knows all. His knowledge was not based in fact but arose from his wicked heart's desire. An impure heart is a sorry counselor.

Saturday, October 31st – Esther 6: 6-9

Haman's pride deceives him into thinking that his reply to the king would determine the nature and extent of his own reward. Accordingly, the foolish Agagite goes all out to propose a lavish reward. There is divine irony in this, as God determines not only to deliver His servant from Haman's gallows but also to employ Haman in the honoring of His servant. So it has been, is, and always will be for all of the Lord's servants. Our Lord makes us to be more than conquerors.

Sunday, November 1st – Esther 6: 6-9

Haman assumed that he was hours away from executing his wicked judgment against Mordecai and enjoying honors of his own making from the king. Instead, the King of heaven was working out His own righteous judgment. Part of that divine judgment was God giving Haman over to the power of his sin (Rom. 1:24-26, 28). Any soul so delivered into the power of

his sin invariably digs his own grave even as he thinks he is achieving his own promotion. Accordingly, Haman works with relish and zeal to produce dishonor and destruction for himself, while the honors he sought are conferred upon the meek servant of Christ.

Monday, November 2nd – Esther 6: 6-9

It is significant that the honors Haman thinks he is fashioning for himself are rich with royal trappings. In every way short of his sitting on the throne, the Agagite was intending to display to the people of Susa that he was virtually their king. Judging from Haman's arrogance and cunning ambition, we are probably correct to assume that such aping of the king would be but another step toward his grasping for the throne itself. The king had offered up to half of his kingdom to humble Esther, but proud Haman was busy attempting to steal the entirety of the kingdom. Such overarching pride comes before a great fall.

Tuesday, November 3rd – Esther 6: 10

Before Haman's body was hung from the gallows he had built for Mordecai (Esth. 7:9,10), the hopes of the Agagite dropped from a height greater than that of the high gallows. Ironically, when the king spoke the words of this verse he essentially said to Haman: *Your will be done*. Despite all of the careful cunning and guile the wicked so confidently employ to advance themselves, they invariably learn when it is too late for them to repent that they have been working to promote the glory of the God whom they have despised and the good of His people whom they have hated.

Wednesday, November 4th – Esther 6: 10

The tension between the opposed agendas of honoring or hanging Mordecai is resolved with the king's directive. Mordecai, far from being hanged, would be publically and greatly honored. Whether Esther's delay in expressing to the king her request resulted from fear or faith, we cannot but marvel at how masterly effective and abundantly productive her delay proved to be. She would have pleaded for the sparing of the Jews' lives; here we see that Mordecai's life was not only spared but also advanced with exalting honors. Here is a token of the deliverance and glorious exaltation of all of the Lord's people in every age and in every trying circumstance. It is our Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

Thursday, November 5th – Esther 6: 10, 11

Haman was clearly thunderstruck by the king's announcement that Mordecai was the man to be honored. It was the very last thing in Haman's thinking that his most hated enemy should be so openly exalted. No less shocked will be all those in the final day of judgment who have neglected or refused to honor God by trusting in the Savior He has sent into the world (Rev. 6:12-17).

Friday, November 6th - Esther 6: 10, 11

So shocked was Haman by the words of the king that all of his powers of flattery and smooth cunning forsook him, leaving him no choice but to comply with all that the king had directed. Far from Haman being honored by the king, the Agagite is directed by the king to honor Mordecai. Far from Haman being exalted by the king, he is made to serve his hated enemy, leading him throughout Susa on a royal steed. Far from the mouth of Haman serving to express honors he would receive, the Agagite is made to cry out acclaiming words of honor for

the man he had every expectation of hanging on that day. What great, just, and glorious reversals our Lord works within a few minutes of a single night. Patient trust in our Lord is our best and wisest course, especially when we fear that He is allowing the wicked too much time to threaten the righteous with destruction. Our God is the Maker and the Master of time, and He does not require much of it to subdue His foes and exalt His friends.

Saturday, November 7th - Esther 6: 12

This verse briefly indicates to us the aftermath of Haman's reversed fortunes and Mordecai's royally conferred honors. Mordecai returned to the king's gate. He returned there not to request further royal honors for which he had developed a taste, but rather hastened to resume his godly vigilance at the post of his assumed duty. By such action the godly Jew displays the attitude Paul had when he counted worldly honors as rubbish in comparison with the surpassing treasure of his knowing Christ (Phil. 3:7-11). While Mordecai may have appreciated his momentary donning of a royal robe, his sights were never off of the glorious robe of God's provision through Christ to come. Therefore, Mordecai removed the robe of an earthly king temporarily loaned to him in order to put on once more the sackcloth of his mourning over the death decreed for all of the Jews. In this he lays aside worldly honors in order to resume his humble service of suffering with the people of God, awaiting the Lord's deliverance and exaltation.

Sunday, November 8th – Esther 6: 12

In the aftermath of his honoring ride through Susa, Mordecai hastened to return to his post of duty awaiting the triumphant deliverance of the Lord (Esth. 4:14). At the same time, Haman hastened not to return to his work at the king's palace, but rather fled to his home, seeking personal comfort from his family and friends for the crushing disappointments he had suffered. In contrast with Mordecai's sackcloth that signified his faithful mourning, from which he would surely be comforted by God (Mt. 5:4), Haman covered his head as one who had been thoroughly defeated and was entirely dejected. His was a remorse from which no relief could be expected. For Haman, no divine deliverance would come, but the king he had sought to usurp would order his head, now covered in shame, to be placed in a hangman's noose at an execution to which Haman was nearer than he knew. All the surprises for the righteous are wondrous; all the surprises for the wicked are woeful worst than their darkest imaginings.

Monday, November 9th - Esther 6: 12

There is another character whose reaction is implied in this verse. Due to the public nature of Mordecai's royal reward, Esther surely knew about her adoptive father's exaltation and Haman's reduction. Surely she was heartened by the development and would rightly have seen this as a token from the Lord signaling to her that she should with all confidence ask the king that day for the lives of the Jews. If there had been fears paralyzing her and causing her delay in appealing for her people, they would have been swept away by this amazing development. Now, without fear or hesitation she could do exactly what Mordecai had directed her to do, namely, plead for the lives not merely of the Jews but of those who were her people (Esther. 4:8). By that precise way of pleading, she would identify herself with the people under a death decree, but also identify herself with Mordecai, a representative of her people who had served to save the king's life and had been rewarded for his service with royal honors. Who would not serve fearlessly in the strength of such a position of being identified with a royal favorite? Why should we, who are

accepted by the King of heaven in His beloved Son, ever fear standing by His enabling power and serving for His glory and the good of His people?

