It Was in Front of Us the Whole Time

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. Well, in the book of Esther, we meet King Ahasuerus, known also as Xerxes.

This very lengthy banquet where he is showcasing his wealth and his power and his prestige. Part of what he is doing is trying to drum up support for a military conquest that he longs to do.
During the part of this feast at the end of it, there is another feast and he calls for his queen, a lady named Vashti, to come and to dance for him and for his friends who are there.
She declines. He is outraged. His advisors encourage him to get rid of her, which he does. He goes away at this military campaign.
Comes back unsuccessful. He's outraged and discouraged and frustrated. Realizes that he has to get someone to take the queen's place.
[1:29] And then this activity takes place where they go and select hundreds of ladies throughout the empire. Two separate six-month preparation processes take place.

Eventually, it is Esther Hadassah who is chosen to be his queen and his replacement. She has been raised by her cousin named Mordecai.
Mordecai is a Jewish person as she is, but he has told her as he has raised her up to not let people know that she is a Jew. She continues and fulfills that, does not tell people where she is from or her background.
Mordecai is a respected man. He's there at the king's gate. He's got a limit to where he can go and how far his access is, but he is known and respected. There's a man that rises to power, a wicked man named Haman.
And Haman has everybody that bows down to him except for Mordecai. Mordecai refuses to bow down to Haman. Haman's an Agagite, which takes us back to the earlier happenings in the Old Testament, back to the days of Saul when we've looked at that.
[2:45] And part of what Mordecai, no doubt, is doing is trying to honor the Lord and not bowing down to this man, not bowing down to this Agagite.

It enrages Haman and he wants not only to get rid of Mordecai, but to get rid of the entirety of the Jewish people.
He goes to King Ahasuerus and says that there is a people here that are different. They have their own customs and their own rules. And he persuades the king that this other group of people within the empire are a threat to him.
And strangely enough, there's no record in Esther of the king even asking who it is. He just agrees to it. An edict is made and that edict is put out that on a certain day that the Jewish people can be killed and destroyed and annihilated.
They cast lots, Haman does, with his advisors until they figure out what day they want to do this on.
Mordecai then gets word to Esther that she needs to go in front of the king and put a stop to this because if the stop's not put to it, then all of the Jewish people empire are going to die.
[4:07] And she says, I can't approach the king without being asked. I would be put to death for that. And besides that, he hasn't even talked to me in four weeks. Eventually, she does decide that it's time to take that risk.

And she says, I will do that. I will go before the king. And if I perish, I perish. The king, who we don't know why he had not talked to her in four weeks, receives with favor her petitioning of him.
She invites him to a banquet and invites Haman as well. In the meantime, Haman has decided it's time to put Mordecai to death.

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And at the banquet, the king is, of course, interested to see what is it that Esther is wanting from me. She's been willing to risk her life.
What is so important? And she at that banquet says, I want to invite you to another one tomorrow. Come back. And he agrees to do that. It was Haman's design to have Mordecai hung on these gallows.
[5:20] But instead, at the next banquet, as Esther reveals who she is, she says that we've got this massive problem that all of her people have been given a death sentence.

And the king says, who is it that has done this? And she says, it's the wicked Haman. The king gets up and leaves and goes out to the garden. And while he's gone, the wicked Haman is begging for his life and for mercy from Esther.
When the king comes back in, he sees what is happening. And it supposes that he is threatening to assault Esther. And ironically, orders for Haman to be killed on the very gallows that he had had built to hang Mordecai.
The problem is that the edict that has been given out has already been sent out. And you can't revoke it. Not in the Medo-Persian Empire.
What is done is done. And so where we have this very significant issue is while the king is now sympathetic to Esther and to her people, we have a day set where the destruction of the Jews has been decreed.
[6:43] That brings us to chapter 9. We look at chapter 9 and 10. As we come to chapter 9, what happens is we have this second edict now that's been thrown into the mix.

