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Preface

An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of The Book of Esther

How the providence of God watched over the Jews that had returned out of captivity to their own land, and what great and kind things were done for them, we read in the two foregoing books; but there were many who staid behind, having not zeal enough for God's house, and the holy land and city, to carry them through the difficulties of a removal thither. These, one would think, should have been excluded the special protection of Providence, as unworthy the name of Israelites; but our God deals not with us according to our folly and weakness. We find in this book that even those Jews who were scattered in the provinces of the heathen were taken care of, as well as those who were gathered in the land of Judea, and were wonderfully preserved, when doomed to destruction and appointed as sheep for the slaughter. Who drew up this story is uncertain. Mordecai was as able as any man to relate, on his own knowledge, the several passages of it; *quorum pars magna fuit—for he bore a conspicuous part in it*; and that he wrote such an account of them as was necessary to inform his people of the grounds of their observing the feast of Purim we are told (ch. 9:20, *Mordecai wrote these things*, and sent them enclosed in letters to all the Jews), and therefore we have reason to think he was the penman of the whole book. It is the narrative of a plot laid against the Jews to cut them all off, and which was wonderfully disappointed by a concurrence of providences. The most compendious exposition of it will be to read it deliberately all together at one time, for the latter events expound the former and show what providence intended in them. The name of God is not found in this book; but the apocryphal addition to it (which is not in the Hebrew, nor was ever received by the Jews into the canon), containing six chapters, begins thus, *Then Mordecai said, God has done these things*. But, though the name of God be not in it, the finger of God is, directing many minute events for the bringing about of his people's deliverance. The particulars are not only surprising and very entertaining, but edifying and very encouraging to the faith and hope of God's people in the most difficult and dangerous times. We cannot now expect such miracles to be wrought for us as were for Israel when they were brought out of Egypt, but we may expect that in such ways as God here took to defeat Haman's plot he will still protect his people. We are told, I. How Esther came to be queen and Mordecai to be great at court, who were to be the instruments of the intended deliverance, ch. 1, 2. II. Upon what provocation, and by what arts, Haman the Amalekite obtained an order for the destruction of all the Jews, ch. 3. III. The great distress the Jews, and their patriots especially, were in thereupon, ch. 4. IV. The defeating of Haman's particular plot against Mordecai's life, ch. 5-7. V. The defeating of his general plot against the Jews, ch. 8. VI. The care that was taken to perpetuate the remembrance of this, ch. 9, 10. The whole story confirms the Psalmist's observation (Ps. 37:12, 13), *The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him; he sees that his day is coming.*

Chapter 1

Several things in this chapter itself are very instructive and of great use; but the design of recording the story of it is to show how way was made for Esther to the crown, in order to her being instrumental to defeat Haman's plot, and this long before the plot was laid, that we may observe and admire the foresight and vast reaches of Providence. "Known unto God are all his works" before-hand. Ahasuerus the king, I. In his height feasts all his great men (v. 1-9). II. In his heat he divorces his queen, because she would not come to him when he sent for her (v. 10-22). This shows how God serves his own purposes even by the sins and follies of men, which he would not permit if he knew not how to bring good out of them.

Verses 1-9

Which of the kings of Persia this Ahasuerus was the learned are not agreed. Mordecai is said to have been one of those that were *carried* captive from *Jerusalem* (ch. 2:5, 6), whence it should seem that this Ahasuerus was one of the first kings of that empire. Dr. Lightfoot thinks that he was that Artaxerxes who hindered the building of the temple, who is called also *Ahasuerus* (Ezra 4:6, 7), after his great-grandfather of the Medes, Dan. 9:1. We have here an account,

I. Of the vast extent of his dominion. In the time of Darius and Cyrus there were but 120 princes (Dan. 6:1); now there were 127, *from India to Ethiopia*, v. 1. It had become an over-grown kingdom, which in time would sink with its own weight, and, as usual, would lose its provinces as fast as it got them. If such vast power be put into a bad hand, it is able to do so much the more mischief; but, if into a good hand, it is able to do so much the more good. Christ's kingdom is, or shall be, far larger than this, when the kingdoms of the world shall all become his; and it shall be everlasting.

II. Of the great pomp and magnificence of his court. When he found himself fixed in his throne, the pride of his heart rising with the grandeur of his kingdom, he made a most extravagant feast, wherein he put himself to vast expense and trouble only *to show the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty*, v. 4. This was vain glory, an affection of pomp to no purpose at all; for none questioned the riches of his kingdom, nor offered to vie with him for honour. If he had shown the riches of his kingdom and the honour of his majesty, as some of his successors did, in contributing largely towards the building of the temple and the maintaining of the temple service (Ezra 6:8, 7:22), it would have turned to a much better account. Two feasts Ahasuerus made:-1. One for his nobles and princes, which lasted *a hundred and eighty days*, v. 3, 4. Not that he feasted the same persons every day for all that time, but perhaps the nobles and princes of one province one day, of another province another day, while thus he and his constant attendants fared sumptuously every day. The Chaldee paraphrast (who is very bold in his additions to the story of this book) says that there had been a rebellion among his subjects and that this feast was kept for joy of the quashing of it. 2. Another was made for *all the people, both great and small*, which lasted *seven days*, some one day and some another; and, because no house would hold them, they were entertained *in the court of the garden*, v. 5. The hangings with which the several apartments were divided or the tents which were there pitched for the company, were very fine and rich; so were the beds or benches on which they sat, and the pavement under their feet, v. 6. Better is a dinner of herbs with quietness, and the enjoyment of one's self and a friend, than this banquet of wine with all the

noise and tumult that must needs attend it.

III. Of the good order which in some respects was kept there notwithstanding. We do not find this like Belshazzar's feast, in which dunghill-gods were praised and the vessels of the sanctuary profaned, Dan. 5:3, 4. Yet the Chaldee paraphrase says that the vessels of the sanctuary were used in this feast, to the great grief of the pious Jews. It was not like Herod's feast, which reserved a prophet's head for the last dish. Two things which are laudable we may gather from the account here given of this feast:-1. That there was no forcing of healths, nor urging of them: *The drinking was according to the law*, probably some law lately made; *none did compel*, no, not by continual proposing of it (as Josephus explains it); they did not send the glass about, but every man drank as he pleased (v. 8), so that if there were any that drank to excess it was their own fault, a fault which few would commit when the king's order put an honour upon sobriety. This caution of a heathen prince, even when he would show his generosity, may shame many who are called Christians, who think they do not sufficiently show their good housekeeping, nor bid their friends welcome, unless they make them drunk, and, under pretence of sending the health round, send the sin round, and death with it. There is a woe to those that do so; let them read it and tremble, Hab. 2:15, 16. It is robbing men of their reason, their richest jewel, and making them fools, the greatest wrong that can be. 2. That there was no mixed dancing; for the gentlemen and ladies were entertained asunder, not as in the feast of Belshazzar, whose wives and concubines drank with him (Dan. 5:2), or that of Herod, whose daughter *danced before him*. Vashti feasted the women in her own apartment; not openly in the court of the garden, but *in the royal house*, v. 9. Thus, while the king showed the honour of his majesty, she and her ladies showed the honour of their modesty, which is truly the majesty of the fair sex.

Verses 10-22

We have here a damp to all the mirth of Ahasuerus's feast; it ended in heaviness, not as Job's children's feast by a wind from the wilderness, not as Belshazzar's by a hand-writing on the wall, but by his own folly. An unhappy falling out there was, at the end of the feast, between the king and queen, which broke off the feast abruptly, and sent the guests away silent and ashamed.

I. It was certainly the king's weakness to send for Vashti into his presence when he was drunk, and in company with abundance of gentlemen, many of whom, it is likely, were in the same condition. *When his heart was merry with wine* nothing would serve him but Vashti must come, well dressed as she was, with *the crown on her head*, that the princes and people might see what a handsome woman she was, v. 10, 11. Hereby, 1. He dishonoured himself as a husband, who ought to protect, but by no means expose, the modesty of his wife, who ought to be to her *a covering of the eyes* (Gen. 20:16), not to uncover them. 2. He diminished himself as a king, in commanding that from his wife which she might refuse, much to the honour of her virtue. It was against the custom of the Persians for the women to appear in public, and he put a great hardship upon her when he did not court, but command her to do so uncouth a thing, and make her a show. If he had not been put out of the possession of himself by drinking to excess, he would not have done such a thing, but would have been angry at any one that should have mentioned it. When the wine is in the wit is out, and men's reason departs from them.

II. However, perhaps it was not her wisdom to deny him. *She refused to come* (v. 12); though he sent his command by seven honourable messengers, and publicly, and Josephus says sent again and again, yet she persisted in her denial. Had she come,

while it was evident that she did it in pure obedience, it would have been no reflection upon her modesty, nor a bad example. The thing was not in itself sinful, and therefore to obey would have been more her honour than to be so precise. Perhaps she refused in a haughty manner, and then it was certainly evil; she *scorned to come at the king's commandment*. What a mortification was this to him! While he was showing the glory of his kingdom he showed the reproach of his family, that he had a wife that would do as she pleased. Strifes between yoke-fellows are bad enough at any time, but before company they are very scandalous, and occasion blushing and uneasiness.

III. The king thereupon grew outrageous. He that had rule over 127 provinces had no rule over his own spirit, but his *anger burned in him*, v. 12. He would have consulted his own comfort and credit more if he had stifled his resentment, had passed by the affront his wife gave him, and turned it off with a jest.