Tuesday, November 10th - Esther 6: 12

The significance of the token of Mordecai's exaltation was that it was an open demonstration of divine mastery of the entire situation facing Esther, Mordecai, and all of the Jews. However fearfully and imperfectly their prayers were offered, the Jews were all in the merciful and mighty hand of their saving God, and could know it with abounding assurance when they saw with their own eyes the masterful work of the Lord abasing Haman and exalting Mordecai. While it has been to us somewhat unclear whether Esther's delaying issued from her faith or her fear, it is now abundantly clear to all that her waiting for the divine initiative was the wisest and most productive course she could have followed. Scripture makes clear to us here and in other places that there are times when the most effective thing we can do is to be still and wait upon the working of the Lord our God (Ps. 25:3).

Wednesday, November 11th - Esther 6: 13

The Word of God tracks Haman's return to his home and to the family and friends who had only hours previously cheered him with the counsel to have a prominent gallows built for the hanging of Mordecai. Upon his return, the Agagite could do nothing but complain of his frustrated plans. This time there is no recounting of his glories (Esth. 5:11,12), for the day's events had opened Haman's eyes to the fact that his glories were more imagined than real. Now even the comfort of his delusion was forever gone in view of the reality of Mordecai's royal exaltation. Nothing disheartens and disarms the wicked like the standing of the faithful in their exalted Lord (Eph. 2:10ff; Phil. 4:13; Col. 2:15).

Thursday, November 12th - Esther 6: 13

If Haman expected any shred of comfort and hope from his family and friends, even that morsel of expectation was denied him when his wife revealed by her words that she had rightly read the significance of the token of Mordecai's royal ride that day. Zareh declares truly that the honoring of Mordecai and of all the Jews had but begun, while at the same time Haman's fall was only starting. Within hours, Haman would be lifted up in a way he could not have imagined and would fall 50 cubits to his death. We need never fear the strutting of the proud.

Friday, November 13th - Esther 6: 13, 14

As shocking as the king's directive for Haman to serve up the honors to Mordecai had been to the Agagite, the worst news awaited Haman at his home and would come to him through the lips of his wife. Zareh had apparently reflected further upon the fact that her husband's enemy was a Jew. As the hearts of the Canaanites, especially in Jericho, had melted with dread when they learned of all that the Lord did for His people in Egypt and after their exodus from that land (Josh. 2:10,11), so here Haman's wife declares her husband's doom before the people who were loved and secured by the hand of their almighty God. As bad as his day had been thus far, the worst for Haman was yet to be. In contrast, the best for all believers in Christ is always yet to be.

Saturday, November 14th - Esther 6: 13, 14

The words of Zareh must have fallen hard upon Haman. Yet, the fact that she was declaring not her own opinion but the truth gave greater weight to her words. Her discouraging words

soon were shown to have been prophetic, as the king's agents arrived to bring Haman to Esther's banquet where he would face the queen's words that would expose his wickedness and ignite the wrath of the king, who would cause Haman's hanging preparations for Mordecai to rebound upon the head of the wicked Agagite. Complete and thorough will be the fall of all the wicked who now boast in vain and work their own destruction.

Sunday, November 15th - Esther 6: 14

It is possible that Haman viewed his being escorted to Esther's banquet as a welcome relief from the shocks he had received thus far that day. If he did find such comfort it would soon be revealed as a further delusion that would be dissipated by the reality of his imminent judgment. All who say in their hearts that there is no God to whom they must one day answer for their godless and loveless deeds are fools who feed upon the husks of their own delusions.

Monday, November 16th - Esther 7: 1, 2

Esther's banquet began as congenially as did the banquet the queen had given on the previous day. There was food and wine and fellowship enjoyed by Ahasuerus, Haman, and Esther. In all probability such pleasantries were grasped by Haman as encouragements for him to regain his cunning composure and perhaps view the previous matters of Mordecai's royal reward and the discouraging words of Zeresh as mere temporary setbacks to his murderous ambitions. After all, Haman's death decree still stood, and Esther (whom he did not yet know to be a Jew) seemed to favor him. It may have seemed to Haman that all could yet be sorted out in his favor, especially when he here had opportunity to lubricate the process of further influencing the king with the wine that Ahasuerus clearly enjoyed. All of this might seem reasonable and possible so long as Haman left God out of his reckoning. In fact, it was all vain folly since God was clearly in the equation acting for His people.

Tuesday, November 17th - Esther 7: 1, 2

Whatever delusions Haman may have been trying to construct in an attempt to repair his shattered composure, the fact is clear that the Agagite is in deeper trouble at this banquet than he could possibly have imagined. The inconceivable royal honoring of his hated enemy had turned Haman's proud and wicked pleasure (Esth. 5:14) to mourning and shame (Esth. 6:12). Now an even more inconceivable reality was about to come crashing down on Haman. Queen Esther was about to reveal that she was a Jew armed with words that would end not only Haman's career but also his life. The day of judgment is much nearer to the wicked than they realize, and the magnitude of the judgment is more awful than the wicked can imagine.

Wednesday, November 18th - Esther 7: 1, 2

Esther was about to destroy Haman with her words. The king invited Esther to speak those words. As on the previous day, so at this second day's banquet the king asks Esther to express her petition to him. He gives renewed assurance of his receptive and generous disposition when he offers her up to half his kingdom. But what was different at this second banquet, where all else seemed to be the same, was that the Lord had confirmed His Word to His covenant people through His work of giving them a token in Mordecai's public honoring. The finite, fallible, and changeable words and offers of earthly kings are shaky reeds upon which men depend, but those who rely on the Lord's Word and works will be emboldened to ask for life from death and will not be disappointed when they are given it in eternal duration and glorious character.

Thursday, November 19th - Esther 7: 3, 4

Now that the Lord had demonstrated His being for His people and against all that threatened them, Esther's delays are over. The showing of God's hand has emboldened Esther to open her mouth and to express her plight and petition without delay. Nor does she downplay her revelation of the true character of Haman, the Jew's enemy and the king's friend. The sinner perceives God and fears and seeks to hide himself; the saint perceives God and fearlessly opens himself to serve by the Lord's enabling grace and power.

Friday, November 20th - Esther 7: 3, 4

The boldness and clear candor of Esther's petition do not obliterate her graciousness. She begins not by charging the king with his own character flaws that had opened him up to Haman's malicious influence. She does not demand justice. Rather, she humbly claims the king's favor that he had extended to her and asks only that her earthly sovereign do what should please him. Here Esther may seem to be making her case fatally weak by casting it in the form of a humble petition rather than that of a demanding suit. Yet, she who knows she has wrestled with God and prevailed in obtaining His blessing can afford humbly to ask, knowing that she will receive more than she asks or thinks.

Saturday, November 21st - Esther 7: 3, 4

Esther's petition is for her life; her request is for the lives of her people. These are things that the king and even Haman at this point assumed that Esther already had. They could see no threat to the queen's life. Yet Haman had put the queen that Ahasuerus loved under a decree of death and had deceived the king into thinking that her people were pests to be exterminated rather than people like Mordecai who served honorably and enhanced the king's security by their prayers and labors. Esther does not ask for half of the king's kingdom, but only that she and her people might continue to live in, pray for, and work in his kingdom to the glory of God and the blessing of men, not least the king (Jer. 29:7; 1 Tim. 2:1,2). Let us ask the King of kings to preserve our lives so that we might labor by his grace, for His glory, and for the good of others.