While their hope was that the first decree would go away, that can't happen. And so what takes place is a second decree that says the Jews can defend themselves.
We're about nine months away from that date. And so the word has gone throughout the entirety of the empire. And everybody knows about Haman's decree and the second decree.
The first decree, you can kill, destroy, and annihilate the Jews. The second decree, the Jews can defend themselves and do whatever it takes to do so. The 13th of Adar has two edicts given for it. Extermination and defense. When you come to chapter 9, verses 1 and 19, first we see the conflict of the kingdom.
[8:01] The conflict of the kingdom. Let's read it together. Now on the 12th month, which is the month of Adar, on the 13th day of the same, when the king's command and the edict were about to be carried out, on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, the reverse occurred.

The Jews gained mastery over those who hated them. The Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm.
And no one could stand against them, for the fear of them had fallen on all the peoples.
Something extraordinary has happened. When we left off last week, we had people in the kingdom who weren't even Jewish people who were converting to Judaism.
And when you read there in Esther 9, verse 2, it sounds a lot like Exodus 15, the song of Moses. Verse 16 says,!
[9:16] Because of the greatness of your arm, they are still as a stone. Till your people, O Lord, pass by, till the people pass by whom you have purchased.

Exodus 15 and Esther 9 sound very similar. Now, I have to think that as Esther is being penned, that there's this linking back to the days of Moses to show that the same God who delivered the Israelites from Egypt is the same God who will deliver them now.
Now, that's important. Because Moses is roughly 1500 B.C. Esther, a little bit after this, but roughly 500 B.C., about a thousand years.
The same God, active in the days of Moses, same God, active in the days of Esther. Same God, active in the days of Esther, same God active in your life today.
God's people must understand this thread throughout Scripture and throughout history of the character of our God.
[10:38] And we are worshiping the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The God of Moses. The God of David. And the God who rules in Esther.

Verse 3, All the officials of the provinces and the satraps and the governors and the royal agents also helped the Jews for the fear of Mordecai had fallen on them.

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For Mordecai was great in the king's house and his fame spread throughout all the provinces. For the man Mordecai grew more and more powerful.
I think, again, there's a direct link here. Exodus 11, verse 3, The man Moses was very great.
I think those who are reading Esther are meant to connect that God has raised up a man, a deliverer, to help lead the people.
[11:42] Verse 5, The Jews struck all their enemies with a sword, killing and destroying them, and did as they pleased to those who hated them.

In Susa, the citadel itself, the Jews killed and destroyed 500 men, and also killed Parshadatha, and Dolphin, and Azpatha, and Paratha, and Adalia, and Eridatha, and Parmashda, and Erisai, and Eridai, and Vizatha.
Now why are those names important? Marcy said, are you going to really pronounce those? I did it.
Why are they important? Look at your next phrase. The ten sons of Haman, the son of Hamadatha, the enemy of the Jews, but they laid no hand on their plunder.
That is there to show the absolute, complete downfall of Haman. He lost his life. Remember from last week, he lost his house.
It was given to Esther. Now he's lost his family. This man who would seek to destroy the Jewish people, who out of pride, and the inability to deal with any personal frustration, used any means necessary, to get an edict passed that would destroy the entire people.
[13:32] It's worth noting that it says they laid no hand on the plunder at the end of verse 10. 1 Samuel 15, where so much of this started with the Agagites, we covered that weeks ago, in Saul's day, we remember that he was not supposed to take the plunder, but he did.

Here, in Esther's day, the Jews were permitted to take the plunder, but they did not. In some sense, it's as if they've reversed Saul's sin.
In verse 11, it says, that very day, the number of those killed and sued to the citadel was reported to the king. And the king said to Queen Esther, in Susa the citadel, the Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and also the ten sons of Haman.
What then have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? Now what is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what further is your request? It shall be fulfilled.
And Esther said, if it please the king, let the Jews who are in Susa be allowed tomorrow also to do according to this day's edict and let the ten sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows.
[14:53] So the king commanded this to be done. A decree was issued in Susa and the ten sons of Haman were hanged. The Jews who were in Susa gathered also on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and they killed three hundred men in Susa, but they laid no hands on the plunder.