IV. Though he was very angry, he would not do any thing in this matter till he advised with his privy-counsellors; as he had seven chamberlains to execute his orders, who are named (v. 10), so he had seven counsellors to direct his orders. The greater power a man has the greater need he has of advice, that he may not abuse his power. Of these counsellors it is said that they were learned men, for they *knew law and judgment*, that they were wise men, for they *knew the times*, and that the king put great confidence in them and honour upon them, for they *saw the king's face and sat first in the kingdom*, v. 13, 14. In the multitude of such counsellors there is safety. Now here is,

1. The question proposed to this cabinet-council (v. 15): *What shall we do to the queen Vashti according to the law?* Observe, (1.) Though it was the queen that was guilty, the law must have its course. (2.) Though the king was very angry, yet he would do nothing but what he was advised was according to law.

2. The proposal which Memucan made, that Vashti should be divorced for her disobedience. Some suggest that he gave this severe advice, and the rest agreed to it, because they knew it would please the king, would gratify both his passion now and his appetite afterwards. But Josephus says that, on the contrary, he had a strong affection for Vashti, and would not have put her away for this offence if he could legally have passed it by; and then we must suppose Memucan, in his advice, to have had a sincere regard to justice and the public good. (1.) He shows what would be the bad consequences of the queen's disobedience to her husband, if it were passed by and not animadverted upon, that it would embolden other wives both to disobey their husbands and to domineer over them. Had this unhappy falling out between the king and his wife, wherein she was conqueror, been private, the error would have remained with themselves and the quarrel might have been settled privately between themselves; but it happening to be public, and perhaps the ladies that were now feasting with the queen having shown themselves pleased with her refusal, her bad example would be likely to have a bad influence upon all the families of the kingdom. If the queen must have her humour, and the king must submit to it (since the houses of private persons commonly take their measures from the courts of princes), the wives would be haughty and imperious and would scorn to obey their husbands, and the poor despised husbands might fret at it, but could not help themselves; for the *contentions of a wife are a continual dropping*, Prov. 19:13; 27:15; and see Prov. 21:9; 25:24. When wives *despise their husbands*, whom they ought to reverence (Eph. 5:33), and contend for *dominion* over those to whom they ought to be in *subjection* (1 Pt. 3:1), there cannot

but be continual guilt and grief, confusion and every evil work. And great ones must take heed of setting copies of this kind, v. 16–18. (2.) He shows what would be the good consequence of a decree against Vashti that she should be divorced. We may suppose that before they proceeded to this extremity they sent to Vashti to know if she would yet submit, cry *Peccavi—I have done wrong*, and ask the king's pardon, and that, if she had done so, the mischief of her example would have been effectually prevented, and process would have been stayed; but it is likely she continued obstinate, and insisted upon it as her prerogative to do as she pleased, whether it pleased the king or no, and therefore they gave this judgment against her, that she *come no more before the king*, and this judgment so ratified as never to be reversed, v. 19. The consequence of this, it was hoped, would be that *the wives would give to their husbands honour*, even the wives of the *great*, notwithstanding their own greatness, and the wives of the *small*, notwithstanding the husband's meanness (v. 20); and thus every man would bear rule in his own house, as he ought to do, and, the wives being subject, the children and servants would be so too. It is the interest of states and kingdoms to provide that good order be kept in private families.

3. The edict that passed according to this proposal, signifying that the queen was divorced for contumacy, according to the law, and that, if other wives were in like manner undutiful to their husbands, they must expect to be in like manner disgraced (v. 21, 22): were they better than the queen? Whether it was the passion or the policy of the king that was served by this edict, God's providence served its own purpose by it, which was to make way for Esther to the crown.

Chapter 2

Two things are recorded in this chapter, which were working towards the deliverance of the Jews from Haman's conspiracy:-

II. The advancement of Esther to be queen instead of Vashti. Many others were candidates for the honour (v. 1-4); but Esther, an orphan, a captive-Jewess (v. 5-7), recommended herself to the king's chamberlain first (v. 8-11) and then to the king (v. 12-17), who made her queen (v. 18-20). II. The good service that Mordecai did to the king in discovering a plot against his life (v. 21-23).

Verses 1-20

How God put down one that was high and mighty from her seat we read in the chapter before, and are now to be told how he exalted one of low degree, as the virgin Mary observes in her song (Lu. 1:52) and Hannah before her, 1 Sa. 2:4-8. Vashti being humbled for her height, Esther is advanced for her humility. Observe,

I. The extravagant course that was taken to please the king with another wife instead of Vashti. Josephus says that when his anger was over he was exceedingly grieved that the matter was carried so far, and would have been reconciled to Vashti but that, by the constitution of the government, the judgment was irrevocable—that therefore, to make him forget her, they contrived how to entertain him first with a great variety of concubines, and then to fix him to the most agreeable of them all for a wife instead of Vashti. The marriages of princes are commonly made by policy and interest, for the enlarging of their dominions and the strengthening of their alliances; but this must be made partly by the agreeableness of the person to the king's fancy, whether she was rich or poor, noble or ignoble. What pains were taken to humour the king! As if his power and wealth were given him for no other end than that he might have all the delights of the sense wound up to the height of pleasurable, and exquisitely refined, though at the best they are but dross and dregs in comparison with divine and spiritual pleasures. 1. All the provinces of his kingdom must be searched for fair young virgins, and officers appointed to choose them, v. 3. 2. A house (a seraglio) was prepared on purpose for them, and a person appointed to have the charge of them, to see that they were well provided for. 3. No less than twelve months was allowed them for their purification, some of them at least who were brought out of the country, that they might be very clean, and perfumed, v. 12. Even those who were the masterpieces of nature must yet have all this help from art to recommend them to a vain and carnal mind. 4. After the king had once taken them to his bed, they were made recluses ever after, except the king pleased at any time to send for them (v. 14); they were looked upon as secondary wives, were maintained by the king accordingly, and might not marry. We may see, by this instance, to what absurd practices those came who were destitute of divine revelation, and who, as a punishment for their idolatry, were given up to vile affections. Having broken through that law of creation which resulted from God's making man, they broke through another law, which was founded upon his making one man and one woman. See what need there was of the gospel of Christ to purify men from the lusts of the flesh and to reduce them to the original institution. Those that have *learned Christ* will think it *a shame even to speak of such things as these which were done of them, not only in secret, but avowedly, Eph. 5:12.*

II. The overruling providence of God thus bringing Esther to be queen. Had she been recommended to Ahasuerus for a wife, he

would have rejected the motion with disdain; but when she came in her turn, after several others, and it was found that though many of them were ingenious and discreet, graceful and agreeable, yet Esther excelled them all, way was made for her, even by her rivals, into the king's affections and the honours consequent thereupon. It is certain, as bishop Patrick says, that those who suggest that she committed a great sin to come at this dignity do not consider the custom of those times and countries. Every one that the king took to his bed was married to him, and was his wife of a lower rank, as Hagar was Abraham's; so that, if Esther had not been made queen, the sons of Jacob need not say that he *dealt with their sister as with a harlot*. Concerning Esther we must observe,

1. Her original and character. (1.) She was one of the *children of the captivity*, a Jewess and a sharer with her people in their bondage. Daniel and his fellows were advanced in the land where they were captives; for they were of those whom God sent thither *for their good*, Jer. 24:5. (2.) She was an orphan; her father and mother were both dead (v. 7), but, when they had forsaken her, then the Lord took her up, Ps. 27:10. When those whose unhappiness it is to be thus deprived of their parents in their childhood yet afterwards come to be eminently pious and prosperous, we ought to take notice of it to the glory of that God, and his grace and providence, who has taken it among the titles of his honour to be a *Father of the fatherless*. (3.) She was a beauty, *fair of form, good of countenance*; so it is in the margin, v. 7. Her wisdom and virtue were her greatest beauty, but it is an advantage to be a diamond to be well set. (4.) Mordecai, her cousin-german, was her guardian, *brought her up, and took her for his own daughter*. The Septuagint says that he designed to make her his wife; if that were so, he was to be praised that he opposed not her better preferment. Let God be acknowledged in raising up friends for the fatherless and motherless; let it be an encouragement to that pious instance of charity that many who have taken care of the education of orphans have lived to see the good fruit of their care and pains, abundantly to their comfort. Dr. Lightfoot thinks that this Mordecai is the same with that mentioned in Ezra 2:2, who went up to Jerusalem with the first, and helped forward the settlement of his people until the building of the temple was stopped, and then went back to the Persian court, to see what service he could do them there. Mordecai being Esther's guardian or pro-parent, we are told, [1.] How tender he was of her, as if she had been his own child (v. 11): he walked before her door every day, to know how she did, and what interest she had. Let those whose relations are thus cast upon them by divine Providence be thus kindly affectioned to them and solicitous for them. [2.] How respectful she was to him. Though in relation she was his equal, yet, being in age and dependence his inferior, she honoured him as her father—*did his commandment*, v. 20. This is an example to orphans; if they fall into the hands of those who love them and take care of them, let them make suitable returns of duty and affection. The less obliged their guardians were in duty to provide for them the more obliged they are in gratitude to honour and obey their guardians. Here is an instance of Esther's obsequiousness to Mordecai, that she did not *show her people of her kindred*, because Mordecai had charged her that she should not, v. 10. he did not bid her deny her country, nor tell a lie to conceal her parentage; if he had told her to do so, she must not have done it. But he only told her not to proclaim her country. All truths are not to be spoken at all times, though an untruth is not to be spoken at any time. She being born in Shushan, and her parents being dead, all took her to be of Persian extraction, and she was not bound to undeceive them.