Sunday, November 22nd - Esther 7: 3, 4

The plight of Esther and her people is that they had been sold for the profit of Haman, who had no propriety in them but rather had stolen them from the king. The purpose for this transaction was purely destructive. They were sold to be annihilated. Esther adds that if they had been sold as slaves, she and her people would not have bothered the king with this petition. The reason that Esther could sincerely say this is that she knew what we should know, namely, that saving grace enables one to be more than a conqueror in any circumstance. Thus, Joseph perceived the good intention of God in the evil afflictions he suffered, and Paul found contentment in all circumstances, even a Philippian dungeon (Acts 16: 23-25; Phil. 4:11-13), while Peter told slaves to be submissive even to the worst of their masters, by the enabling and overcoming grace of God (1 Pet. 2:18,19).

Monday, November 23rd - Esther 7: 5

In response to Esther's petition, the king spoke pointedly to her. The Hebrew wording literally translates that the king *said and said to*, meaning that he would hear only from Esther without consulting but rather excluding Haman. With such compelling conviction Esther had spoken that the king asked for no supporting evidence but rather wanted only to know who and

where was the man who had so maliciously usurped his authority to abuse his people. The king's question must have made Haman uncomfortable. But as Haman did not know that Esther was a Jew he may have thought that she appealed for herself and her wider family for relief from some villain other than Haman. But the noose is already around Haman's neck and with Esther's next words it would be inescapably tightened. There is no escape for the wicked from God's holy hand of vengeance.

Tuesday, November 24th - Esther 7: 6

As Nathan the prophet drew from guilty David's own lips his confession of sin, so Esther's penetrating petition leads the king to ask the identity of the man and to receive the answer not, *Thou art the man*, but rather, *Your closest advisor and friend is the man*. When Esther names Haman, she draws out aspects of his vile, malicious, and wicked character before she speaks his name. The king had known the name but not the man's true nature. Prior to God's having moved Ahasuerus to honor Mordecai for his vital service, the king appears to have trusted no one but Haman with his security and welfare. Once the king's eyes were opened by God to see friends and faithful servants elsewhere, Esther rightly reckoned that the time was right to expose Haman not as the king had fondly imagined him to be, but as he truly was: a wicked enemy of God and men. Here Esther speaks the truth in a light and at a time when the king could perceive it as truth lovingly conveyed to save lives and serve for the king's true glory.

Wednesday, November 25th - Esther 7: 6

Esther spoke truth and Haman was terrified. Surely the Agagite's dread was fixed upon the consequences of his sinful ploys that had just been exposed. However, if he had reflected on the cause of those consequences, namely, upon his essential wickedness, he would have been truly terrified. Every sinner, when he sees who he is and what he has done, will be dumbfounded with horror. In the final day of revelation the wicked will cry out to be hidden under the rocks of the earth from the wrath of God and from the knowledge not only of what they have planned and done, but also of what they have become in their sin.

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Thursday, November 26th - Esther 7: 6

In view of the fact that the Lord has all things so well in hand, such as His opening of the king's eyes and His closing in on Haman, we may wonder if it was really necessary for Esther to speak and reveal Haman's wicked character and evil career. However, it certainly was necessary for Esther to plead for her people and testify against Haman. She had committed herself so to speak, having indicated her determination to do so to both Mordecai and the king. Furthermore, it would not have been sufficient for Esther to let the city of Susa honor the one Jew, Mordecai, for a day. It is fine for the world to glimpse the honor due to Christ and His people. However, such glimpses would be short and shallow if the enemies of the Lord and the church were not exposed and opposed. God's sovereignty incorporates the faithful words and deeds of His people as they love and seek to promote good while hating and resisting evil (Rom. 12:9).

Friday, November 27th – Esther 7: 6-8

These verses record the immediate results of Esther's pleading for her people and exposing Haman as their enemy. The relationship between the king and Haman suddenly changed

drastically and permanently. The king's dotting reliance upon Haman (and wine) is replaced by sober anger, while Haman's cunning manipulation of the king is turned into terror. Esther's words of truth spoken in timely fashion served to demolish the unholy and seemingly strong alliance between these two powerful men. Similarly, when we speak the truth about sin and the gospel of salvation, men may be separated from their sin and from Satan by the effectual calling of God and the divine putting of enmity between the new man and his old, evil dominators.

Saturday, November 28th - Esther 7: 6-8

When the eyes of Ahasuerus are opened to see the monstrous wickedness of Haman, the king is quickly liberated from his being the fawning dupe of the Agagite to his being a righteously wrathful magistrate. As such, the king begins to serve as the bearer of the sword for the good and protection of the people of God. The sovereign and majestic Lord is the ultimate wielder of that sword, and He will wield it as One who has holy zeal for the people who form the house of His earthly dwelling (Jn. 2:14-17; Eph. 2:18-22).

Sunday, November 29th - Esther 7: 6-8

Haman's cunning confidence and imperious pride collapse under the weight of Esther's exposing words of truth. His eyes, too, are opened now and he rightly perceives that his ambitions are all shattered and his life is in serious peril. The Lord set Haman's feet in a slippery place by delivering him to the power of his sin so that he might thereby be ripened for judgment.

Monday, November 30th - Esther 7: 6-8

Haman finds himself greatly changed from being a man who was the king's favorite, to being one who was the focus of consuming royal wrath. He also finds that he is no longer the one confidently expecting to take the life of his enemy, but rather is one who must grovel before the queen and beg for his own life. Finally, Haman is no longer the one who could do no wrong in the king's eyes, but has become one who can do nothing right in the sight of the king. Even the groveling of the Agagite is now construed by Ahasuerus as being an assault upon the king's beloved wife and queen. Behold how quick and thoroughly the Lord casts down the wicked in the day of His determined judgment. It is no wonder that we are repeatedly told in Scripture not to fear evil men, who will surely find that it is a terrifying thing to fall into the judging hands of the Lord.

Tuesday, December 1st – Esther 7: 8

The king may in this verse appear to be in error when he mistakes Haman's appeal for his life as an assault upon the queen. However, when an abuser of the trust of others is exposed, it is inevitable that others will judge him not with the generosity of charity but rather with a severity that places the worst construction upon all of his words and deeds. In this case, such severe judgment is warranted because Haman had demonstrated himself to be a liar and a murderer, and the king could not rightly and responsibly ever again trust him. Even when such a proud, wicked, and unrepentant man appears to be humbling himself and doing right, in reality he is still doing wrong that deserves to be punished.

Wednesday, December 2nd – Esther 7: 7, 8

Haman begged the queen for his life, and the king construed it as an assault that further aggravated the guilt of the wicked Agagite. When the king declared Haman's action to be an

assault, all pleading from Haman ceased and the king's servants covered Haman's face with a cloth as though he were a corpse, which he soon would be. Here is a picture of the final judgment when God will declare all of the sinner's wickedness and the sinner will be speechless before Him, having no defense to make for their sins, and no Advocate to plead for him.