Verse 16, Now the rest of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also gathered to defend their lives and got relief from their enemies and killed seventy-five thousand of those who hated them, but laid no hands on the plunder.
This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar. On the fourteenth day, they rested and made that a day of feasting and gladness. But the Jews who were in Susa gathered on the thirteenth day and on the fourteenth and rested on the fifteenth day, making that a day of feasting and gladness.
Therefore the Jews of the villages who lived in rural towns hold the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a day for gladness and feasting, as a holiday, and as a day on which they send gifts of food to one another.
It's a day in which they would give gifts. It was a day of celebration. It was a day of commemorating that God had protected them. That is the historical accounting of the conflict of the kingdom.
[16:22] The edict had been set. Permission to kill, destroy, annihilate the Jews had been given. The second edict had been given that the Jews could defend themselves. And for about nine months, people waited.

When the day of reckoning came, God's people were spared. At the end of chapter 9, we see the celebration of the victors.
Verse 20 says, Mordecai recorded these things and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Hashuares, both near and far, obliging them to keep the 14th day of the month of Adar and also the 15th day of the same year by year.
Mordecai here is establishing what we know as the ongoing celebration of Purim. Incidentally, in doing so, I think Mordecai becomes the only person in the Old Testament besides Moses who establishes a feast for Israel.

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On the 13th day, they killed their opponents. On the 14th day, there was feasting and gladness. The celebration for the future was put back a day because of the extra day of fighting that took place in Susa.
[17:43] And because of that, they would celebrate on the 14th and the 15th. Verse 22 says, As the days on which the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday, that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor.

The celebration that is enacted here is not so much a celebration of thinking about the fact of all the people they killed.
It's a celebration of reminding them of the relief that they were saved from unjustly being put to death. The days of celebration were to be kept by the Jewish people both near and far.
And really, on that day of Purim, there were three main things that would happen. One is it was a time of feasting. Two, you would give gifts. And then three, you would remember the poor in a special way.
So it would be customary to have special feasting with your family and to give money to those who are poor and to give gifts to those to show your love.
[18:57] Verse 23, The Jews accepted what they had started to do and what Mordecai had written to them. For Haman the Agagite, the son of Hamadapha, the enemy of the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them and had cast poor, that is, cast lots, to crush and destroy them.

But when it came before the king, he gave orders in writing that his evil plan that he had devised against the Jews should return on his own head and that he and his son should be hanged on the gallows.
Therefore, they called these days Purim after the term poor. Remember that the term poor, P-U-R, is a word that means lots or a lot.
A dice in a sense and the plural of that would be Purim. Purim, it's not a Hebrew word, probably an Assyrian term that's been held over.
So, Purim would mean the days of the lots. Which takes us back to when Haman was casting the lots to determine what day this edict would say that the Jewish people were to be killed.
[20:05] This holiday, Purim, that we have just read about from the book of Esther some 2,500 years ago is still celebrated today. Kids dress up.

They will gather and they will retell the story of Esther. As the story, the book of Esther is read, the kids will cheer when Mordecai's name is mentioned.
And the children will boo when Haman's name is mentioned. Children will take gifts to the elderly and they will give gifts to the poor.
And it just so happens that holiday starts tomorrow at sundown. It says, therefore, because of all that was written in this letter and what they had faced in this matter and what had happened to them, the Jews firmly obligated themselves and their offspring and all who joined them, that without fail they would keep these two days according to what was written and at the time appointed every year.
That these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation and every clan, province, and city, and that these days of Purim should never fall into disuse among the Jews nor should the commemoration of these days cease among their descendants.
[21:30] Verse 29, then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abahel and Mordecai, the Jew, gave full written authority confirming the second letter about Purim. Letters were sent to all the Jews to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus in words of peace and truth that these days of Purim should be observed at their appointed seasons as Mordecai, the Jew, and Queen Esther obligated them and as they had obligated themselves and their offspring with regard to their fast and their lamenting, the command of Esther confirmed these practices of Purim and it was recorded in writing.

One small detail in verse 29, Queen Esther, the daughter of Abahel, her Jewish heritage is no longer concealed. It is now celebrated. That's the celebration of the victors.
The very end of the book you have chapter 10 which is just this very short three verse paragraph that details the career of Mordecai.
King Hashuerus imposed tax on the land and on the coastlands of the sea and all the acts of his power and might and the full account of the high honor of Mordecai to which the king advanced him.

