

Text: Esther 5:1-14

Title: “Where’s Your Happy Place?”

INTRODUCTION

Happy Father’s Day! Men, I’m grateful to the Lord that you are here today. If you are a husband or a dad, having your family in church with you is so important in living and leaving a legacy. And for the ladies, Father’s Day is also known as “National Elbow Your Husband in the Ribs During the Sermon Day.” Hopefully that won’t be the case today, but rather that the Holy Spirit might elbow all of us in the ribs today. And when He does that He often uses the Word of God. So let’s open our Bibles to Esther 5.

If you’re just joining us today, the book of Esther is about a period in history, 400-500 years before Christ was born, when Jews living in the ancient Persian Empire woke up one day to the news that a law had been passed that they would all be killed. A young Jewish woman named Esther has become the queen of Persia, married to King Xerxes or Ahasuerus. Her father is a man named Mordecai who realizes that Esther, being confined in the palace, doesn’t have a clue what is about to happen. So he alerts her to the situation and tells her that if she doesn’t persuade the king to stop this, the consequences will be grave. So Esther tells Mordecai to gather all his friends together and have them fast. Then she will muster the courage to go to speak to the king. The first eight verses of Esther 5 tell us how she plans her approach to the king. This is important because you don’t just pop in for a chat with the king. So here’s what she does: **Read Esther 5:1-8.**

The suspense is building. Why doesn’t Esther just tell the king what’s about to happen? Instead she invites him to a banquet, and then invites him to another banquet, like she’s beating around the bush. But we’ll leave this scene hanging for now. Next the Scripture wants to focus our attention on an evil character we’ve come to know in our study ... Haman.

ILLUSTRATION - I picture Haman as a male version of Cruella Daville. Remember that evil, greedy, hateful character in *101 Dalmatians*? That’s the way I think of Haman.

Haman is the #2 guy in the kingdom, and he wanted everyone to know it. We learned back Esther 3 that when Mordecai didn’t bow down to him, Haman was enraged and concocted the plan to have all the Jews killed, including Mordecai. But now he has just been to one banquet with the king and the queen, and he’s been invited to another private dinner that Esther is preparing. So....

Esther 5:9a - Haman went out that day happy and in high spirits.

He’s intoxicated, by the alcohol, but also by the prestige of being in the company of two of the most important people in the world. He’s in his “happy place.” He’s made it. I’m sure Haman’s Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts all light up with a photo and the line, “Loved hanging with my peeps Esther and Xerxes today!” This is the best day ever. Notice what happens...

Esther 5:9 - Haman went out that day happy and in high spirits. But when he saw Mordecai at the king’s gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage against Mordecai.

Grrrrr! He did it again. Mordecai still won't bow down to Haman. There's Haman coming out of the palace with the invitation in his hand to a private dinner with the king and queen. He's happy and in high spirits ... then BOOM. In an instant he's filled with rage. Why? His happy place has been threatened.

You see, Haman is in his happy place when he has acceptance and significance in the eyes of other people ... when everyone likes him and applauds him. And we can understand that. Most of us like to be liked. I don't know too many people who enjoy being hated. So it's not necessarily a bad thing.

So what is your happy place ... the place where you feel most secure and satisfied? Maybe it's your comfortable house, or the car you drive. Maybe it is a vacation in a beautiful resort, or having the newest, sharpest TV on the market. Maybe it is sexual intimacy with your mate, or knowing your children are doing great. And those things are not necessarily wrong ... unless your happy place becomes something you must have for meaning in your life, and if it is threatened or taken away you are plunged into despair. That's what the Bible calls an idol.

An idol is anything or anyone that takes the place of God in your life ... anything or anyone you run to for happiness that keeps you from running to God. You see, a good thing in a god place is a bad thing.

QUOTE: The great writer C.S. Lewis once said, "Human history is the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy."

Haman's happy place was the acceptance, approval and applause of certain people. When he was stroked, like being invited to Esther's banquet with the king, he was exhilarated. But when he was disrespected and shunned by Mordecai (who's really a "nobody"), his attitude turns dark. What happens when your idol is threatened? Like Haman do you turn angry? Or are you plunged into depression or despair or fear or extreme anxiety.

Esther 5:10 - Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home. Calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife,

To console himself Haman went home to his family and friends ... to his happy place where all the attention will be focused on him. So...

Esther 5:11 - Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials.

Esther 5:12 - "And that's not all," Haman added. "I'm the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me along with the king tomorrow.

You see, if your idol is the applause of others, and you don't get enough of that, you have to become your own cheerleader. And that's why Haman is bragging and boasting here. What he's trying to do is to medicate his own sick, wounded soul; but it doesn't work. Look at the next sentence:

Esther 5:13 - But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate."

In the Hebrew it literally means, "But all this is not adequate for me." Haman has all this going for him ... but it isn't enough. You see, whatever happy place we run to for meaning and satisfaction in this life apart from God will never be enough ... it will never satisfy. There is an emptiness at the center of our lives that only a relationship with God will satisfy.