Thursday, December 3rd – Esther 7: 9

Haman's fortune goes from bad to worse. The way of the sinner does not terminate with the discovery of his wickedness and his resulting terror and shame, but ends in death. Accordingly, now all things inform against the wicked son of Hammedatha. Even the lowly eunuch, Harbonah, is emboldened to speak up and inform the king of the gallows Haman had made for the execution of Mordecai. Apparently, Haman had been so certain of his wicked cause that he not only had the gallows erected but also let the report of its purpose be circulated. Now all that Haman had planned, said, done, and advertized rebounds upon his own head. Without hesitation the king ordered that Haman be hanged on the gallows that the wicked Agagite thought he had built for another man.

Friday, December 4th – Esther 7: 9, 10

The judgment of the king moves quickly against Haman. The way this movement is recorded in these verses leads us to believe that very little time passed between the point when the royal sentence issued from the king's lips to the point when Haman was hanged on the gallows he had made for Mordecai. Righteous government does not delay the dispensing of justice at any point. This judgment moved swiftly because it was right in the sight of God that there be no delay in imposing it upon the man who with towering, wicked arrogance had sought to kill one of the Lord's choice servants. We read in the book of Revelation an account of the swiftness of God's judgment upon the world in the last day, when all that men have built and devoted themselves to will perish *in one day* (Rev. 18:8), indeed *in one hour* (Rev. 18:10,17,19).

Saturday, December 5th – Esther 7: 9, 10

The king executed Haman not for a murderous deed done, but rather for his murderous intention. Such punishment for thoughts and intentions may seem foreign and unfair to us. Yet, as a man thinks in his heart, so is he, especially before God. In the final judgment, men will not only be held accountable for their deeds, but also for their words and thoughts. Let us strive to bring all of our thoughts, words, and works captive to Christ.

Sunday, December 6th - Esther 7: 9, 10

Scripture stresses the fact that Haman was hanged on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. These two men are representatives of the world in its hatred of and opposition to the kingdom of God. Just as with Cain and Abel, one man humbly worships God while another proudly dotes on himself. And just as Cain refused to be his brother's keeper and stepped quickly from such lovelessness to being his brother's killer, so Haman refused to tolerate Mordecai and decided to murder him. Yet, unlike with Cain and Abel, in this instance it is the wicked man who prepared to murder the righteous who is righteously executed. All who have failed to love the servants of the Lord and who, given the opportunity, would have prepared their murder, will find themselves thrown into the lake of fire that is the second death on the day of God's final judgment, while the righteous will live and reign with Christ in glory forever.

Monday, December 7th - Esther 7: 9, 10

Haman could only prepare the gallows for Mordecai. God would not allow the Agagite actually to hang His servant on it. The worst the wicked can ever do against the righteous is to prepare their deaths. Even in cases like Abel with Cain, when the righteous are actually killed by the wicked, the righteous will find that because they have believed in Christ, the Fountain of life, they from their innermost being issue forth rivers of living water that will make even their deaths to be their gain. Invariably, the God of heaven and earth will cause the evil the wicked intend for the righteous to work for the good of the righteous, while all the evil of the wicked and the sting of death will rebound upon their own heads.

Tuesday, December 8th – Esther 7: 9, 10

The irony and justice of a great exchange is emphasized in these verses. The gallows Haman had constructed for Mordecai was used to execute Haman. Wicked men cannot do anything except destroy themselves when they prepare the destruction of the righteous. With this exchange, a just execution replaced an unjust one that had been planned. We are told that the king's anger subsided with this just execution. It is the glory of earthly kings to reward the righteous and to punish those who do evil. This just execution and the great exchange that leads to it reminds us of another great exchange and execution that pacified the God and judge of heaven and earth. Yet, on the cross it was the righteous One who died in place of the guilty. Why should that have appeased God's holy wrath? Because by it we who are sinners have become righteous, and Christ by His death destroyed sin and Satan (2 Cor. 5:21; Col. 2:13-15), and triumphed over death itself by His resurrection. It is the supreme glory of the divine King of heaven that saving and infinitely costly mercy should triumph over just judgment.

Wednesday, December 9th - Esther 7: 9; 8: 2

In the honoring of Mordecai and the hanging of Haman we have a prime example of God's sinless use of sinners and their sin for the good of His people. All for which Haman planned and worked served not *for* him but *against* him. Haman worked to honor himself; Mordecai received those honors. Haman worked to destroy Mordecai and succeeded only in destroying himself. Our God wisely and mercifully chooses sinlessly to use evil to promote His people before He justly destroys all evil. It is the heritage of God's people that no weapon formed against them should accomplish anything but their good (Isa. 54:11-17).

Thursday, December 10th - Esther 8: 1, 2

Not only did Haman lose his life, but also his estate was taken from his heirs and was conferred by the king upon Esther and Mordecai. It is God's determination that the malicious should work for their own destruction while the meek inherit the earth. Our believing this will keep us from envying the wicked when, for a season, they appear to flourish.

Friday, December 11th - Esther 8: 1, 2

When evil men are put down, the righteous are promoted. When the light of righteousness shines, all shadows of ignorance and deception flee. When the king perceived and punished Haman's wickedness, he was further enlightened to know the close relationship between his beloved Esther and his recently discovered benefactor, Mordecai. Accordingly, the king added to the temporary honors he had just conferred upon the faithful Jew a position of permanent honor and royal authority. The signet ring Ahasuerus had in darkened ignorance given to the

man who deceptively sought to exalt himself and kill others, he now in the light of true knowledge gives to the godly man who had proven himself to be not a plotter of death but a preserver of life. Whether or not rulers of the earth recognize and reward the faithful and loving deeds of the righteous (and often such rulers *do* reward the godly), the King of kings will not fail to recognize even the smallest services of His people and reward them massively for it, giving them the joys and glory of heaven for their sharing food with their hungry brethren (Mt. 25:31-40).

Saturday, December 12th - Esther 8: 1, 2

It may seem unjust that Haman's family should for his sins suffer the loss of their house and lands. However, because evil is so readily spread from sinful father to sinful children, the Lord punishes the fathers and their sons to the third and fourth generation (Ex. 34:7). Let us pursue good and mortify sin within us for the sake of our children and their children as well as for ourselves.

Sunday, December 13th - Esther 8: 3

We have seen how quickly and thoroughly things have changed for good for Esther and Mordecai. The head of evil has been destroyed and his goods and powers have been given to the faithful servants of the Lord. Yet, the body of Haman's evil decree remained alive and still threatened all of the Jews. Therefore, Esther does not allow herself the luxury of resting contentedly in her newly acquired personal possessions. Neither does she ignore or forget the death decree nor does she presume in the wake of the great recent reversal that the decree's force would fade away. Esther faces this residual threat and deals with it by making further intercession with the king on behalf of her people. When, by our firm standing in faith, the devil flees from us, we must further deal with the deeds and seeds for potential destruction that he has left behind.