2. Her preferment. Who would have thought that a Jewess, a captive, and orphan, was born to be a queen, an empress! Yet so it proved. Providence sometimes *raiseth up the poor out of the dust, to set them among princes*, 1 Sa. 2:8. (1.) The king's chamberlain honoured her (v. 9), and was ready to serve her. Wisdom and virtue will gain respect. Those that make sure of God's favour shall find favour with man too as far as it is good for them. All that looked upon Esther admired her (v. 15) and concluded that she was the lady that would win the prize, and she did win it. (2.) The king himself fell in love with her. She was not solicitous, as the rest of the maidens were, to set herself off with artificial beauty; she *required nothing* but just what was *appointed* for her (v. 15) and yet she was most acceptable. The more natural beauty is the more agreeable. *The king loved Esther above all the women*, v. 17. Now he needed not to make any further trials, or take time to deliberate; he is soon determined to *set the royal crown upon her head, and make her queen*, v. 17. This was done in his seventh year (v. 16) and Vashti was divorced in his third year (ch. 1:3); so that he was four years without a queen. Notice is taken, [1.] Of the honours the king put upon Esther. He graced the solemnity of her coronation with a *royal feast* (v. 18), at which perhaps Esther, in compliance with the king, made a public appearance, which Vashti had refused to do, that she might have the praise of obedience in the same instance in which the other incurred the blot of disobedience. He also granted a *release to the provinces*, either a remittance of the taxes in arrear or an act of grace for criminals; as Pilate, at the feast, released a prisoner. This was to add to the joy. [2.] Of the deference Esther continued to pay to her former guardian. She still *did the commandment of Mordecai, as when she was brought up with him*, v. 20. Mordecai sat *in the king's gate*; that was the height of his preferment: he was one of the porters or door-keepers of the court. Whether he had this place before, or whether Esther obtained it for him, we are not told; but there he sat contentedly, and aimed no higher; and yet Esther who was advanced to the throne was observant of him. This was an evidence of a humble and grateful disposition, that she had a sense of his former kindnesses and his continued wisdom. It is a great ornament to those that are advanced, and much to their praise, to remember their benefactors, to retain the impressions of their good education, to be diffident of themselves, willing to take advice, and thankful for it.

Verses 21-23

This good service which Mordecai did to the government, in discovering a plot against the life of the king, is here recorded, because the mention of it will again occur to his advantage. No step is yet taken towards Haman's design of the Jews' destruction, but several steps are taken towards God's design of their deliverance, and this for one. God now gives Mordecai an opportunity of doing the king a good turn, that he might have the fairer opportunity afterwards of doing the Jews a good turn.

1. A design was laid against the king by two of his own servants, who sought *to lay hands on him*, not only to make him a prisoner, but to take away his life, v. 21. Probably they resented some affront which they thought he had given them, or some injury which he had done them. Who would be great, to be so much the object of envy? Who would be arbitrary, to be so much the object of ill-will? Princes, above any mortals, have their souls continually in their hands, and often go down *slain to the pit*, especially those who *caused terror in the land of the living*. 2. Mordecai got notice of their treason, and, by Esther's means, discovered it to the king, hereby confirming her in and recommending himself to the king's favour. How he came to the

knowledge of it does not appear. Whether he overheard their discourse, or whether they offered to draw him in with them, so it was that *the thing was known* to him. This ought to be a warning against all traitorous and seditious practices: though men presume upon secrecy, *a bird of the air shall carry the voice*. Mordecai, as soon as he knew it, caused it to be made known to the king, which ought to be an instruction and example to all that would be found good subjects not to conceal any bad design they know of against the prince or the public peace, for it is making a confederacy with public enemies. 3. The traitors were hanged, as they deserved, but not till their treason was, upon search, fully proved against them (v. 23), and the whole matter was recorded in the king's journals, with a particular remark that Mordecai was the man who discovered the treason. He was not rewarded presently, but a book of remembrance was written. Thus with respect to those who serve Christ, though their recompence is adjourned till the resurrection of the just, yet an account is kept of their *work of faith and labour of love*, which *God is not unrighteous to forget*, Heb. 6:10.

Chapter 3

A very black and mournful scene here opens, and which threatens the ruin of all the people of God. Were there not some such dark nights, the light of the morning would not be so welcome. I. Haman is made the king's favourite (v. 1). II. Mordecai refuses to give him the honour he demands (v. 2-4). III. Haman, for his sake, vows to be revenged upon all the Jews (v. 5, 6). IV. He, upon a malicious suggestion, obtains an order from the king to have the all massacred upon a certain day (v. 7-13). V. This order is dispersed through the kingdom (v. 14, 15).

Verses 1-6

Here we have,

I. Haman advanced by the prince, and adored thereupon by the people. Ahasuerus had lately laid Esther in his bosom, but she had no such interest in him as to get her friends preferred, or to prevent the preferring of one who she knew was an enemy to her people. When those that are good become great they still find that they cannot do good, nor prevent mischief, as they would. This Haman was an Agagite (an Amalekite, says Josephus), probably of the descendants of Agag, a common name of the princes of Amalek, as appears, Num. 24:7. Some think that he was by birth a prince, as Jehoiakim was, whose seat was set above the rest of the captive kings (2 Ki. 25:28), as Haman's here was, v. 1. The king took a fancy to him (princes are not bound to give reasons for their favours), made him his favourite, his confidant, his prime-minister of state. Such a commanding influence the court then had that (contrary to the proverb) those whom it blessed the country blessed too; for all men adored this rising sun, and the king's servants were particularly commanded *to bow before him and to do him reverence* (v. 2), and they did so. I wonder what the king saw in Haman that was commendable or meritorious; it is plain that he was not a man of honour or justice, of any true courage or steady conduct, but proud, and passionate, and revengeful; yet was he promoted, and caressed, and there was none so great as he. Princes' darlings are not always worthies.

II. Mordecai adhering to his principles with a bold and daring resolution, and therefore refusing to reverence Haman as the rest of the king's servants did, v. 2. He was urged to it by his friends, who reminded him of the king's commandment, and consequently of the danger he incurred if he refused to comply with it; it was as much as his life was worth, especially considering Haman's insolence, v. 3. They *spoke daily to him* (v. 4), to persuade him to conform, but all in vain: he hearkened not to them, but told them plainly that he was a Jew, and could not in conscience do it. Doubtless his refusal, when it came to be taken notice of and made the subject of discourse, was commonly attributed to pride and envy, that he would not pay respect to Haman because, on the score of his alliance to Esther, he was not himself as much promoted, or to a factious seditious spirit and a disaffection to the king and his government; those that would make the best of it looked upon it as his weakness, or his want of breeding, called it a humour, and a piece of affected singularity. It does not appear that any one scrupled at conforming to it except Mordecai; and yet his refusal was pious, conscientious, and pleasing to God, for the religion of a Jew forbade him, 1. To give such extravagant honours as were required to any mortal man, especially so wicked a man as Haman was. In the apocryphal chapters of this book (ch. 13:12-14) Mordecai is brought in thus appealing to God in

this matter: *Thou knowest, Lord, that it was neither in contempt nor pride, nor for any desire of glory, that I did not bow down to proud Haman, for I could have been content with good will, for the salvation of Israel, to kiss the soles of his feet; but I did this that I might not prefer the glory of man above the glory of God, neither will I worship any but thee.* 2. He especially thought it a piece of injustice to his nation to give such honour to an Amalekite, one of that devoted nation with which God had sworn that he would have perpetual war (Ex. 17:16) and concerning which he had given that solemn charge (Deu. 25:17), *Remember what Amalek did.* Though religion does by no means destroy good manners, but teaches us to render *honour to whom honour* is due, yet it is the character of a citizen of Zion that not only in his heart, but *in his eyes*, such a *vile person as Haman was is contemned*, Ps. 15:4. Let those who are governed by principles of conscience be steady and resolute, however censured or threatened, as Mordecai was.

III. Haman meditating revenge. Some that hoped thereby to curry favour with Haman took notice to him of Mordecai's rudeness, waiting to see whether he would bend or break, v. 4. Haman then observed it himself, and was *full of wrath*, v. 5. A meek and humble man would have slighted the affront, and have said, "Let him have his humour; what am I the worse for it?" But it makes Haman's proud spirit rage, and fret, and boil, within him, so that he becomes uneasy to himself and all about him. It is soon resolved that Mordecai must die. The head must come off that will not bow to Haman; if he cannot have his honours, he will have his blood. It is as penal in this court not to worship Haman as it was in Nebuchadnezzar's not to worship the golden image which he had set up. Mordecai is a person of quality, in a post of honour, and own cousin to the queen; and yet Haman thinks his life nothing towards a satisfaction for the affront: thousands of innocent and valuable lives must be sacrificed to his indignation; and therefore he vows the destruction of all the people of Mordecai, for his sake, because his being a Jew was the reason he gave why he did not reverence Haman. Herein appear Haman's intolerable pride, insatiable cruelty, and the ancient antipathy of an Amalekite to the Israel of God. Saul the son of Kish, a Benjamite, spared Agag, but Mordecai the son of Kish, a Benjamite (ch. 2:5), shall find no mercy with this Agagite, whose design is to *destroy all the Jews throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus* (v. 6), which, I suppose, would include those that had returned to their own land, for that was now a province of his kingdom. *Come and let us cut them off from being a nation*, Ps. 83:4. Nero's barbarous wish is his, that they had all but one neck.

Verses 7-15

Haman values himself upon that bold and daring thought, which he fancied well became his great spirit, of destroying all the Jews—an undertaking worthy of its author, and which he promised himself would perpetuate his memory. He doubts not but to find desperate and bloody hands enough to cut all their throats if the king will but give him leave. How he obtained leave, and commission to do it, we are here told. He had the king's ear, let him alone to manage him.

