

Text: Esther 3:1-15

Title: "Standing Against the Darkness"

INTRODUCTION

Let's open our Bibles again today to the book of Esther 3. As you're turning I want to say how grateful I am for the men and women who have given their lives in service to our nation. Just two weeks ago the son of a family we have known for many years was killed in Afghanistan. Let's pray for the families of those whose loved ones have paid the highest price for the freedoms we enjoy. Pray.

ILLUSTRATION – Several years ago when we lived in New Mexico we would often make trips to Carlsbad Caverns Nat'l Park. If you've been there you know that you walk down hundreds of feet below the surface winding through caves that have spectacular beauty. In those days there was a point where you entered one cave, and park rangers warned you that they were about to turn off the lights for just a few seconds to let you feel just how dark the caverns are so far removed from the light. When the lights went out the darkness was stifling ... it's hard to describe how it feels. It's a relief when the lights come back on.

Well today we're going to walk down into what I think is one of the darkest chapters in the Bible. You see, the Bible pulls the lid off of the human heart and shows us the darkness that is in our world and deep down in our hearts.

Before we get to Esther 3, let's review. King Xerxes is the powerful leader of the massive Persian Empire. He dumps his wife Queen Vashti and conducts a competition among the most beautiful women of the empire to pick his next queen. Entered in the competition is a young Jewish girl named Esther, who was adopted by her cousin Mordecai. Esther was strikingly beautiful and she won the competition to become the new queen of Persia, all the while not letting anyone know that she was a Jew, one of the covenant people of God.

Esther 3:1 - After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles.

So we're introduced to another character ... Haman the Agagite. He just sounds evil, doesn't he? And he is. With Haman's rise to this position of power, a cloud of darkness is about to settle over the land ... a darkness that could lead to one of the most atrocious acts of evil in all of history.

Esther 3:2 - All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor.

So Esther's cousin Mordecai, a Jew, has become a royal official in the king's government. But he refused to bow to honor Haman. And the other officials asked him why.

Esther 3:4 - Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai's behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew.

What I want to do as we walk through this chapter is to show you what spiritual and moral darkness looks like when it settles over a kingdom, over a city, over a family or over a life. Actually we see it all around us every day ... in the news, in movies, on TV. But many of us are blinded by the darkness. But just like Mordecai we have to decide if we will have the moral and spiritual courage to stand up against the darkness all around us.

And the first symptom of the darkness I want you to see is ... **PRIDE**. Pride exists just about every place where our lives intersect with others ... at home ... at work ... even at church. Maybe you work for someone with a huge ego, and everything has to be about them. Maybe you know someone who thinks they're better than everyone else. God says in...

Proverbs 8:13b - I hate pride and arrogance...

Why? Pride is the ultimate anti-God sin. Pride sets ourselves up as god, thinking that everything is about us. So Haman is strutting around insisting that everyone bow down to him, but Mordecai refused. Now there's a reason he doesn't bow.

Haman was called an Agagite because he was a descendant of a man named Agag who was an Amalekite. The Amalekites were long-time enemies of the Jews. When Moses led Israel out of Egypt, the first people to attack them were the Amalekites. So God instructed Israel to fight them every chance they could in order to obliterate this evil enemy of God's covenant people. This goes on through the years up to the time when King Saul ruled over Israel, just before David became king. Saul was told by God to go to fight against the Amalekites and to completely destroy them as God's judgment on them. But Saul only partially obeyed. He didn't kill the king of the Amalekites, a man named Agag. God was so displeased with this act of disobedience that He would eventually take the kingship away from Saul. Saul was of the tribe of Benjamin. Do you remember who else is from the tribe of Benjamin? Mordecai. Haman is an Agagite ... a descendent of Agag. It's no wonder Mordecai couldn't bring himself to bow in the presence of Haman.

Esther 3:5 - When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged.

And here's another symptom of the darkness that lurks in the human heart ... **HATRED**. Haman's spirit reeked of this poison of hatred. He's out for blood now, and not just Mordecai's.

Esther 3:6 - Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.

Haman hates the Jews just like his ancestor Agag did, so he hatches a plot to destroy them all ... millions of them including the Jews who lived in Jerusalem ... the ones from whom the Messiah Jesus would come.

So Haman consults the gods by casting the lot and determines the evil plan will be carried out at a set time, but he needs the king's permission.