We spend so much of our energy trying to be accepted by other people, when all the while what we're really craving is to know that God accepts us.

Many of us have earthly fathers whose love and acceptance made it easy for us to understand when we first heard that God, the Heavenly Father, loved us and gave His Son Christ for us ... and that when we put our trust in Christ we are completely accepted by God as His child. Some of us have fathers that didn't do so well in that department; we never felt their love and acceptance, and so we struggled with the idea of our Heavenly Father accepting us. And when we don't know we are accepted by God we go running after love and acceptance anywhere we can get it.

So what would you say to Haman if you were his wife, or his best friend, and he came home in such a rotten mood? Well, you're blessed if you have a wife or a husband or some good friends who will tell you the truth: "Oh grow up. Get over yourself." But that doesn't happen for Haman.

Esther 5:14 - His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Have a gallows built, seventy-five feet high, and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai hanged on it. Then go with the king to the dinner and be happy." This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the gallows built.

They're saying, "Haman, you deserve to be happy. So just eliminate the cause of your unhappiness." Isn't that the way it goes for us? My idol is happiness, and if anything or anyone gets in the way of my happiness, then it must go.

Well, this suggestion makes Haman happy again ... he's back in his happy place. He will handle his anger by eliminating Mordecai. So Haman begins the construction on a gallows on which Mordecai will be hanged or perhaps impaled. And it was 75 feet high. That's as high as the steeple on our church. Why? Haman wanted to send a message to everyone: "Don't mess with me or my happy place. Don't disobey or disrespect me." Bitter people do terrible things.

What happens to you when your idol is threatened? How do you medicate your angry, depressed, fearful, anxious, wounded soul? Do you turn to pornography or alcohol or drugs or food? Does it make you controlling or obsessive about everybody around you being perfect? Do you need to go buy something new?

Perhaps this morning the Holy Spirit has elbowed you in the ribs about something in your life. You have a good thing in a god place and that's a bad thing. What are we supposed to do with this idol we keep running to for meaning and happiness?

1. RECOGNIZE IT.

What is your “happy place” ... apart from God, the place where you run for meaning, comfort or satisfaction in your life? Where is your security? What are you afraid of losing? Who are you afraid of losing? Where are you afraid of failing?

You see if Haman had been the least bit self-aware he would have recognized that he had a good life. Why did Mordecai’s disapproval of him shatter his whole world? Was it because acceptance and approval of others was so important to him ... it had become for him an idol. When you find yourself overcome by anger or bitterness or despair or anxiety, trace it out. What triggered that emotion? That could be pointing to an emptiness in your life that God alone should be filling? Remember ... a good thing in a god place is a bad thing. Next...

2. REPENT OF IT.

1 John 5:21 - Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

Why would John say that? It is because idols are an affront to the One True God. The first of the Ten Commandments is, “You shall have no other gods before me.” The second commandment is, “You shall not make for yourselves an idol.” We are created for God alone. When we’re confronted with that in our lives we repent and turn to God by putting our trust in His Son Jesus Christ.

Recognize it ... repent of it ... and ...

3. REPLACE IT.

There’s an emptiness in our souls that can only be filled by the God who created us. Until we have that relationship with God we will always be chasing after other things to make us happy. So the Bible describes being saved in these terms ... when some people in the ancient city of Thessalonica turned to Christ it says:

1 Thessalonians 1:9b - They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,

Remember that Haman was obsessed with his own glory. But what if we became obsessed with the glory of God? Then it doesn’t matter if people don’t recognize us, or if people disrespect us, or if we don’t get invited to the right parties, or if we don’t get the best seat in the house. That’s not our happy place. We’re in our happy place when God is glorified.

Listen to how King David in OT described his “happy place”:

Psalm 84:1 - How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty!

Psalm 84:2 - My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

Remember that Haman longed for the courts of an earthly king; David longed for the courts of his heavenly King. He knew that the real longing of his heart and his flesh was for a relationship with God.

Think about this: Haman had been in the throne room, the inner court, of the most important man in the world ... and full access to all the power and prestige that went with that. He walks out of that glorious setting in happy and high spirits, but in no time he's back in a dark pit of anger and despair. How can this be? Why wouldn't Haman be the most fulfilled and secure man in the world? It is because the acceptance and approval and applause of people, no matter how important they are, can never take the place of God in our lives.

Haman doesn't know it at this point in the story, but the king and queen will not be pleased with him for much longer. You see, it's a bad thing to place your happiness in something that you can lose ... your health, your money, your career, your stuff. Sooner or later in this life we will lose all of that. The Lord God Almighty is the King of the Universe. And through Jesus Christ we get to go into His throne room. We get to have a banquet with Him; the Bible calls this salvation. And by the Holy Spirit through prayer and the Word of God we get to talk and listen to God. And as we do our hearts are so filled with His glory, His grace, His love, His mercy, His power, that when we walk out of that throne room and meet evil and hatred and rejection on every hand, it doesn't move us. We are so full of the love and acceptance of God that we have through Jesus we don't have to run to the happy places we use to run to in our sin. He is enough!