I. He makes a false and malicious representation of Jews, and their character, to the king, v. 8. The enemies of God's people could not give them such bad treatment as they do if they did not first give them a bad name. He would have the king believe, 1. That the Jews were a despicable people, and that it was not for his credit to harbour them: "*A certain people there is,*" without name, as if nobody knew whence they came and what they were; "they are not incorporated, *but scattered abroad and*

dispersed in all the provinces as fugitives and vagabonds on the earth, and inmates in all countries, the burden and scandal of the places where they live." 2. That they were a dangerous people, and that it was not safe to harbour them. "They have laws and usages of their own, and conform not to the statutes of the kingdom and the customs of the country; and therefore they may be looked upon as disaffected to the government and likely to infect others with their singularities, which may end in a rebellion." It is no new thing for the best of men to have such invidious characters as these given of them; if it be no sin to kill them, it is no sin to belie them.

II. He bids high for leave to destroy them all, v. 9. He knew there were many that hated the Jews, and would willingly fall upon them if they might but have a commission: *Let it be written* therefore *that they may be destroyed*. Give but orders for a general massacre of all the Jews, and Haman will undertake it shall be easily done. If the king will gratify him in this matter, he will make him a present of *ten thousand talents*, which shall be *paid into the king's treasuries*. This, he thought, would be a powerful inducement to the king to consent, and would obviate the strongest objection against him, which was that the government must needs sustain loss in its revenues by the destruction of so many of its subjects; so great a sum, he hoped, would be equivalent for that. Proud and malicious men will not stick at the expenses of their revenge, nor spare any cost to gratify it. Yet no doubt Haman knew how to re-imburse himself out of the spoil of the Jews, which his janizaries were to seize for him (v. 13), and so to make them bear the charges of their own ruin; while he himself hoped to be not only a saver but a gainer by the bargain.

III. He obtains what he desired, a full commission to do what he would with the Jews, v. 10, 11. The king was so inattentive to business, and so bewitched with Haman, that he took no time to examine the truth of his allegations, but was as willing as Haman could wish to believe the worst concerning the Jews, and therefore he gave them up into his hands, as lambs to the lion: *The people are thine, do with them as it seemeth good unto thee*. He does not say, "Kill them, slay them" (hoping Haman's own cooler thoughts would abate the rigour of that sentence and induce him to sell them for slaves); but "Do what thou wilt with them." And so little did he consider how much he should lose in his tribute, and how much Haman would gain in the spoil, that he gave him withal the ten thousand talents: *The silver is thine*. Such an implicit confidence likewise he had in Haman, and so perfectly had he abandoned all care of his kingdom, that he gave Haman his ring, his privy-seal, or sign-manual, wherewith to confirm whatever edict he pleased to draw up for this purpose. Miserable is the kingdom that is at the disposal of such a head as this, which has one ear only, and a nose to be led by, but neither eyes nor brains, nor scarcely a tongue of its own.

IV. He then consults with his soothsayers to find out a lucky day for the designed massacre, v. 7. The resolve was taken up in the first month, in the twelfth year of the king, when Esther had been his wife about five years. Some day or other in that year must be pitched upon; and, as if he doubted not but that Heaven would favour his design and further it, he refers it to *the lot*, that is, to the divine Providence, to choose the day for him; but that, in the decision, proved a better friend to the Jews than to him, for the lot fell upon *the twelfth month*, so that Mordecai and Esther had eleven months to turn themselves in for the defeating of the design, or, if they could not defeat it, space would be left for the Jews to make their escape and shift for their safety. Haman, though eager to have the Jews cut off, yet will submit to the laws of his superstition, and not anticipate the

supposed fortunate day, no, not to gratify his impatient revenge. Probably he was in some fear lest the Jews should prove too hard for their enemies, and therefore durst not venture on such a hazardous enterprise but under the smiles of a good omen. This may shame us, who often acquiesce not in the directions and disposals of Providence when they cross our desires and intentions. He that believeth the lot, much more that believeth the promise, will not make haste. But see how God's wisdom serves its own purposes by men's folly. Haman has appealed to the lot, and to the lot he shall go, which, by adjourning the execution, gives judgment against him and breaks the neck of the plot.

V. The bloody edict is hereupon drawn up, signed, and published, giving orders to the militia of every province to be ready against *the thirteenth day of the twelfth month*, and, on that day, to murder all the Jews, men, women, and children, and seize their effects, v. 12–14. Had the decree been to banish all the Jews and expel them out of the king's dominions, it would have been severe enough; but surely never any act of cruelty appeared so barefaced as this, to *destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all the Jews*, appointing them *as sheep for the slaughter* without showing any cause for so doing. No crime is laid to their charge; it is not pretended that they were obnoxious to the public justice, nor is any condition offered, upon performance of which they might have their lives spared; but die they must, without mercy. Thus have the church's enemies thirsted after blood, the *blood of the saints and the martyrs of Jesus*, and drunk of it till they have been perfectly intoxicated (Rev. 17:6); yet still, like *the horse-leech*, they cry, *Give, give*. This cruel offer is ratified with the king's seal, directed to the king's lieutenants, and drawn up in the king's name, and yet the king knows not what he does. Posts are sent out, with all expedition, to carry copies of the decree to the respective provinces, v. 15. See how restless the malice of the church's enemies is: it will spare no pains; it will lose no time.

VI. The different temper of the court and city hereupon. 1. The court was very merry upon it: *The king and Haman sat down to drink*, perhaps to drink "Confusion to all the Jews." Haman was afraid lest the king's conscience should smite him for what he had done and he should begin to wish it undone again, to prevent which he engrossed him to himself, and kept him drinking. This cursed method many take to drown their convictions, and harden their own hearts and the hearts of others in sin. 2. The city was very sad upon it (and the other cities of the kingdom, no doubt, when they had notice of it): *The city Shushan was perplexed*, not only the Jews themselves, but all their neighbours that had any principles of justice and compassion. It grieved them to see their king so abused, to see *wickedness in the place of judgment* (Eccl. 3:16), to see men that lived peaceably treated so barbarously; and what would be the consequences of it to themselves they knew not. But the king and Haman cared for none of these things. Note, It is an absurd and impious thing to indulge ourselves in mirth and pleasure when the church is in distress and the public are perplexed.

Chapter 4

We left God's Isaac bound upon the altar and ready to be sacrificed, and the enemies triumphing in the prospect of it; but things here begin to work towards a deliverance, and they begin at the right end. I. The Jews' friends lay to heart the danger and lament it (v. 1-4). II. Matters are concerted between Mordecai and Esther for the preventing of it. 1. Esther enquires into this case, and receives a particular account of it (v. 5-7). 2. Mordecai urges her to intercede with the king for a revocation of the edict (v. 8, 9). III. Esther objects the danger of addressing the king uncalled (v. 10-12). IV. Mordecai presses her to venture (v. 13, 14). V. Esther, after a religious fast of three days, promises to do so (v. 15-17), and we shall find that she sped well.

Verses 1-4

Here we have an account of the general sorrow that there was among the Jews upon the publishing of Haman's bloody edict against them. It was a sad time with the church. 1. Mordecai cried bitterly, *rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth*, v. 1, 2. He not only thus vented his grief, but proclaimed it, that all might take notice of it that he was not ashamed to own himself a friend to the Jews, and a fellow-sufferer with them, their brother and companion in tribulation, how despicable and how odious soever they were now represented by Haman's faction. It was nobly done thus publicly to espouse what he knew to be a righteous cause, and the cause of God, even when it seemed a desperate and a sinking cause. Mordecai laid the danger to heart more than any because he knew that Haman's spite was against him primarily, and that it was for his sake that the rest of the Jews were struck at; and therefore, though he did not repent of what some would call his obstinacy, for he persisted in it (ch. 5:9), yet it troubled him greatly that his people should suffer for his scruples, which perhaps occasioned some of them to reflect upon him as too precise. But, being able to appeal to God that what he did he did from a principle of conscience, he could with comfort commit his own cause and that of his people to him that judgeth righteously. God will keep those that are exposed by the tenderness of their consciences. Notice is here taken of a law that *none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth*; though the arbitrary power of their kings often, as now, set many a mourning, yet none must come near the king in a mourning dress, because he was not willing to hear the complaints of such. Nothing but what was gay and pleasant must appear at court, and every thing that was melancholy must be banished thence; all in king's palaces *wear soft clothing* (Mt. 11:8), not sackcloth. But thus to keep out the badges of sorrow, unless they could withal have kept out the causes of sorrow—to forbid sackcloth to enter, unless they could have forbidden sickness, and trouble, and death to enter—was just. However this obliged Mordecai to keep his distance, and only to come before the gate, not to take his place in the gate. 2. All the Jews in every province laid it much to heart, v. 3. They denied themselves the comfort of their tables (for they fasted and mingled tears with their meat and drink), and the comfort of their beds at night, for *they lay in sackcloth and ashes*. Those who for want of confidence in God, and affection to their own land, had staid in the land of their captivity, when Cyrus gave them liberty to be gone, now perhaps repented of their folly, and wished, when it was too late, that they had complied with the call of God. 3. Esther the queen, upon a general intimation of the trouble Mordecai was in, *was exceedingly grieved*, v. 4. Mordecai's grief was hers, such a respect did she still retain for him; and the Jews' danger was her distress; for, though a queen,

she forgot not her relation to them. Let not the greatest think it below them to *grieve for the affliction of Joseph*, though they themselves be *anointed with the chief ointments*, Amos 6:6. Esther sent change of raiment to Mordecai, the *oil of joy for mourning and the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness*; but because he would make her sensible of the greatness of his grief, and consequently of the cause of it, *he received it not*, but was as one that refused to be comforted.

Verses 5-17

So strictly did the laws of Persia confine the wives, especially the king's wives, that it was not possible for Mordecai to have a conference with Esther about this important affair, but divers messages are here carried between them by Hatach, whom the king had appointed to attend her, and it seems he was one she could confide in.

