David Guzik's Commentary on the Bible

Esther 5

Verses 1-14

ESTHER 5 - ESTHER'S BOLD REQUEST

A. The first banquet.

1. (Esther 5:1-5) Esther invites both king Ahasuerus and Haman to this banquet.

Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, across from the king's house, while the king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house. So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, that she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter. And the king said to her, "What do you wish, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given to you; up to half the kingdom!" So Esther answered, "If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him." Then the king said, "Bring Haman quickly, that he may do as Esther has said." So the king and Haman went to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

   a. Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace: Esther showed courage in her willingness to appear before the king without being summoned by him. This took special courage because King Ahasuerus did not have a good reputation for treating his queens well.

   b. If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him: Esther also showed tact by not blurting out her ultimate request right away. She wanted to first win the king's confidence in her - and she wanted Haman at the banquet to ultimately expose his wickedness.

2. (Esther 5:6-8) Esther's request at the first banquet.

At the banquet of wine the king said to Esther, "What is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!"

Then Esther answered and said, "My petition and request is this: If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, then let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said."

   a. What is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done! King Ahasuerus repeated this offer to Queen Esther. It was more of a proverbial expression than a literal offer for anything up to half of the kingdom.

   b. Let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said: Esther put off the request for one more day, promising to reveal her
petition at a second banquet on the next day.

i. It may be that Esther could not find the courage to present her request, and used the successive banquets as a delaying tactic. “Some of us are very unaccountable, but on that woman’s unaccountable silence far more was hanging than appears at first sight. Doubtless she longed to bring out her secret, but the words came not. God was in it; it was not the right time to speak, and therefore she was led to put off her disclosure. I dare say she regretted it, and wondered when she should be able to come to the point, but the Lord knew best.” (Spurgeon)

B. Haman’s plot against Mordecai.

1. (Esther 5:9-13) Haman’s frustration with Mordecai.

So Haman went out that day joyful and with a glad heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king’s gate, and that he did not stand or tremble before him, he was filled with indignation against Mordecai. Nevertheless Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and called for his friends and his wife Zeresh. Then Haman told them of his great riches, the multitude of his children, everything in which the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and servants of the king. Moreover Haman said, “Besides, Queen Esther invited no one but me to come in with the king to the banquet that she prepared; and tomorrow I am again invited by her, along with the king. Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.”

   a. He was filled with indignation against Mordecai: Miserable Haman! Honored by both the King and Queen of Persia, the disapproval of one man makes him feel worthless. This is an accurate description of how empty the rewards of this world are.

      i. Haman’s deep seated insecurities and need to be honored by everybody means that he can never be happy; God meant this hunger for acceptance in each of us to be ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ - because we are accepted in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:6), accepted before God because of who we are in Jesus.

   b. Nevertheless Haman restrained himself: This is a remarkable evidence of the hand of God. God would not allow the fury of Haman to take action until all the proper pieces were set in place to ultimately defeat his plan.

   c. Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate: Haman’s problem wasn’t Mordecai, it was the emptiness in his own heart. Even if he solved the “Mordecai problem,” it would not fill the emptiness in his heart.

      i. “The soul was made for God, and nothing but God can fill it and make it happy.” (Clarke)

2. (Esther 5:14) Haman happily receives counsel to ask for Mordecai’s execution the next day at the second feast.

Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, “Let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high, and in the morning suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it; then go merrily with the king to the banquet.” And the thing pleased Haman; so he had the gallows made.

   a. Let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high, and in the morning suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it: For these friends of Haman, it wasn’t enough to just punish Mordecai’s people (remember the genocide against the Jews is already set in motion), or merely to kill
Mordecai. They wanted Haman to ask for a public, humiliating execution of Mordecai on gallows 75 feet (25 meters) high.

i. The gallows mentioned here was not for hanging a victim, but for violently killing and displaying the victim. “A pointed stake is set upright in the ground, and the culprit is taken, placed on the sharp point, and then pulled down by his legs till the stake that went in at the fundament passes up through the body and comes out through the neck. A most dreadful species of punishment, in which revenge and cruelty may glut the utmost of their malice. The culprit lives a considerable time in excruciating agonies.” (Clarke)

b. And the thing pleased Haman; so he had the gallows made: We should never underestimate the destructive and distorting power of hatred. The same irrational, violent hatred that made Haman want to see Mordecai hang to his death is the same irrational, violent hatred that made man want to hang Jesus on a cross.