

When God is Silent
Coming to Grips with the Silence of God –The Story of Esther

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Introduction: I stand amazed at God's presence—a problem solved, a fear confronted, a relationship healed, a sinner repenting. We marvel at the presence and activity of God in these circumstances. More than His presence, I sometimes wonder about God's absence—or is it His seemingly absence? A better word than absence is His silence. Examples? An unexplainable death or untimely death, a problem remains, a marriage that is not reconciled, a prayer unanswered. We have all been there! Tucked away in the Old Testament is a book that addresses that question of God's silence.

Do you know the story of Esther? As we survey the story today, listen and look for the activity of God, even though He is never mentioned by name. In referring to Esther's story, someone has remarked that though God appears to be invisible in the events, He proves to be invincible. Isn't that the way it seems to be in our lives? God is sovereign, though sometimes silent. My challenge today is somewhat difficult because in order to understand the story, you have to understand the whole story. Let me read to you the end of the story and then try to tell you the rest of the story.

Text: ¹ That night sleep escaped the king, so he ordered the book recording daily events to be brought and read to the king. ² They found the written report of how Mordecai had informed on Bigthana and Teresh, two eunuchs who guarded the [king's] entrance, when they planned to assassinate King Ahasuerus. ³ The king inquired, "What honor and special recognition have been given to Mordecai for this [act]?"

The king's personal attendants replied, "Nothing has been done for him."

⁴ The king asked, "Who's in the court?" Now Haman was just entering the outer court of the palace to ask the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows he had prepared for him.

⁵ The king's attendants answered him, "See, Haman is standing in the court."

"Have him enter," the king ordered.

⁶ Haman entered, and the king asked him, "What should be done for the man the king wants to honor?"

Haman thought to himself, "Who is it the king would want to honor more than me?" ⁷ Haman told the king, "For the man the king wants to honor: ⁸ Have them bring a royal garment that the king himself has worn and a horse the king himself has ridden, which has a royal diadem on its head. ⁹ Put the garment and the horse under the charge of one of the king's most noble officials. Have them clothe the man the king wants to honor, parade him on the horse through the city square, and proclaim before him, 'This is what is done for the man the king wants to honor.'"

¹⁰ The king told Haman, "Hurry, and do just as you proposed. Take a garment and a horse for Mordecai the Jew, who is sitting at the King's Gate. Do not leave out anything you have suggested." ¹¹ So Haman took the garment and the horse. He clothed Mordecai and paraded him through the city square, crying out before him, "This is what is done for the man the king wants to honor."

¹² Then Mordecai returned to the King's Gate, but Haman, overwhelmed, hurried off for home with his head covered. ¹³ Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened. His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is Jewish, you won't overcome him, because your downfall is certain." ¹⁴ While they were still speaking with him, the eunuchs of the king arrived and rushed Haman to the banquet Esther had prepared.

The Story: The book of Esther contains the story of God's purposeful intervention in the lives of the Jews who were living under Persian domination.

Chapter 1

- A wicked king—Ahasuerus
- An ungodly party—180 days just to show off his vast wealth
- An ungodly request—When all the guests are good and drunk, he calls for his wife to come to the party. He wanted to show her off because she was beautiful.
- A bold refusal—Queen Vashti refused to come. She recognized the "time bomb" to which she was being asked to come.
- An Ungodly rule—Angered by her refusal and because the other men are afraid that other wives will hear of this refusal, the King is convinced to issue a decree that she is banished and she is no longer queen.

Chapter 2

- An Elaborate Beauty Pageant—of all the most beautiful women of the kingdom
- A godly man (Mordecai) and his beautiful niece (Esther) is introduced to the story
- Esther becomes queen—Esther wins the beauty pageant. Esther is a Jew.
- Mordecai saves the King—Meanwhile Mordecai goes to the King's Gate every day. Mordecai overheard the plans of a scheme to kill the king. Relaying this news to Esther, Mordecai's name is recorded for saving the king.

Chapter 3

- Haman's Plot-- Suddenly, another character, Haman, arrives on the scene as the king's "right-hand-man." Angered at Mordecai's refusal to bow in his presence, Haman devises a plan to exterminate the Jews. He is so angry at Mordecai that he is going to kill everyone of the same race as Mordecai. He gets the king to sign off on his plan.

Chapter 4—Mordecai pleads for Esther to get involved and Esther plans to intercede. Mordecai, learning of this plot convinces Esther that perhaps she has attained such a position as queen to bring salvation to her people, the Jews.

Chapter 5—Esther holds a series of banquets while Haman’s jealousy continues to boil. At this point in the story two meetings with the king are planned—one requested by Esther and the other by Haman. Esther’s request is for the king to intervene for the Jews; Haman’s request is for Mordecai’s life.

Chapter 6—A King who cannot sleep!

The Rest of the Story-- On the night before this meeting, the king cannot sleep and reads from the records of the king. The reading reminds the king of Mordecai’s intervention to save his life and wonders what has been done to honor him. The result of the king not sleeping ultimately results in several things. First, Mordecai is finally honored (by Haman of all people). Second, upon hearing of the plan to exterminate the Jews, the king orders the hanging of Haman on the gallows he had made for Mordecai. Third, the king gives Mordecai Haman’s job. Most importantly, the fourth result is the salvation of the Jews. Whereas the king could not reverse his earlier decree, he allowed the Jews to defend themselves. In defending themselves, they destroyed their enemies. As a result of their victory, the Jews inaugurated a day of celebration to remind themselves of this victory.

What does this story have to do with you and me?

Understanding the Silence of God

1. Sometimes God chooses to be silent.

Life is filled with sometimes sustained periods of silence. History is filled with these periods of silence. Four hundred years elapsed after the last prophet of the Old Testament testifying of the coming Messiah and Jesus’ birth. The turning points of life are often very subtle—a king cannot sleep, Mary and Joseph with no room at the inn in a stable. Often we will not see the subtle moves of God until well after the fact.

2. Though God may be silent, He is at work.

Esther indicates the lesson that God works through mysterious ways to accomplish His purposes. Only when you sit back and overview the story do you really see all the ways that God has been at work. Interestingly, the name of God does not appear in the entire book of Esther, yet His thumbprint is all over the book. In His sovereignty, a Jew becomes queen. God’s sovereignty allows Mordecai to be in the right place at the right time to overhear the plot to kill the king. Finally, it is the sovereignty of God that causes the king to not be able to sleep on the night before both Haman and Esther want his ear. Why did all of these unrelated things occur? The answer is simple—in His sovereignty, God is protecting His people.

3. Our situation may appear to get worse before it gets better .

The story seems to unfold pretty slowly.

4. God is always on time.

At the right time, God will step in.

Responding to the Silence of God

1. I am going to trust that God is at work.

Usually, this happens only by faith. It is a big mistake to think that God is not at work. It is a big mistake to think that God does not see or does not care.

2. I am going to seek to understand what God wants me to do now.