I. She sent to Mordecai to know more particularly and fully what the trouble was which he was now lamenting (v. 5) and why it was that he would not put off his sackcloth. To enquire thus after news, that we may know the better how to direct our griefs and joys, our prayers and praises, well becomes all that love Sion. If we must weep with those that weep, we must know why they weep.

II. Mordecai sent her an authentic account of the whole matter, with a charge to her to intercede with the king in this matter: *Mordecai told him all that had happened unto him* (v. 7), what a pique Haman had against him for now bowing to him, and by what arts he had procured this edict; he sent her also a true copy of the edict, that she might see what imminent danger she and her people were in, and charged her, if she had any respect for him or any kindness for the Jewish nation, that she should appear now on their behalf, rectify the misinformations with which the king was imposed upon, and set the matter in a true light, not doubting but that then he would vacate the decree.

III. She sent her case to Mordecai, that she could not, without peril of her life, address the king, and that therefore he put a great hardship upon her in urging her to it. Gladly would she wait, gladly would she stoop, to do the Jews a kindness; but, if she must run the hazard of being put to death as a malefactor, she might well say, *I pray thee have me excused*, and find out some other intercessor.

1. The law was express, and all knew it, that whosoever came to the king uncalled should be put to death, unless he was pleased to *hold out the golden sceptre to them*, and it was extremely doubtful whether she should find him in so good a humour, v. 11. This law was made, not so much in prudence, for the greater safety of the king's person, as in pride, that being seldom seen, and not without great difficulty, he might be adored as a little god. A foolish law it was; for, (1.) It made the kings themselves unhappy, confining them to their retirements for fear they should be seen. This made the royal palace little better than a royal prison, and the kings themselves could not but become morose, and perhaps melancholy, and so a terror to others and a burden to themselves. Many have their lives made miserable by their own haughtiness and ill nature. (2.) It was bad for the subjects; for what good had they of a king that they might never have liberty to apply to for the redress of grievances and appeal to from the inferior judges? It is not thus in the court of the King of kings; to the footstool of his throne of grace we may at any time *come boldly*, and may be sure of an answer of peace to the prayer of faith. We are welcome, not only into the inner court, but even into the holiest, through the blood of Jesus. (3.) It was particularly very uncomfortable for

their wives (for there was not a proviso in the law to except them), who were *bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh*. But perhaps it was wickedly intended as much against them as any other, that the kings might the more freely enjoy their concubines, and Esther knew it. Miserable was the kingdom when the princes framed their laws to serve their lusts.

2. Her case was at present very discouraging. Providence so ordered it that, just at this juncture, she was under a cloud, and the king's affections cooled towards her, for she had been *kept from his presence thirty days*, that her faith and courage might be the more tried, and that God's goodness in the favour she now found with the king notwithstanding might shine the brighter. It is probable that Haman endeavoured by women, as well as wine, to divert the king from thinking of what he had done, and then Esther was neglected, from whom no doubt he did what he could to alienate the king, knowing her to be averse to him.

IV. Mordecai still insisted upon it that, whatever hazard she might run, she must apply to the king in this great affair, v. 13, 14. No excuse will serve, but she must appear an advocate in this cause; he suggested to her, 1. That it was her own cause, for that the decree to *destroy all the Jews* did not except here: "*Think not therefore that thou shalt escape in the king's house, that the palace will be thy protection, and the crown save thy head: no, thou art a Jewess, and, if the rest be cut off, thou wilt be cut off too.*" It was certainly her wisdom rather to expose herself to a conditional death from her husband than to a certain death from her enemy. 2. That it was a cause which, one way or other, would certainly be carried, and which therefore she might safely venture in. "*If thou shouldst decline the service, enlargement and deliverance will arise to the Jews from another place.*" This was the language of a strong faith, which *staggered not at the promise* when the danger was most threatening, but *against hope believed in hope*. Instruments may fail, but God's covenant will not. 3. That if she deserted her friends now, through cowardice and unbelief, she would have reason to fear that some judgment from heaven would be the ruin of her and her family: "*Thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed, when the rest of the families of the Jews shall be preserved.*" He that by sinful shifts will save his life, and cannot find in his heart to trust God with it in the way of duty, shall lose it in the way of sin. 4. That divine Providence had an eye to this in bringing her to be queen: "*Who knows whether thou hast come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*" and therefore, (1.) "Thou art bound in gratitude to do this service for God and his church, else thou dost not answer the end of thy elevation." (2.) "Thou needest not fear miscarrying in the enterprise; if God designed thee for it, he will bear thee out and give thee success." Now, [1.] It appeared, by the event, that she did come to the kingdom that she might be an instrument of the Jews' deliverance, so that Mordecai was right in the conjecture. *Because the Lord loved his people*, therefore he made Esther queen. There is a wise counsel and design in all the providences of God, which is unknown to us till it is accomplished, but it will prove, in the issue, that they are all intended for, and centre in, the good of the church. [2.] The probability of this was a good reason why she should now bestir herself, and do her utmost for her people. We should every one of us consider for what end God has put us in the place where we are, and study to answer that end; and, when any particular opportunity of serving God and our generation offers itself, we must take care that we do not let it slip; for we were entrusted with it that we might improve it. These things Mordecai urges to Esther; and some of the Jewish writers, who are fruitful in invention, add another thing which had *happened to him* (v. 7) which he desired she might be told, "that going home, the night before, in great heaviness, upon the notice of Haman's plot, he met three Jewish children coming from school, of

whom he enquired what they had learned that day; one of them told him his lesson was, Prov. 3:25, 26, *Be not afraid of sudden fear*; the second told him his was, Isa. 8:10, *Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought*; the third told him his was Isa. 46:4, *I have made, and I will bear, even I will carry and will deliver you*. 'O the goodness of God,' says Mordecai, 'who out of the mouth of babes and sucklings ordains strength!'"

V. Esther hereupon resolved, whatever it might cost her, to apply to the king, but not till she and her friends had first applied to God. Let them first by fasting and prayer obtain God's favour, and then she should hope to find favour with the king, v. 15, 16. She speaks here,

1. With the piety and devotion that became an Israelite. She had here eye up unto God, in whose hands the hearts of kings are, and on whom she depended to incline this king's heart towards her. She went in peril of her life, but would think herself safe, and would be easy, when she had committed the keeping of her soul to God and had put herself under his protection. She believed that God's favour was to be obtained by prayer, that his people are a praying people, and he a prayer-hearing God. She knew it was the practice of good people, in extraordinary cases, to join fasting with prayer, and many of them to join together in both. She therefore, (1.) Desired that Mordecai would direct the Jews that were in Shushan to *sanctify a fast* and *call a solemn assembly*, to meet in the respective synagogues to which they belonged, and to pray for her, and to keep a solemn fast, abstaining from all set meals and all pleasant food for three days, and as much as possible from all food, in token of their humiliation for sin and in a sense of their unworthiness of God's mercy. Those know not how to value the divine favours who grudge thus much labour and self-denial in the pursuit of it. (2.) She promised that she and her family would sanctify this fast in her apartment of the palace, for she might not come to their assemblies; her maids were either Jewesses or so far proselytes that they joined with her in her fasting and praying. Here is a good example of a mistress praying with her maids, and it is worthy to be imitated. Observe also, Those who are confined to privacy may join their prayers with those of the solemn assemblies of God's people; those that are absent in body may be present in spirit. Those who desire, and have, the prayers of others for them, must not think that this will excuse them from praying for themselves.

2. With the courage and resolution that became a queen. "When we have sought God in this matter, *I will go unto the king* to intercede for my people. *I know it is not according to the king's law*, but it is according to God's law; and therefore, whatever comes of it, I will venture, and not count my life dear to me, so that I may serve God and his church, and, *if I perish, I perish*. I cannot lose my life in a better cause. Better do my duty and die for my people than shrink from my duty and die with them." She reasons as the lepers (2 Ki. 7:4): "*If I sit still, I die*; if I venture, I may live, and be the life of my people: if the worst come to the worst," as we say, "*I shall but die*." Nothing venture, nothing win. She said not this in despair or passion, but in a holy resolution to do her duty and trust God with the issue; welcome his holy will. In the apocryphal part of this book (ch. 13 and 14) we have Mordecai's prayer and Esther's upon this occasion, and both of them very particular and pertinent. In the sequel of the story we shall find that God said not to this seed of Jacob, *Seek you me in vain*.

Chapter 5

The last news we had of Haman left him in his cups, 3:15. Our last news of queen Esther left her in tears, fasting and praying. Now this chapter brings in, I. Esther in her joys, smiled upon by the king and honoured with his company at her banquet of wine (v. 1-8). II. Haman upon the fret, because he had not Mordecai's cap and knee, and with great indignation setting up a gallows for him (v. 9–14). Thus those that sow in tears shall reap in joy, but the triumphing of the wicked is short.

Verses 1-8

Here is, I. Esther's bold approach to the king, v. 1. When the time appointed for their fast was finished she lost no time, but on the third day, when the impression of her devotions were fresh upon her spirit, she addressed the king. When the heart is enlarged in communion with God it will be emboldened in doing and suffering for him. Some think that the three days' fast was only one whole day and two whole nights, in all which time they did not take any food at all, and that this is called *three days*, as Christ's lying in the grave so long is. This exposition is favoured by the consideration that on the third day the queen made her appearance at court. Resolutions which have difficulties and dangers to break though should be pursued without delay, lest they cool and slacken. *What thou doest*, which must be done boldly, *do it quickly*. Now she *put on her royal apparel*, that she might the better recommend herself to the king, and laid aside her fast-day clothes. She put on her fine clothes, not to please herself, but her husband; in her prayer, as we find in the Apocrypha (Esther 14:16), she thus appeals to God: *Thou knowest, Lord, I abhor the sign of my high estate which is upon my head, in the days wherein I show myself, etc.* Let those whose rank obliges them to wear rich clothes learn hence to be dead to them, and not make them their adorning. She stood *in the inner court over against the king*, expecting her doom, between hope and fear.

