

When the World Seems Out of Control (Esther 5:1-8:2)

Big Idea: Even when it looks like the world is out of control, God is at work behind the scenes, and we don't need to be afraid.

After the presidential debate last week, I found a few tweets like [this](#):

Anyone else's anxiety thru the roof? #Debates2020

No kidding.

No matter where you stand politically, it is not an encouraging time right now. We were already living in what some are calling the age of anxiety, and now that was before the events of this year. The world seems out of control. If you haven't been feeling some stress, you probably haven't been paying enough attention.

And that's why it's so good that we're looking at the book of Esther. Esther immerses us in a world that seems completely out of control. Let me catch you up on what is going on.

We're in the middle of a story that happened 2,500 years ago, back when the Persians ruled over Judah and most of the known world. Xerxes, king of that empire, has deposed the queen and taken Esther – a young Jewish woman – as his new queen,

but his second in command has convinced King Xerxes to annihilate the Jewish people. This would not only destroy the lives of that nation, but it would also destroy God's plans to bless the world through that nation just as God had promised.

And so Esther agrees to talk to the king. But there are no guarantees. It looks pretty hopeless for Esther and for God's people.

As we get to today's part of the story, time slows. The events in chapters 1-4 happened over a 9-year period. What happens in today's part of the story takes place over just two days. Everything slows down as the tension escalates.

This story tells us a lot. Here's the first.

It Really Looks Like the World Is Out of Control

By the time we get to chapter five, things look completely out of control. You know that feeling, right?

Haman hates Mordecai. The king has already decided to annihilate all of the Jews. But then Esther takes a risk and goes into the king's presence. The king welcomes her, and Esther slowly edges herself into asking for the king's help.

But first, things get worse. Haman goes home to his family, and we read in 5:11-12:

And Haman recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the servants of the king. Then Haman said, "Even Queen Esther let no one but me come with the king to the feast she prepared. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king.

Only one thing is wrong in Haman's world. "Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate" (5:13). So Haman and his friends come up with a plan to build a pike in a very visible location to impale Mordecai. That's one of the ways that Persians executed people back then especially if they wanted to publicly embarrass them.

Let's summarize what's wrong:

- Israel is under foreign rule.
- A decree has been issued to kill all the Jewish people, and that decree can't be changed.
- The second-most powerful person in the kingdom is threatening to kill Mordecai.
- There is only the faintest glimmer of hope that anything is going to work out. Mordecai will be executed before Esther can even ask the king for help.

Look around the world, and it will seem like the world is badly out of control. Does anybody else here open a news app and want to freak out a little? How do we even begin to express all the ways that the world is messed up?

So much so that it's very hard to even believe that there could be any meaning or hope behind what's happening. The Institute for Economics and Peace runs something called the [Global Peace Index](#). The Global Peace Index has dropped in four of the past five years. "The 2020 GPI reveals a world in which the conflicts and crises that emerged in the past decade have begun to abate, only to be replaced with a new wave of tension and uncertainty as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic." And that's not to mention forest fires and all kinds of other bad news.

On the personal level, it can also seem like God is absent and things are out of control. We're all going to face moments like Mordecai and Esther did, when there's a lot of evidence that the world is a mess and very little evidence that God is doing anything about it.

But then we get to chapter six.

God Is at Work Behind the Scenes

Esther is very unusual. It's the only biblical book that never mentions God. It doesn't mention any prayers, sacrifices, or religious observances. It's the most secular book of the Bible.

It's hard to overstate how unusual this is. Most books in the ancient Near East were full of religious language.

So why isn't God mentioned here? It's by design. In chapter six, we read what happens next:

On that night the king could not sleep. And he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. And it was found written how Mordecai had told about Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, and who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. And the king said, "What honor or distinction has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" The king's young men who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him." (Esther 6:1-3)

It just so happens that the king can't sleep. It just so happens that he asks for the book of the chronicles of his reign to be read. It just so happens that they choose to read about the assassination plot that Mordecai thwarted, just hours before Haman is about to impale Mordecai.

Just then, Haman comes to talk to the king about impaling Mordecai. The king asks Haman what she should do to honor someone he delights in. Haman is so full of himself that he thinks the king is talking about him.

For the man whom the king delights to honor, let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and the horse that the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown is set. And let the robes and the horse be handed

over to one of the king's most noble officials. Let them dress the man whom the king delights to honor, and let them lead him on the horse through the square of the city, proclaiming before him: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor. (Esther 6:7-9)

Because Haman thinks it's about him, he loads up pretty much everything he can think of. What he asks borders on treason. It comes close to claiming the king's throne. He comes pretty close to asking for equality with the most powerful man on earth.

And then, reversal. The king orders all of this to be given to Mordecai. Haman grasped for greatness and was humiliated; Mordecai didn't grasp for greatness and got it. God was at work behind the scenes to accomplish his purposes.

And then it gets even worse for Haman in chapter 7. Esther throws another feast for the king, and this time she pleads with the king to save her people.

If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request. For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have been silent, for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king. (Esther 7:3-4)

The king asks who's behind this, and Esther says, "A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!" (7:6). Within moments, Haman is impaled on the pole that he built to kill Mordecai.

Everything changes. At the heart of the empire, the major enemy of God's people has been removed, and a representative of God's people has been promoted. In the first two verses of chapter 8, Mordecai, who started out in sackcloth outside the palace, is put in charge of Haman's considerable estate.

No strategy could have made this happen. Nobody could have engineered these events. After nine years of buildup, God works behind the scenes without even being mentioned.

Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will." Behind the scenes, God can change the heart of even the most powerful person in the world.

Because God's at Work, We Don't Need to Be Afraid

God sometimes works by parting the Red Sea. He sometimes shows up as the fourth man in the fiery furnace. But he also works out of sight without us even knowing it.

I think God's most common miracle—if there is such a thing—is the coincidence. It's all in the timing. And God has impeccable timing. If I asked for miracle stories, some of you would tell of healings or some amazing sight, but lots of people would tell stories of miraculous coincidences.

I think God favors miracles of timing because he can stay incognito, visible only to those who believe in him. Everything in this story, and so many others, looks ordinary. No one does anything particularly remarkable—but if you see behind the scenes, you see astonishing things. God clearly manipulates these events, yet he does it without ever coercing anyone. No one does anything out of character. No one acts inconsistently. That is the way our sovereign God works. It's miraculous. (Lee Eclov)

Because God works this way, we can relax. We don't need to be afraid. If we ever doubt it, we just have to look at Jesus. "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:31-32)

As someone's [said](#), "God is on his throne, everything is going his way, and he loves me."

You may feel forgotten, you may feel like the world is falling apart, but if you know Jesus, God is for you. He is working behind the scenes to accomplish his purposes. You have no reason to fear.

When everything seems hopeless and out of control, we don't need to fear. As Jen Pollock Michel [put it](#) this week:

Here's the wonderful thing about being a Christian. It means being absolutely unafraid to lose even your very life. You can speak truth to power, you can

literally LAUGH at the devil—and know that you are held safe in the palm of God's hand.