Monday, December 14th - Esther 8: 3, 4

Esther is rightly emboldened by the blessings that her God had already showered upon her endeavors. Therefore, she does not delay but with swift resolution pleads to have the king avert the deadly wiles of Haman that still remained after his death. Our standing in the strength of the Lord against the devil is not complete until our God has answered our prayers that the fruit, root, and seeds of the evil one have all been removed from our lives.

Tuesday, December 15th - Esther 8: 3, 4

Esther does not plead for her people with cold indifference, as through it mattered little to her whether her people lived or died so long as she had her own life and the reward of Haman's lands. With zeal and passion she cries out to the king, pleading for the lives of her brethren as though she were pleading for her own life. When our brethren have cause to weep, we cannot rejoice. For the Christian who has the mind of Christ whereby he lovingly counts his brethren to be more important than himself, personal honors and security mean little so long as his brethren stand in harm's way (Phil. 2:3,4).

Wednesday, December 16th - Esther 8: 3, 4

The loving fervor of Esther is met with favor from the king. If a man as imperfect and sinful as we have seen Ahasuerus to be responds favorably to the zealous intercessions of his queen, we

should expect our loving and glorious God and Father to hear much more readily our prayerful cries for our brethren and answer above what we ask or think.

Thursday, December 17th - Esther 8: 5

From her passionate prostration at the feet of the king, Esther rises to stand before him and plead with clarity and persuasion for her people. While a believer without warm emotions is considered cold if not dead, a believer who is carried to excess by his emotions is considered irrational. We are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mk. 12:30). Therefore, we shall weep when the occasion calls for tears, but we shall soberly speak when we are asked to give an account in words.

Friday, December 18th - Esther 8: 5

As we saw in her earlier request of the king (Esth. 7:3), so again with this pleading, Esther does not ask the king to grant her petition at the expense of his glory and pleasure. Despite her strong and passionate commitment to the welfare of her people and her sympathetic regard for them as they still dwelt in the shadow of an extermination decree, she does not play their mortal plight as a card that trumps all other considerations. Instead, she asks that the king do only what he deemed to be right and pleasing to himself and only if he truly and freely favored her and found pleasure in granting her request. Esther does not demand that her king act under compulsion but requests that he act freely and lovingly and in accord with his own highest interests. Such pleading might appear to undermine the strength of her appeal for her people, but in truth nothing incites a person to agree to a request more readily than when that person's self-interest is shown to be respected and enhanced by his hearing and granting the request. We are here taught and encouraged to pray to our heavenly King with a supreme view to His glory, knowing that our highest good will never suffer or be sacrificed but rather will be secured as He is glorified.

Saturday, December 19th - Esther 8: 5, 6

After Esther expresses her consideration for the king's pleasure, she then communicates the Jews' plight. Although the plotter of their plight had been executed, his deeds lived on and carried serious consequences for the people of God. With characteristic prudence, Esther speaks of Haman within the matrix of his familial generations, referring to Haman as a child of his father and thus alluding to the Agagite's ten sons who lived no doubt with resentment over their father's lost estate which lessened their inheritance (Esth. 9:7-10). Something had to be done about the living force of Haman's decree and the living force of Haman's descendants, friends, and general supporters. If a demon is cast out of the house, other worse demons will surely replace him if further steps are not taken to destroy the bitter fruits of that demon's work and fill the void with godly fruit (Mt. 12:43-45).

Sunday, December 20th - Esther 8: 5, 6

Esther further emphasizes in her request to the king that Haman's decree, if not revoked, would result in many loyal and productive subjects, like Mordecai, being killed throughout the king's empire. Added to his civil loss would be the personal and domestic pain he would suffer in seeing his beloved queen, Esther, bear unendurable grief over the destruction of her people. In this way, Esther makes clear that for reasons of moral righteousness along with civil and familial responsibility, the king should revoke Haman's decree and deliver the Jews from death. The

offense committed by Haman was monstrous in nature and extensive in magnitude. The wicked do not aim merely to attain small victories for evil.

Monday, December 21st - Esther 8: 7

The king's answer is not a simple granting of Esther's request. Here the king's own complicity with Haman in the royal sanction given to the death decree puts Ahasuerus in an embarrassing bind. Accordingly, he responds to Esther's request by reminding her how much he had already done for her in his having executed Haman and given his house to her. Yet, although Haman was dead and no longer represented a personal threat against the Jews, his hand's work, having been sanctioned by the unchangeable law of the Medes and Persians, lived on in full force. If the king stopped short of countering that force, his gift to Esther would have fallen far short of the offer of half of his kingdom. Yet, not even the king could revoke the immutable law. Here was a crisis for Ahasuerus. Would this king, who had demonstrated weak character, grow slack now that he was being asked to revoke a law that he had sanctioned and which was irrevocable? Our doing what is right and good involves our bearing costs and dealing with difficulties; but if our desire is to persevere in doing good, the Lord will show us a way to carry on to completion.

Tuesday, December 22nd - Esther 8: 7, 8

The king begins his response to Esther's request with what appears to be a complacency that urges her to be content with what he had already done. However, while he admits the formidable challenge facing him in his dealing with the decree that may not be revoked, he comes up with a creative alternative to Esther's request. This king, though still no doubt weak, is becoming stronger and clearer and more incisive in his thinking, no doubt due to the prayers of his wife, Mordecai, and all of God's people. Accordingly, although he admits that the law cannot be changed, he empowers Esther and Mordecai with full royal authority to draft another law that would counter the effects of Haman's death decree. When we are tempted to do less than all that is right, the Lord will show us a way of escape from that temptation so that we might persevere in doing right. Here that divine provision operates for His people through the agency of a pagan king upon whose right doings their lives were dependent.

Wednesday, December 23rd - Esther 8: 9, 10

By the time notice given in v.9, we can ascertain that Esther made her request for the lives of her people more than eight months before the day that called for their annihilation. Haman's decreed day was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (Esth. 3:13) and Esther's counter-decree was drafted in the third month on the twenty-third day. Whereas Esther wisely exercised patience before approaching the king with her request, once she did so she delayed no further in seeing to it that all that could be done was done to achieve the salvation of her people. May our God give us such prudent perception in our knowing when to wait and when to work with dispatch.

Thursday, December 24th - Esther 8: 9, 10

It is left to wise and godly Mordecai to draft the counter-decree and to see to its proper distribution. The Jew whom Haman sought to kill was diligently thorough in commanding first the Jews and then all levels of the empire's officials. Haman's decree apparently was not addressed to the Jews at all, but only to all around them who would be incited to rise up against

them (Esth. 3:12-14). Mordecai takes primary care to inform the Jews of the king's provision that was being made for them and secondarily he informed all other people of the empire so that they would realize that the Jews were no longer helpless victims made vulnerable to their greed and malice by Haman's wicked decree. The law Mordecai drafted was sealed with the king's full authority, and copies of the edict were dispatched throughout the empire by couriers astride royal horses. Any fair-minded person in the empire would have no trouble understanding that whereas Haman's royally sanctioned decree could not be revoked, this more carefully considered decree—that was being delivered with more obvious royal approval after the king's execution of Haman—took clear precedence over the decree of the Agagite for the annihilation of the Jews. Thanks be to our God, who has countered the law of sin and death and the convicting decrees against us with the law of the Spirit of life in Christ (Rom. 8: 1-4).