II. The favourable reception which the king gave her. When he *saw her* she *obtained favour in his sight*. The apocryphal author and Josephus say that she took two maids with her, on one of whom she leaned, while the other bore up her train,—that her countenance was cheerful and very amiable, but her heart was in anguish,—that the king, lifting up his countenance that shone with majesty, at first looked very fiercely upon her, whereupon she grew pale, and fainted, and bowed herself on the head of the maid that went by her; but then God changed the spirit of the king, and, in a fear, he leaped from his throne, took her in his arms till she came to herself, and comforted her with loving words. Here we are only told,

1. That he protected her from the law, and assured her of safety, by *holding out to her the golden sceptre* (v. 2), which she thankfully *touched the top of*, thereby presenting herself to him as a humble petitioner. Thus having had power with God and prevailed, like Jacob, she had power with men too. *He that will lose his life for God shall save it*, or find it in a better life.

2. That he encouraged her address (v. 3): *What wilt thou, queen Esther, and what is thy request?* So far was he from counting her an offender that he seemed glad to see her, and desirous to oblige her. He that had divorced one wife for not coming when she was sent for would not be severe to another for coming when she was not sent for. God can turn the hearts of men, of great men, of those that act most arbitrarily, which way he pleases towards us. Esther feared that she should perish, but was promised that she should have what she might ask for, though it were *the half of the kingdom*. Note, God in his providence

often prevents the fears, and outdoes the hopes, of his people, especially when they venture in his cause. Let us from this story infer, as our Saviour does from the parable of the unjust judge, an encouragement to *pray always* to our God, *and not faint*, Lu. 18:6-8. Hear what this haughty king says (*What is thy petition, and what is thy request? It shall be granted thee*), and say *shall not God* hear and answer the prayers of *his own elect, that cry day and night to him?* Esther came to a proud imperious man; we come to the God of love and grace. She was not called; we are: the Spirit says, *Come*, and the bride says, *Come*. She had a law against her; we have a promise, many a promise, in favour of us: *Ask, and it shall be given you*. She had no friend to introduce her, or intercede for her, while on the contrary he that was then the king's favourite was her enemy; but we have an advocate with the Father, in whom he is well pleased. *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace*.

3. That all the request she had to make to him, at this time, was that he would please to come to a banquet which she had prepared for him, and bring Haman along with him, v. 4, 5. Hereby, (1.) She would intimate to him how much she valued his favour and company. Whatever she had to ask, she desired his favour above any thing, and would purchase it at any rate. (2.) She would try how he stood affected to her; for, if he should refuse this, it would be to no purpose as yet to present her other request. (3.) She would endeavour to bring him into a pleasant humour, and soften his spirit, that he might with the more tenderness receive the impressions of the complaint she had to make to him. (4.) She would please him, by making court to Haman his favourite, and inviting him to come whose company she knew he loved and whom she desired to have present when she made her complaint; for she would say nothing of him but what she durst say to his face. (5.) She hoped at the banquet of wine to have a fairer and more favourable opportunity of presenting her petition. Wisdom is profitable to direct how to manage some men that are hard to deal with, and to take them by the right handle.

4. That he readily came, and ordered Haman to come along with him (v. 5), which was an indication of the kindness he still retained for her; if he really designed the destruction of her and her people, he would not have accepted her banquet. There he renewed his kind enquiry (*What is thy petition?*) and his generous promise, that it should be granted, *even to the half of the kingdom* (v. 6), a proverbial expression, by which he assured her that he would deny her nothing in reason. Herod used it, Mk. 6:23.

5. That then Esther thought fit to ask no more than a promise that he would please to accept of another treat, the next day, in her apartment, and Haman with him (v. 7, 8), intimating to him that then she would let him know what her business was. This adjourning of the main petition may be attributed, (1.) To Esther's prudence; thus she hoped yet further to win upon him and ingratiate herself with him. Perhaps her heart failed her now when she was going to make her request, and she desired to take some further time for prayer, that God would give her *a mouth and wisdom*. The putting of it off thus, it is likely, she knew would be well taken as an expression of the great reverence she had for the king, and her unwillingness to be too pressing upon him. What is hastily asked is often as hastily denied; but what is asked with a pause deserves to be considered. (2.) To God's providence putting it into Esther's heart to delay her petition a day longer, she knew not why, but God did, that what was to happen in the night intervening between this and to-morrow might further her design and make way for her success, that Haman might arrive at the highest pitch of malice against Mordecai and might begin to *fall before him*. The Jews perhaps

blamed Ester as dilatory, and some of them began to suspect her sincerity, or at least her zeal; but the event disproved their jealousy, and all was for the best.

Verses 9-14

This account here given of Haman is a comment upon that of Solomon, Prov. 21:24. *Proud and haughty scorner is his name that deals in proud wrath.* Never did any man more answer that name than Haman, in whom pride and wrath had so much the ascendant. See him,

I. Puffed up with the honour of being invited to Esther's feast. He was *joyful and glad of heart* at it, v. 9. Observe with what a high gust he speaks of it (v. 12), how he values himself upon it, and how near he thinks it brings him to the perfection of felicity, that Esther the queen did let no man come with the king to the banquet but his mighty self, and he thought it was because she was exceedingly charmed with his conversation that the next day she had invited him also to come with the king; none so fit as he to bear the king company. Note, Self-admirers and self-flatterers are really self-deceivers. Haman pleased himself with the fancy that the queen, by this repeated invitation, designed to honour him, whereas really she designed to accuse him, and, in calling him to the banquet, did but call him to the bar. What magnifying glasses do proud men look at their faces in! And how does the *pride of their heart deceive them!* Obad. 3.

II. Vexing and fretting at the slight that Mordecai put upon him, and thereby made uneasy to himself and to all about him. 1. Mordecai was as determined as ever: *He stood not up, nor moved for him*, v. 9. What he did was from a principle of conscience, and therefore he persevered in it, and would not cringe to Haman, no, not when he had reason to fear him and Esther herself complimented him. He knew God could and would deliver him and his people from the rage of Haman, without any such mean and sneaking expedients to mollify him. Those that walk in holy sincerity may walk in holy security, and go on in their work, not fearing what man can do unto them. *He that walks uprightly walks surely.* 2. Haman can as ill bear it as ever; nay, the higher he is lifted up, the more impatient is he of contempt and the more enraged at it. (1.) It made his own spirit restless, and put him into a grievous agitation. He was *full of indignation* (v. 9) and yet *refrained himself*, v. 10. Gladly would he have drawn his sword and run Mordecai through for affronting him thus; but he hoped shortly to see him fall with all the Jews, and therefore with much ado prevailed with himself to forbear stabbing him. What a struggle had he in his own bosom between his anger, which required Mordecai's death immediately (*O that I had of his flesh! I cannot be satisfied!* Job 31:31), and his malice, which had determined to wait for the general massacre! Thus *thorns and snares are in the way of the froward.* (2.) It made all his enjoyments sapless. This little affront which he received from Mordecai was the dead fly which spoiled all his pot of precious ointment; he himself owned in the presence of his wife and friends, to the everlasting reproach of a proud and discontented mind, that he had no comfort in his estate, preferment, and family, as long as Mordecai lived and had a place *in the king's gate*, v. 10–13. He took notice of his own riches and honours, the numerousness of his family, and the high posts to which he was advanced, that he was the darling of the prince and the idol of the court; and *yet all this avails him nothing* as long as Mordecai is unchanged. Those that are disposed to be uneasy will never want something or other to be uneasy at; and proud men, though they have *much* to their mind, yet, if they have not *all* to their mind, it is as nothing to them. The

thousandth part of what Haman had would serve to make a humble modest man as much of a happiness as he expects from this world; and yet Haman complained as passionately as if he had been sunk into the lowest degree of poverty and disgrace.

III. Meditating revenge, and assisted therein by his wife and his friends, v. 14. They saw how gladly he would dispense with his own resolution of deferring the slaughter till the time determined by the lot, and therefore advised him to take an earnest and foretaste of the satisfaction he then expected in the speedy execution of Mordecai; let him have that to please him at the moment; and having, as he thought, made sure the destruction of all the Jews, at the time appointed, he will not think scorn, for the present, to lay hands on Mordecai alone. 1. For the pleasing of his fancy they advise him to get *a gallows ready*, and have it set up before his own door, that, as soon as ever he could get the warrant signed, there might be no delay of the execution; he would not need so much as to stay the making of the gallows. This is very agreeable to Haman, who has the gallows made and fixed immediately; it must be fifty cubits high, or as near that as might be, for the greater disgrace of Mordecai and to make him a spectacle to every one that passed by; and it must be before Haman's door, that all men might take notice it was to the idol of his revenge that Mordecai was sacrificed and that he might feed his eyes with the sight. 2. For the gaining of his point they advise him to go early in the morning to the king, and get an order from him for the hanging of Mordecai, which, they doubted not, would be readily granted to one who was so much the king's favourite and who had so easily obtained an edict for the destruction of the whole nation of the Jews. There needed no feigned suggestion; it was enough if he let the king know that Mordecai, in contempt of the king's command, refused to reverence him. And now we leave Haman to go to bed, pleased with the thoughts of seeing Mordecai hanged the next day, and then going merrily to the banquet, and not dreaming of handselling his own gallows.