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Are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Median Persia? For Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to king Ahasuerus.
[23:03] you'll recall that the whole reversal the whole turnaround for Mordecai came because he had discovered the plot of the men who were wanting to kill the king and Mordecai had made that known and it spared the king's life and the king on a restless night said bring the books and read to me and they read to him and it happened to be about what Mordecai did and when he said what did we do to bless this man they said nothing was done for him and yet the Lord in his providence saw to it that Mordecai was once forgotten now promoted now given great leadership and authority it says he was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brothers for he sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his people a man who had his death sentence given and his means by which he would be hung had been built by God's intervention not only survived but became a very well known powerful leader which brings us to the end of these chapters and three main things

I want you to consider with me tonight at the end of the story number one God's providence is the guiding hand of human history history God's providence is the guiding hand of human history now however you deal in your mind with the reality of these twin truths of God's sovereignty and human responsibility and we can understand much of that but we are finite minds can't grasp the entire complexities of that when you read the book of Esther here's what you need to remember and hold intention together Haman is truly wicked Haman is truly doing what his wicked heart wants to do and that is to kill Mordecai and kill all of the Jewish people that's truly what his heart wanted to do that was his choice that was how he lived those are the decisions that he made the king really did choose to let his advisors lead him into making foolish decisions and while the king as far as we know never even knew who the group was in a lack of wisdom he acquiesced to this edict to put this group of people to death that was a real choice
Esther chose not to reveal who she was that was a real choice she made and then truly chose to go before the king and risk her life death it was a real risk could have resulted in a real death and yet at the same time God's providence rules over all things both of these things are true God is sovereign man is responsible you're making choices and decisions that have real impact and real consequences and yet God is sovereign over all things and if you have trouble sleeping at night trying to make sense of all of that not to dismiss the reality of human responsibility but you find your rest in the knowledge that our
God is sovereign that's where you find your rest doesn't take away from the fact that real people make real choices and those real choices have real consequences yet even that reality does not override the ultimate reality that this is our father's world and he has decreed the end from the beginning God's providence is the guiding hand of human history number two God's people are used to accomplish God's purposes most often through ordinary means God's people are used to accomplish God's purposes most often through ordinary means I want you to understand that while God is free to do anything he wants to do the ordinary way God works throughout history is by using ordinary people in their ordinary faithfulness I would suspect that we don't have a single Sunday school teacher in our church who this morning felt like what they were doing was heroic I doubt we had a single Sunday school teacher who woke up today and thought I'll bet the lesson I'll teach these children or these adults will be so great it will change their life it will flip the world upside down and no one will ever forget this day it's not the way it works you just study you teach you invest in people's lives an ordinary Sunday an ordinary lesson to ordinary children and ordinary youth and ordinary adults some of whom are on the edge of their seat listening some of whom are scrolling on their phone some of whom have no doubt fallen asleep both in the adults and the children's classes and
[29:54] Sunday after Sunday after Sunday you may enjoy it you may be thrilled by it it may be the greatest delight of your life but it's still humanly speaking an ordinary day it doesn't mean as the one who is teaching and preparing that it's not thrilling it is but it's just an ordinary Sunday you taught today because it's the Lord's day the same reason you taught last Sunday the same reason Lord willing you'll be back next Sunday and teach the same children same youth same adults it's just ordinary means I have heard in my life I wouldn't even begin to know how many sermons I've heard I've been in church since I was born I listened to all kinds of preaching week after week I have for years I couldn't even begin to tell you how many thousands of sermons