Friday, December 25th - Esther 8: 11, 12

The new law that was drafted by Mordecai, sealed with the king's signet ring, and distributed throughout the empire, gave the Jews very specific and strictly limited rights. They were given the right to assemble and to defend themselves against any who, acting under Haman's decree, would seek to attack them. The Jews were given no authority to initiate action against their enemies. They were further limited to such self-defense on the day on which Haman's decree called upon the people of the empire to rise up against the Jews. This right of self defense was given as a practical discouragement against such attacks on the Jews and the discouragement was strengthened by the Jews being given the right to destroy and plunder any who would be wicked and foolish enough to attack them. The new law kept the Jews as harmless as doves unless their enemies struck them, in which case they were empowered to be more than conquerors over their foes. Those who blessed the Jews by respecting their lives would be blessed with keeping their own lives and possessions, while those who sought to curse the Jews would be cursed with their own death and loss of possessions.

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Saturday, December 26th - Esther 8: 11, 12

The measure that Mordecai drafted to counter Haman's death decree was wisely and effectively limited to the extent of the existing threat. The limitations removed temptation for the Jews to make a pre-emptive strike or to indulge in excessive retaliation against a mere threat of death. At the same time the right of self-defense protected the people of God for as long as they would be under the death threat. This godly provision served to preserve peace, protect property rights, and preserve the lives of all the people of the empire. Those who chose to attack the Jews under the shield of Haman's law would find themselves destroyed by the Jews acting under Mordecai's law. All godly provisions serve to protect not only the Lord's people but even those who do not know the Lord. But if the wicked rise up against the righteous, in defiance of godly provisions, the righteous will find not only protection but also profit, while the wicked perish.

Sunday, December 27th – Esther 8: 11, 12

Haman's law incited and prepared to unleash the vast majority of the subjects of the empire

against a tiny Jewish minority. Mordecai's law simply armed the Jews with the right of self-defense. How could such a tiny minority hope to fend off the attacks of an overwhelming majority? Although the Jews were surely appreciative of the law drafted by Mordecai and would act according to its provisions, their trust was not in the law nor would their reliance be upon their own strength, but they hoped in the Lord who would grant them peace or magnify their power to prevailing proportion in the event of a fight. Likewise, all believers should love God's law because the sovereign authority and almighty power of the Lord uphold it and all who love and obey it.

Monday, December 28th - Esther 8: 13, 14

These verses recount the publication of the law written by Mordecai. This publication informed the people of God of their rights and restrictions. It also stimulated their hope for the best, namely, that their right to defend themselves would discourage their enemies from attacking them and so preserve the civil peace of the empire. At the same time, the Jews were instructed to make practical preparation for the worst. Effective Christian living in this fallen world must be along these two paths of praying for the best, yet preparing for the worst.

Tuesday, December 29th - Esther 8: 15

Here we are told of Mordecai's further exaltation and how the city of Susa rejoiced in it. As the godly Jew was granted by the king authority not only to draft a counter-measure to Haman's wicked decree but also to publish it throughout the empire, so Mordecai did not only assume and exercise his exalted authority, but he also wisely displayed himself in the glorious clothing of his exalted station. He did this further to encourage the Jews with a public demonstration that their champion ruled effectively for their good. Also, the enemies of the Jews would be further discouraged from attacking God's people. Believers should be greatly encouraged when they read and hear sermons and teachings and testimonies about the victorious exaltation of their Savior.

Wednesday, December 30th - Esther 8: 15

Mordecai's glorious appearance not only encouraged the Lord's people, but also the people of the capitol city of this great pagan empire rejoiced over this exalted appearance of the godly Jew. Even the worldly sense rightly that godly leaders make the best rulers for all citizens of their realms. Who would not rejoice when a wicked, capricious, and bloodthirsty tyrant has been replaced by a man of righteous integrity and charitable disposition?

Thursday, December 31st – Esther 8: 15, 16

It was not only the citizens of Susa who rejoiced over Mordecai's glorious exaltation, but the Jews also rejoiced in the effulgence of their ruling head. In v.16, we read of a rejoicing among the Jews that was greater than the rejoicing of Susa's citizens. For the Jews there was light replacing their gloomy burden of care over the decree of death that had been against them. The Jews rejoiced in the light of God's promise of their deliverance. There was also gladness of outer expression and the inner joy of heart for all of the Jews. Finally, the Jews were not only made happy, but they were honored as the brethren of Mordecai who had been so immensely honored. If the worldly have cause to rejoice in the outer traces of God's common grace, much more cause do we have to rejoice in our Lord's special grace and His sovereign reign over all things for our good!

Friday, January 1st – Esther 8: 15, 16

The Jews exulted in relief, rejoiced, and were honorably esteemed by their neighbors all because a law was published for their protection and the man who wrote that law appeared in exalted glory. The Jews did not wait to rejoice until after the effectiveness of Mordecai's law was tested. They trusted that the word of one so exalted would be as good as the work of their being protected from and victorious over their threatening enemies. Such confidence manifests faith not in the man Mordecai, but in the God whose Word announced should ever be regarded by believers as reliable as His work accomplished.

Saturday, January 2nd – Esther 8: 15-17

The manifested exaltation of Mordecai, the publication of his decree by the king's authority, and the confident trust and grateful rejoicing of the Jews all had extensive effect upon the people of the empire. In v.17 we read that the dread of the Jews fell on the people in every province and city, leading many of the people to become Jews. When we note how the confidence of the Jews had this extensive effect upon the world around them, we should believe that our sincere faith in the Lord and His Word, when not obscured by our fears or carnal distractions, will shine forth as the most effective evangelism. Our lively faith, not our timid and loveless declaration of facts, best begets faith in others.

Sunday, January 3rd – Esther 8: 15-17

The phrase *dread of the Jews* means that the people throughout the empire no longer were indifferent or disdainful toward God's people, but rather by their seeing the light of the Jews' evident faith in their glorious and almighty God, the people were subdued by a sense of awesome respect for the covenant children of Israel. For some, this awesome regard led to their own conversion to the God of Israel, similar to the way that the dread of the Jews led Rahab to have faith in the Lord (Josh. 2:1, 8-14). For others, their dread of the Jews did not attract them to God but merely subdued them to comply outwardly with the ways and will of God's people, as was the case with the Egyptians plundered by the Israelites (Ex. 12:33-36). In either case, we see that God is more glorified and the Church is more secure and honored when the people of the Lord manifest a vibrant faith in their Lord. Our faith not only gives us the living hope of heaven but also magnifies the majestic character of the redeemed here on earth.