Chapter 6

It is a very surprising scene that opens in this chapter. Haman, when he hoped to be Mordecai's judge, was made his page, to his great confusion and mortification; and thus way was made for the defeat of Haman's plot and the deliverance of the Jews. I. The providence of God recommends Mordecai in the night to the king's favour (v. 1-3). II. Haman, who came to incense the king against him, is employed as an instrument of the king's favour to him (v. 4-11). III. From this his friends read him his doom, which is executed in the next chapter (v. 12-14). And now it appears that Esther's intercession for her people was happily adjourned, "De die in diem"—from day to day.

Verses 1-3

Now Satan put it into the heart of Haman to contrive Mordecai's death we read in the foregoing chapter; how God put it into the heart of the king to contrive Mordecai's honour we are here told. Now, if the king's word will prevail above Haman's (for, though Haman be a great man, the king in the throne must be above him), much more will the *counsel of God stand*, whatever *devices there are in men's hearts*. It is to no purpose therefore for Haman to oppose it, when both God and the king will have Mordecai honoured, and in this juncture too, when his preferment, and Haman's disappointment, would help to ripen the great affair of the Jewish deliverance for the effort that Esther was to make towards it the next day. Sometimes delay may prove to have been good conduct. Stay awhile, and we may have done the sooner. *Cunctando restituit rem—He conquered by delay*. Let us trace the steps which Providence took towards the advancement of Mordecai.

I. *On that night could not the king sleep*. His *sleep fled away* (so the word is); and perhaps, like a shadow, the more carefully he pursued it the further it went from him. Sometimes we cannot sleep because we fain would sleep. Even after a banquet of wine he could not sleep when Providence had a design to serve in keeping him waking. We read of no bodily indisposition he was under, that might break his sleep; but God, *whose gift sleep is*, withheld it from him. Those that are ever so much resolved to cast away care cannot always do it; they find it in their pillows when they neither expect nor welcome it. He that commanded 127 provinces could not command one hour's sleep. Perhaps the charms of Esther's conversation the day before gave occasion to his heart to reproach him for neglecting her, and banishing her from his presence, though she was the wife of his bosom, for above thirty days; and that might keep him waking. An offended conscience can find a time to speak when it will be heard.

II. When he could not sleep he called to have the book of records, the Journals of his reign, read to him, v. 1. Surely he did not design that that should lull him asleep; it would rather fill his head with cares, and drive away sleep. But God put it into his heart to call for it, rather than for music or songs, which the Persian kings used to be attended with (Dan. 6:18) and which would have been more likely to compose him to rest. When men do that which is unaccountable we know not what God intends by it. Perhaps he would have this book of business read to him that he might improve time and be forming some useful projects. Had it been king David's case, he would have found some other entertainment for his thoughts; when he could not sleep he would have remembered God and meditated upon him (Ps. 64:6), and, if he would have had any book read to him, it

would have been his Bible; for *in that law did he meditate day and night*.

III. The servant that read to him either lighted first on that article which concerned Mordecai, or, reading long, came to it at length. Among other things it was found written that Mordecai had discovered a plot against the life of the king which prevented the execution of it, v. 2. Mordecai was not in such favour at court that the reader should designedly pitch upon that place; but Providence directed him to it; nay, if we may believe the Jews' tradition (as bishop Patrick relates it), opening the book at this place he turned over the leaves, and would have read another part of the book, but the leaves flew back again to the same place where he opened it; so that he was forced to read that paragraph. How Mordecai's good service was recorded we read ch. 2:23, and here it is found upon record.

IV. The king enquired *what honour and dignity had been done to Mordecai* for this, suspecting that this good service had gone unrewarded, and, like Pharaoh's butler, remembering it as *his fault this day*, Gen. 41:9. Note, The law of gratitude is a law of nature. We ought particularly to be grateful to our inferiors, and not to think all their services such debts to us but that they make us indebted to them. Two rules of gratitude may be gathered from the king's enquiry here:-1. Better honour than nothing. If we cannot, or need not, make recompence to those who have been kind to us, yet let us do them honour by acknowledging their kindnesses and owning our obligations to them. 2. Better late than never. If we have long neglected to make grateful returns for good offices done us, let us at length bethink ourselves of our debts.

V. The servants informed him that nothing had been done to Mordecai for that eminent service; in the king's gate he sat before, and there he still sat. Note, 1. It is common for great men to take little notice of their inferiors. The king knew not whether Mordecai was preferred or no till his servants informed him. High spirits take a pride in being careless and unconcerned about those that are below them and ignorant of their state. The great God takes cognizance of the meanest of his servants, knows what dignity is done them and what disgrace. 2. Humility, modesty, and self-denial, though in God's account of great price, yet commonly hinder men's preferment in the world. Mordecai rises no higher than the king's gate, while proud ambitious Haman gets the king's ear and heart; but, though the aspiring rise fast, the humble stand fast. Honour makes proud men giddy, but *upholds the humble in spirit*, Prov. 29:23. 3. Honour and dignity are rated high in the king's books. He does not ask, What reward has been given Mordecai? what money? what estate? but only, What honour?—a poor thing, and which, if he had not wherewith to support it, would be but a burden. 4. The greatest merits and the best services are often overlooked and go unrewarded among men. Little honour is done to those who best deserve it, and fittest for it, and would do most good with it. See Eccl. 9:14–16. The acquisition of wealth and honour is usually a perfect lottery, in which those that venture least commonly carry off the best prize. Nay, 5. Good services are sometimes so far from being a man's preferment that they will not be his protection. Mordecai is at this time, by the king's edict, doomed to destruction, with all the Jews, though it is owned that he deserved dignity. Those that faithfully serve God need not fear being thus ill paid.

Verses 4-11

It is now morning, and people begin to stir.

I. Haman is so impatient to get Mordecai hanged that he comes early to court, to be ready at the king's levee, before any other

business is brought before him, to get a warrant for his execution (v. 4), which he makes sure that he shall have at the first word. The king would gratify him in a greater thing than that; and he could tell the king that he was so confident of the justice of his request, and the king's favour to him in it, that he had got the gallows ready: one word from the king would complete his satisfaction.

II. The king is so impatient to have Mordecai honoured that he sends to know who is in the court that is fit to be employed in it. Word is brought him that Haman is in the court, v. 5. *Let him come in*, says the king, the fittest man to be made use of both in directing and in dispensing the king's favour; and the king knew nothing of any quarrel he had with Mordecai. Haman is brought in immediately, proud of the honour done him in being admitted into the king's bed-chamber, as it should seem, *before he was up*; for let the king but give orders for the dignifying of Mordecai, and he will be easy in his mind and try to sleep. Now Haman thinks he has the fairest opportunity he can wish for to solicit against Mordecai; but the king's heart is as full as his, and it is fit he should speak first.

III. The king asks Haman how he should express his favour to one whom he had marked for a favourite: *What shall be done to the man whom the king delights to honour?* v. 6. Note, It is a good property in kings, and other superiors, to delight in bestowing rewards and not to delight in punishing. Parents and masters should take a pleasure in commending and encouraging that which is good in those under their charge.

IV. Haman concludes that he himself is the favourite intended, and therefore prescribes the highest expressions of honour that could, for once, be bestowed upon a subject. His proud heart presently suggested, "To whom will the king delight to do honour more than to myself? No one deserves it so well as I," thinks Haman, "nor stands so fair for it." See how men's pride deceives them. 1. Haman had a better opinion of his merits than there was cause for: he thought none so worthy of honour as himself. It is a foolish thing for us thus to think ourselves the only deserving persons, or more deserving than any other. The deceitfulness of our own hearts appears in nothing so much as in the good conceit we have of ourselves and our own performances, against which we should therefore constantly watch and pray. 2. He had a better opinion of his interest than there was reason for. He thought the king loved and valued no one but himself, but he was deceived. We should suspect that the esteem which others profess for us is not so great as it seems to be or as we are sometimes willing to believe it is, that we may not think too well of ourselves nor place too much confidence in others. Now Haman thinks he is carving out honour for himself, and therefore does it very liberally, v. 8, 9. Nay, he does it presumptuously, prescribing honours too great to be conferred upon any subject, that he must be dressed in the royal robes, wear the royal crown, and ride on the king's own horse; in short, he must appear in all the pomp and grandeur of the king himself, only he must not carry the sceptre, the emblem of power. He must be attended by one of *the king's most noble princes*, who must be his lacquey, and all the people must be made to take notice of him and do him reverence; for he must ride in state through the streets, and it must be *proclaimed before him*, for his honour, and the encouragement of all to seek the ruler's favour, *Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honour*, which had the same intention with that which was proclaimed before Joseph, *Bow the knee*; for every good subject will honour those whom the king delights to honour. And shall not every good Christian then honour those whom the King of kings delights to

honour and call the *saints that are on the earth the excellent ones?*

V. The king confounds him with a positive order that he should immediately go himself and put all this honour upon Mordecai the Jew, v. 10. If the king had but said, as Haman expected, *Thou art the man*, what a fair opportunity would he have had to do the errand he came on, and to desire that, to grace the solemnity of his triumphs, Mordecai, his sworn enemy, might be hanged at the same time! But how is he thunderstruck when the king bids him not to order all this to be done, but to do it himself to Mordecai the Jew, the very man he hated above all men and whose ruin he was now designing! Now, it is to no purpose to think of moving any thing to the king against Mordecai when he is *the man whom the king delights to honour*. Solomon says, *The heart of the king is unsearchable* (Prov. 25:3), but it is not unchangeable.

VI. Haman dares not dispute nor so much as seem to dislike the king's order, but, with the greatest regret and reluctance imaginable, brings it to Mordecai, who I suppose did no more cringe to Haman now than he had done, valuing his counterfeit respect no more than he had valued his concealed malice. The apparel is brought, Mordecai is dressed up, and rides in state through the city, recognized as the king's favourite, v. 11. It is hard to say which of the two put a greater force upon himself, proud Haman in putting this honour upon Mordecai, or humble Mordecai in accepting it: the king would have it so, and both must submit. Upon *this* account it was agreeable to Mordecai as it was an indication of the king's favour, and gave hope that Esther would prevail for the reversing of the edict against the Jews.