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I've heard there are a few very few sermons I could count on one hand that I could probably if I had to stand up on any given moment and preach those sermons not of mine but of ones that I've heard and I've heard thousands and I only remember the details of a few of them those sermons were just ordinary men doing their ordinary work preaching ordinary sermons that an ordinary person heard and yet by God's grace as the spirit does taking those truths taking those doctrines and working them into my heart and into my soul and into my mind until I would arrive at a place hopefully of knowing the word and being strong and immovable in the things of
God and it was not done! by heroic men preaching heroic sermons it was just the result of the spirit using ordinary men doing ordinary work put to work and use by an extraordinary God that's how he works those who use their talents of singing week after week lead us in music and lead us in singing praise to our God and we sing on a Sunday morning four or five songs Sunday night three songs that's eight songs a Sunday in a given year Joey tell me tomorrow what 52 times eight is he can figure it out won't take him long we sing hundreds of songs and as we sing them it's just a pretty normal four minute song maybe your favorite song maybe your least favorite song but they're just pretty normal songs and yet there are moments as you have sung these songs of the faith that have taught you theology that have inspired you and they get put invested planted into your heart and your mind and on your hard moments and your desperate days these songs come to your mind and give you a way to express your need and to express your dependence upon the
Lord none of our singers and musicians feel heroic it's just ordinary means God's people are used to accomplish God's purposes and most often through ordinary means things I think that's what's interesting about Purim Purim is the celebration of God's providence in the book of Esther in a book where his name isn't even mentioned the celebration of Purim in its totality is the celebration of a God who in his work of providence used ordinary people in ordinary means there are other Old Testament stories we read of and other events that the people of God through the years would go back to to remember and commemorate and celebrate of when
God did the extraordinary but Purim is the reminder of God using ordinary people ordinary means in a book where his name is not even mentioned though every part of the book he was there right in front of us the whole time and then thirdly God's people I want you to make note of these three things we are to do we're to remember reflect and rejoice God's people are to remember reflect and rejoice we're to look back and remember we're to not forget what God has done for us we're to reflect on it to think deeply on his faithfulness and then to rejoice and celebrate the good things he has done
[35:44] Purim celebrates this great reversal it was supposed to be a time of death for the Jewish people instead it was a time of great victory this great reversal takes place in the book which reminds us to harken back to the Old Testament book of Genesis where it is said what you have meant for evil God has meant for good because that's what our God does he works things together for good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose it's true in Genesis 50 it's true in Esther it's true in Romans 8 28 and it's true in your life today of course the greatest reversal that ever took place happened on the cross when it looked like death had won and heaven was defeated the great reversal when death was crushed and salvation was accomplished that

Christ the one that hell thought had been defeated actually triumphs over the grave and one day will return to rule and reign with his people forever and forever so on days where your faith is shaken be reminded that our God is the God who uses the ordinary and our God is the God who can do the impossible and on the cross we see the clearest example of what man meant for evil God using for good the people who crucified Jesus were real people who made real decisions that was the real consequences of what they truly wanted and intended to do they were absolutely responsible for their very real decisions and yet the book of
Acts describes Jesus as the one crucified according to the foreknowledge of God our God who was faithful with Abraham Isaac and Jacob was faithful in the days of Moses was faithful in the days of David was faithful in the time of Esther was faithful in the time of Jesus and the disciples is the same God today who rules and reigns over your life one day for us it won't just be that we read of him and it won't just be that we worship him by faith one day we will behold him Revelation 5 9 says they sang a new song saying worthy are you to take the scroll and open its seals for you were slain and by your blood you ransomed people for
God from every tribe and language and people and nation Revelation 11 the seventh angel blew his trumpet and there were loud voices in heaven saying the kingdom of the world has become the

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kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign forever!
ever! God always has the final word! Always! Lord, I pray the lessons that we have considered these last number of weeks would remain with us though I am nothing more than an ordinary man preaching ordinary sermons we pray that you would use these ordinary means to bless and strengthen your people we thank you that we see on the cross the great reversal that what was designed for evil instead was used for the greatest good and though there will always be people who will strive to persecute and annihilate!
[40:27] your people because of Christ your son we can honestly say what can man do to me your kingdom will have no end and will be our eternal delight to give worship and praise to the only one worthy of it all we long for the day where wicked is done away with and where your son our savior is worshipped and adored forever and forever it's in his name that we pray amen as at con not or or they know they they but they like they or they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they fathers they they they they they fathers they they fathers they fathers fathers fathers they every they they fathers fathers see fathers fathers fathers

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