Monday, January 4th – Esther 8: 15-17

The remarkable results of the making and publication of Mordecai's law of life against Haman's law of death foreshadow the interposing of another law against a greater threat. Through the person and work of Christ, the Law of God that condemned us has been satisfied, and the dominating law of sin and death within us, as well as the exploiting domination of Satan, have been exposed and bound by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ (Rom. 8:1-4). It remains for us to struggle against the remnants of sin, yet we are equipped to prevail in that struggle (Rom. 6:11-13), and even to profit through it (Rom. 8:28) and emerge from it as more than conquerors (Rom. 8:31-39).

Tuesday, January 5th – Esther 9: 1

Haman, the head of the evil threat against the Jews, has been destroyed. The decree of Haman against the people of God has been counteracted by the decree of Mordecai. In all of this, Esther and Mordecai as well as the Jews have been praying to God, speaking to the king, and

manifesting the joy of their faith before the people of the empire. However, on the day indicated in this verse, the time arrived for the Jews to move from faithful preparation to faithful action. The action was initiated by the enemies of the Jews, who would have been the remnant of the people throughout the empire who did not convert to the Jewish faith or at least rejoice with the Jews. Despite all public demonstrations of the Jews' security, honor, power, and authority to defend themselves, these enemies remained determined to attack God's people. But their wicked plans were frustrated, as the plans of the wicked ever will be frustrated, as they raise their hands against the people who are the apple of God's eye.

Wednesday, January 6th - Esther 9: 1, 2

Despite the good and right decree of Mordecai that was reasonable for all the people of the empire, there were some who remained determined to attack the Jews under the incitement of Haman's wicked decree. The Law of the Spirit of life has ever proven to be supreme over the law of sin and death. Yet, most people of the world choose to submit to the law of sin and death, with its endless procession of defeat and misery, rather than accept the free and empowering gift of God. This is so because the unregenerate hate God and His people so much that they would rather die trying to overcome Christ and His Church than submit to them and experience peace and blessing that surpass understanding (Ps. 2:1-3).

Thursday, January 7th - Esther 9: 1, 2

We have seen that the Jews rejoiced in the hope that their enemies would be discouraged from attacking them (Esth. 8:15-17). Yet, the Jews not only rejoiced, but in accordance with Mordecai's decree (Esth. 8:11,12) they also prepared for the worst. On the eventful day, although many of the people of the empire respected and honored the Jews, a hard core of those who hated them did attack them. Therefore, it proved to be a wise course for the Jews to hope for the best but prepare for the worst. The day came that tested their preparation, just as the time will come to test how we have prepared not only to embrace our joyful prospects but also to resist our most dreaded challenges. The Lord's Word and empowering hand abundantly enable us to face both.

Friday, January 8th – Esther 9: 1, 2

The Jews' victorious response to their enemies' attacks is briefly described in v.1. In vv. 2ff, the way in which the Jews attained their victory is described in some detail. We are first told that on the critical day, the Jews *assembled*. This was in accordance with the direction contained in Mordecai's decree (Esth. 8:11,12). It is good for the members of the Church to gather together regularly (Heb. 10:24,25), but it is critical that such members gather to face crises corporately. In an evil day, the saints must be especially vigilant and lovingly committed to preserving their unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). The devil and his wicked lackeys endeavor to divide and conquer. We must resist them, firm in our faith and bound together in holy love.

Saturday, January 9th - Esther 9: 1, 2

God's people were living under two decrees and had to reckon with both Mordecai's decree of life and Haman's decree of death. Therefore, the law of life did not cause them to rejoice without also directing them to prepare to face and fight those who might seek their death. In this way, the Jews worked out their new salvation in the shadow of the old curse of their death

decree. We, too, must work out our salvation with reverent and sober care, knowing that we must wrestle against the wiles of the devil, but also knowing that our God is at work for and in us to make us more than conquerors (Phil. 2:12,13; Rom. 8:35-37).

Sunday, January 10th - Esther 9: 2, 3

The Jews by their faithful preparation determined to fight, if necessary, and actually did fight, achieving wonderful victories whenever they were attacked. In their striving according to the directions of the godly Mordecai, they found that unexpected resources arose to assure their victory. Leaders of the empire, at all levels of its government, helped the Jews in a way that exalted them over their enemies. When believers fight the good fight of faith, they will always find that the God who directs, equips, and empowers them, will also cause all things seen and unseen to join in an orchestrated service for their good.

Monday, January 11th - Esther 9: 2-4

The Lord who calls His people to meekness at the same time makes them to be majestic (Ps. 16:3), especially in conflict with their foes. Accordingly, we are taught in these verses not only that the Jews prevailed in their defensive battles but that they did so because their God caused the dread of their essential majesty and strength in their Lord to be seen and felt by their enemies. We are also told that the nobles of the empire fought for the Jews due to their respectful regard for Mordecai, the exalted and glorious head of these Jews. We who are in Christ should be comforted to know that in times of our conflict with the world, flesh and devil, such enemies, in the very conflict they have initiated, will be made to face the reality of Christ victoriously dwelling in us and of Christ gloriously reigning over us for our good. In this reality we should rejoice and be strong, and by it our enemies will be seized with dread and collapse in defeat.

Tuesday, January 12th - Esther 9: 5

This verse indicates to us the practical reality of actual martial engagement on the part of the Jews. The Jews did not only pray to the God of heaven for their security, but they also armed themselves with weapons and skill and struck their enemies with mortal blows. Those who devote themselves to the Lord are enabled by the God of Hosts to accomplish whatever practical endeavor they need to perform to secure their lives. The king and sweet psalmist of Israel who was a man after God's heart wrote: *Blessed be the Lord, my rock, who trains my hands for war and my fingers for battle...*(Ps. 144:1).

Wednesday, January 13th - Esther 9: 5

By their discerning perception, the Jews knew all of their enemies; by their divine empowering they engaged and destroyed all of their enemies; and by their being strong in the Lord their holy will determined their success against the will of their wicked and hateful enemies. It is a terrifying thing for sinners to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31), and a dreadful thing for the wicked to be delivered by God into the righteously inspired holy anger of His people.

Thursday, January 14th - Esther 9: 5, 6

In Susa the Jews killed 500 of their enemies. Were they right to resort to such lethal force? They were authorized to do so by Mordecai's decree that formed a part of the civil

administration of the empire. They were also authorized by the Sixth Commandment of the Lord, that directs us to preserve the lives of ourselves and others (Ex. 20:13). Therefore, by the Word of God and the law of the civil magistrate, whom believers are to obey (Rom. 13:1-5), the Jews were authorized and directed to slay all who arose against them. We can be certain that if the Jews' enemies had been able to have their way, there would have been many more than 500 of the Lord's people slain in Susa. True devotion does not make God's people too delicate to do the hard but necessary practical things they are authorized by God and earthly rulers to do. Those most saintly make best the soldiers.