Esther 3:8 - Then Haman said to King Xerxes, "There is a certain people dispersed and scattered among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom whose customs are different from those of all other people and who do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them."

Here in this one verse are several symptoms of the darkness in the human heart. I'll just mention them quickly:

PREJUDICE – Haman said "there is a certain people...whose customs are different." This is raw racial and religious prejudice. Wherever you see prejudice it is of the darkness.

DECEPTION – Haman said these people "do not obey the king's law." That's an exaggeration, but lying is part of the darkness in the human heart.

SUSPICION AND FEAR – Haman counsels the king, "It is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them." So Haman is playing on the king's insecurities and fears. Again ... darkness.

Esther 3:9 - If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will put ten thousand talents of silver into the royal treasury for the men who carry out this business."

And here's one more symptom of the darkness ... **GREED**. Haman waves some money in front of the king's nose. We're talking the equivalent of billions of dollars today. Isn't it crazy how the love of money causes people to do such evil?

Esther 3:10 - So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.

The signet ring carried the official seal of the king. When that emblem was stamped on something, it became the law. And this power is handed over to an evil man. So the orders are all typed up, nice and official.

Esther 3:13 - Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and little children—on a single day ... and to plunder their goods.

So now there is a law that the Jews are to be systematically annihilated. And here's another symptom of the darkness that lurks in our hearts ... **MURDER**.

With someone so powerful seething with hatred like Haman is, it's just a matter of time before murder happens. Remember that Jesus taught that murder and hatred are on the same road. Murder is just further along.

Now does it appall you that here in Esther a government has sanctioned the murder of a whole group of innocent people? It should. It's atrocious, and yet we live in a nation that has done the same thing ... sanctioned the murder of the unborn through abortion. Right here in Tarrant County thousands of babies are killed through abortion every year. Though the number of abortions has been decreasing, still more than a million babies are killed by abortion each year in the U.S. It is an issue in every election. Remember, who has the signet ring is important.

Esther 3:15 - Spurred on by the king's command, the couriers went out, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered.

Xerxes and Haman have been the instruments of a cruel, heartless plot to kill millions of people in one day, and they can just sit and relax over a drink. People are bewildered but will anyone stand against the darkness? Well, God has positioned someone to stand against the darkness. It started with Mordecai refusing to bow to Haman, but it will involve another very important person in the story.

You and I as believers are called and positioned by God to stand against the darkness. Maybe you feel overwhelmed and you just want to hide your head in the sand. Here are three ways to stand against the darkness:

1. LET YOUR LIFE SHINE AS LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS.

Jesus said to His followers, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Don't hide your light."

1 Peter 2:9b – (God) called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Ephesians 5:8 – For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.

The most important way that we do this is proclaiming and living the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It alone has the power to change dark human hearts. And we also need be salt and light. Get involved in some of the great moral issues we are facing today ... the fight to stop abortion or sex trafficking or hunger. Don't hide your light; shine it.

2. REMEMBER WE'RE IN A SPIRITUAL BATTLE.

The darkness is a battle ground between God and Satan. Haman is an instrument of Satan. Haman died a long time ago, but Satan is still alive, and our battle is against him. Of course we know who will win in the end. God will; but we must stand strong in the battle.

Ephesians 6:10 - Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Ephesians 6:11 - Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

Ephesians 6:12 - For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

And in this spiritual battle our greatest weapons are prayer and the proclamation of the truth of the Gospel.

3. SEE YOURSELF IN THE BIG PICTURE.

The Bible pulls the lid off of the human heart and shows us the darkness that is deep down in our hearts. This is what I am capable of, apart from the grace of God.

Mark 7:21-22 - “For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.”

Do you see the Haman in your heart? There is greed, deceit, pride, arrogance, hatred and murder in our hearts. We have rebelled against King Jesus. And we deserve to have the death sentence pronounced against us.

Romans 6:23 - For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jesus is the light of the world, and the only One who can change the darkness in your life.

The Jews in Esther were condemned to death. Jesus took our death sentence for us when He died in our place on the Cross. Everything was to be taken from the Jews. Jesus gave up everything on the Cross to save us. Letters were sent throughout Persia decreeing death for the Jews. But now the Good News has been sent forth throughout the earth offering life and salvation for all who trust in Jesus.