Friday, January 15th - Esther 9: 6-10

Well did the people of the empire stand in dread of the Jews. Those who are most heavenly-minded are most expert in earthly necessities—even when those necessities are as grim as killing others lawfully who would otherwise kill the people of God. It was the mortal folly of the enemies of the Jews that they refused to be moved by a sober respect for the Jews and for the laws of God and men that safeguarded their lives.

Saturday, January 16th - Esther 9: 6-10

It proved to be good and wise that the king gave the estate of Haman to Esther. Such a royal grant deprived the sons of Haman of resources that they clearly would have used to further their hateful attacks upon the people of God. Ahasuerus may or may not have been acting with a clear understanding of the wisdom of his grant to Esther, but the King of heaven certainly superintended the actions of Ahasuerus for the good of His people and to the detriment of their foes. Heaven's King continues to cause all things in our lives to work wisely and wonderfully for our good.

Sunday, January 17th - Esther 9: 6-10

With a holy and awesome effectiveness the Jews killed all who attacked them. The covenant people of the Lord would have remained as harmless as doves and as usefully serving as their leader, Mordecai, had been. But Haman's wicked edict and the irrepressible hatred of those who attacked the Jews necessitated that the Lord's sheep should be transformed into His army of soldiers, filled with holy wrath that consumed their enemies. Although Haman had planned the Jews' extermination, he succeeded only in achieving his own execution. Although Haman's sons were incited by their father's decree and determined to fulfill their father's malicious and murderous will even after his death, they, too, only followed Haman's example to their own deaths. Those who hate and seek to harm the people of God will ever and only succeed in destroying themselves and their own households.

Monday, January 18th - Esther 9: 6-10

While the Jews thoroughly destroyed their enemies, they restrained themselves from partaking of the plunder that was their right according to the law under which they acted (Esth. 8:11). Their restraint was not due to any guilty remorse over their killings or to their refusal fully to carry out the provisions of Mordecai's edict. Instead, they appear to have been determined to demonstrate that their motivation in killing their attacking enemies was to preserve their own lives and not to profit from the deaths of their enemies. But did the Jews have to go as far as killing their enemies in defense of themselves? Neither God nor reasonably formed human laws deprive people of lethal force to employ against those who come against them with lethal

force. Too easily will a man trying merely to wound a murderer succeed only in forfeiting his own life to the murderer. Had the Jews only wounded their attackers, the wounds would have healed and the hateful attacks would have resumed. There are Christian soldiers in our day facing enemies who seek to kill them. Neither God nor their government order them in harm's way without warrant and enabling power to destroy those who would destroy them.

Tuesday, January 19th - Esther 9: 11, 12

These verses tell of the king's response to the reports of the Jews' self-defense measures. The king was not horrified or even slightly unsettled to learn of the Jews' slaughter of their enemies. Apparently, he rightly perceived that every single one killed had with hateful heart and murderous hand attacked the Jews in violation of the law of his empire. At the same time, the king was obviously impressed with the godly character of Esther and Mordecai as well as with the principled focus of the Jews only on their attackers and not on the plunder. Ahasuerus must have been convinced that he could wisely and rightly grant such people anything they asked and it would only serve for the improvement of his empire. Accordingly, the king offered to grant Esther a further petition, this time not restricting it to half of his kingdom. Those who act in submissive and conscientious conformity with the laws of God and man may be entrusted to do as they please in any realm.

Wednesday, January 20th - Esther 9:13

At the king's bidding, Esther requests a royal grant of one more day to finish the work of the Jews' self-defense in the capital city of Susa. She knew that there remained alive in the city a number of those who nurtured a living hatred of the Jews and a murderous determination to kill the people of God. She further asked that Haman's slain sons be hung as a sign of divine curse (Dt. 21:22,23; Gal. 3:13) and as a warning against those who remained under temptation to attack the Jews. That which the godly begin, they, like their God, desire and are enabled to complete.

Thursday, January 21st - Esther 9: 14, 15

The king granted Esther's request and commanded that its provisions be written in an edict and published throughout Susa. The first act that followed the edict's publication was the hanging of the bodies of Haman's ten sons. What a sobering sight that would have been as well as a morbid reminder of the wages of sin, and especially the penalty of one's rising up against the Lord and His Anointed (as here pre-figured by Mordecai) and His beloved people. All those trying to kill rather than kiss the Lord will perish in their attempt (Ps. 2:12).

Friday, January 22nd - Esther 9: 14, 15

In spite of the slaughter of 500 men in Susa and the warning sign of the bodies of Haman's ten slain sons hanging for all to see, 300 more men in Susa possessed the sinful and irrational audacity to attack the Jews. This residual crop of enemies of the Jews followed the same course as did all those who had perished before them. They, too, succeeded only in being killed. Sin makes men stupid and incapable of learning not only from doctrine but also from clear demonstrations. Sin is more than stupid; it is suicidal. We do well to kill sin in us before it kills us. Meanwhile, the Jews retained their precise and devastating focus on their enemies while they continued to decline their plunder. Our God enables His people to mortify all that would sinfully destroy them, even as He gives to them a self-denying spirit when that is appropriate.

Saturday, January 23rd - Esther 9: 16

With this verse, the scene widens its focus from the empire's capital to report on events in all of the provinces. There, as had been done in Susa, the Jews gathered to fend off their attackers. The results were the same: the lives of the Jews were preserved while the devastating effectiveness of their fighting destroyed all of their enemies. The death toll of 75,000 is very high, but not incredible when we recall the vast extent of the empire Ahasuerus ruled (Esth. 1:1). We may be appalled at the thought of so much death being ministered by those who were the lambs of the Good Shepherd (Ps. 23). However, Scripture repeatedly and pointedly informs us that all of those killed hated the Jews and surely hated their God without cause (Esth. 9:1,2,5,10,16). More dreadful still will be the slaughter of sinners who will run into caves rather than into the Church on the day of the wrath of the Lamb of God (Rev. 6:15-17).

Sunday, January 24th - Esther 9: 16

The same refusal of the Jews in the provinces to take the plunder allowed to them is noted as had been done with those in Susa. The spirit of the entire fellowship of Jews throughout the empire was clearly one of necessary self-defense and not aggressive and excessive revenge. The people of God hereby universally demonstrated their determination only to preserve their lives and not to profit by the deaths of their enemies. Theirs was not only a just fight, but also a gracious one as they left the plunder to provide for the women and children widowed and orphaned by the deaths of the men who attacked the Jews (read Esth. 8:11; 9:6,10,12,15—which speak of the Jews killing armies of men only).

Monday, January 25th - Esther 9: 16, 17

The Jews in the provinces completed the securing of their lives entirely on the 13th day of the month. On the 14th day, while their brethren in Susa completed their vital work, these provincial brethren rested from a work thrust upon them by their enemies' initiative. They also feasted as the final result of their earlier fasting (Esth. 4:16), and they rejoiced gratefully in the blessing their God had wrought for them, in face of the cursed edict and murderous attacks that had arisen against them. Such life, victory, rest, feasting, and rejoicing form the heritage of all the people of God in every age. Read about this in Isa. 54:11-17.