Verses 12-14

We may here observe,

I. How little Mordecai was puffed up with his advancement. he *came again to the king's gate* (v. 12); he returned to his place and the duty of it immediately, and minded his business as closely as he had done before. Honour is well bestowed on those that are not made proud and idle by it, and will not think themselves above their business.

II. How much Haman was cast down with his disappointment. he could not bear it. To wait upon any man, especially Mordecai, and at this time, when he hoped to have seen him hanged, was enough to break such a proud heart as he had. He *hasted to his house mourning, and having his head covered*, as one that looked upon himself as sunk and in a manner condemned. What harm had it done him to stoop thus to Mordecai? Was he ever the worse for it? Was it not what he himself proposed to be done by *one of the king's most noble princes*? Why then should he grudge to do it himself? But that will break a proud man's heart which would not break a humble man's sleep.

III. How his doom was, out of this event, read to him by his wife and his friends: "If Mordecai be, as they say he is, *of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall*, though but in a point of honour, never expect to *prevail against him*; for thou *shalt surely fall before him*," v. 13. Miserable comforters were they all; they did not advise him to repent, and ask Mordecai's pardon for his bad design against him, but foretold his destiny as fatal and unavoidable. Two things they foresaw:-1. That Haman would be disappointed in his enterprise against the Jews: "*Thou shalt not prevail* to root out that people. Heaven plainly fights against thee." 2. That he himself would be destroyed: *Thou shalt surely fall before him*. The contest between Michael and the dragon will not be a drawn battle; no, Haman must fall before Mordecai. Two things they grounded their

prognostications upon:—(1.) This Mordecai was *of the seed of the Jews*; *feeble Jews* their enemies sometimes called them, but formidable Jews they sometimes found them. They are a holy seed, a praying seed, in covenant with God, and a seed that the Lord hath all along blessed, and therefore let not their enemies expect to triumph over them. (2.) Haman had begun to fall, and therefore he was certainly a gone man. It has been observed of great court-favourites that when once they have been frowned upon they have fallen utterly, as fast as they rose; it is true of the church's enemies that when God begins with them he will make an end. As for God his work is perfect.

IV. How seasonably he was now sent for to the banquet that Esther had prepared, v. 14. He thought it seasonable, in hopes it would revive his drooping spirits and save his sinking honour. But really it was seasonable because, his spirits being broken by this sore disappointment, he might the more easily be run down by Esther's complaint against him. The wisdom of God is seen in timing the means of his church's deliverance so as to manifest his own glory

Chapter 7

We are now to attend the second banquet to which the king and Haman were invited: and there, I. Esther presents her petition to the king for her life and the life of her people (v. 1-4). II. She plainly tells the king that Haman is the man who designed her ruin and the ruin of all her friends (v. 5, 6). III. The king thereupon gave orders for the hanging of Haman upon the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai, which was done accordingly (v. 7-10). And thus, by the destruction of the plotter, a good step was taken towards the defeating of the plot.

Verses 1-6

The king in humour, and Haman out of humour, meet at Esther's table. Now,

I. The king urged Esther, a third time, to tell him what her request was, for he longed to know, and repeated his promise that it should be granted, v. 2. If the king had now forgotten that Esther had an errand to him, and had not again asked what it was, she could scarcely have known how to renew it herself; but he was mindful of it, and now was bound with the threefold cord of a promise thrice made to favour her.

II. Esther, at length, surprises the king with a petition, not for wealth or honour, or the preferment of some of her friends to some high post, which the king expected, but for the preservation of herself and her countrymen from death and destruction, v. 3, 4.

1. Even a stranger, a criminal, shall be permitted to petition for his life; but that a friend, a wife, should have occasion to present such a petition was very affecting: *Let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request.* Two things bespeak lives to be very precious, and fit to be saved, if innocent, at any expense:—(1.) Majesty. If it be a crowned head that is struck at, it is time to stir. Esther's was such: "*Let my life be given me.* If thou hast any affection for the wife of thy bosom, now is the time to show it; for that is the life that lies at stake." (2.) Multitude. If they be many lives, very many, and those no way forfeited, that are aimed at, no time should be lost nor pains spared to prevent the mischief. "It is not a friend or two, but *my people*, a whole nation, and a nation dear to me, for the saving of which I now intercede."

2. To move the king the more she suggests, (1.) That she and her people were bought and sold. They had not sold themselves by any offence against the government, but were sold to gratify the pride and revenge of one man. (2.) That it was not their liberty only, but their lives that were sold. "Had we been sold" (she says) "into slavery, I would not have complained; for in time we might have recovered our liberty, thought eh king would have made but a bad bargain of it, and not have increased his wealth by our price. Whatever had been paid for us, the loss of so many industrious hands out of his kingdom would have been more damage to the treasury than the price would countervail." To persecute good people is as impolitic as it is impious, and a manifest wrong to the interests of princes and states; they are weakened and impoverished by it. But this was not the case. *We are sold* (says she) *to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish;* and then it is time to speak. She refers to the words of the decree (ch. 3:13), which aimed at nothing short of their destruction; this would touch in a tender part if there were any such in the king's heart, and would bring him to relent.

III. The king stands amazed at the remonstrance, and asks (v. 5) "*Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so? What! contrive the murder of the queen and all her friends? Is there such a man, such a monster rather, in nature? Who is he, and where is he, whose heart has filled him to do so?*" Or, Who hath filled his heart. He wonders, 1. That any one should be so bad as to think such a thing; Satan certainly filled his heart. 2. That any one should be so bold as to do such a thing, should have his heart so fully set in him to do wickedly, should be so very daring. Note, (1.) It is hard to imagine that there should be such horrid wickedness committed in the world as really there is. Who, where is he, that dares, presumes, to question the being of God and his providence, to banter his oracles, profane his name, persecute his people, and yet bid defiance to his wrath? Such there are, to think of whom is enough to make *horror take hold of us*, Ps. 119:53. (2.) We sometimes startle at the mention of that evil which yet we ourselves are chargeable with. Ahasuerus is amazed at that wickedness which he himself is guilty of; for he consented to that bloody edict against the Jews. *Thou art the man*, might Esther too truly have said.

IV. Esther plainly charged Haman with it before his face: "Here he is, let him speak for himself, for therefore he is invited: *The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman* (v. 6); it is he that has designed our murder, and, which is worse, has basely drawn the king in to be *particeps criminis partaker of his crime*, ignorantly agreeing to it."

V. Haman is soon apprehensive of his danger: *He was afraid before the king and queen*; and it was time for him to fear when the queen was his prosecutor, the king his judge, and his own conscience a witness against him; and the surprising operations of Providence against him that same morning could not but increase his fear. Now he has little joy of his being invited to the banquet of wine, but finds himself in straits when he thought himself *in the fulness of his sufficiency*. *He is cast into a net by his own feet*.

Verses 7-10

Here, I. The king retires in anger. He rose from table in a great passion, and *went into the palace garden* to cool himself and to consider what was to be done, v. 7. He sent not for his *seven wise counsellors who knew the times*, being ashamed to consult them about the undoing of that which he had rashly done without their knowledge or advice; but he went to walk in the garden awhile, to compare in his thoughts what Esther had now informed him of with what had formerly passed between him and Haman. And we may suppose him, 1. Vexed at himself, that he should be such a fool as to doom a guiltless nation to destruction, and his own queen among the rest, upon the base suggestions of a self-seeking man, without examining the truth of his allegations. Those that do things with self-will reflect upon them afterwards with self-reproach. 2. Vexed at Haman whom he had laid in his bosom, that he should be such a villain as to abuse his interest in him to draw him to consent to so wicked a measure. When he saw himself betrayed by one he had caressed he was full of indignation at him; yet he would say nothing till he had taken time for second thoughts, to see whether they would make the matter better or worse than it first appeared, that he might proceed accordingly. When we are angry we should pause awhile before we come to any resolution, as those that have *a rule over our own spirits* and are governed by reason.

II. Haman becomes a humble petitioner to the queen for his life. He might easily be perceived by the king's hastily flying out of the room that *there was evil determined against him*. For *the wrath of a king, such a king, is as the roaring of a lion* and as

messengers of death; and now see, 1. How mean Haman looks, when he stands up first and then falls down at Esther's feet, to beg she would save his life and take all he had. Those that are most haughty, insolent, and imperious, when they are in power and prosperity, are commonly the most abject and poor-spirited when the wheel turns upon them. Cowards, they say, are most cruel, and then consciousness of their cruelty makes them the more cowardly. 2. How great Esther looks, who of late had been neglected and doomed to the slaughter *tanquam ovis—as a sheep*; now her sworn enemy owns that he lies at her mercy, a d begs his life at her hand. Thus did God *regard the low estate of his handmaiden and scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts*, Lu. 1:48, 51. Compare with this that promise made to the Philadelphian church (Rev. 3:9), *I will make those of the synagogue of Satan to come and to worship before thy feet and to know that I have loved thee*. The day is coming when those that hate and persecute God's chosen ones would gladly be beholden to them. *Give us of your oil. Father Abraham, send Lazarus. The upright shall have dominion in the morning.*

III. The king returns yet more exasperated against Haman. The more he thinks of him the worse he thinks of him and of what he had done. It was but lately that every thing Haman said and did, even that which was most criminal, was taken well and construed to his advantage; now, on the contrary, what Haman did that was not only innocent, but a sign of repentance, is ill taken, and, without colour of reason, construed to his disadvantage. He lay in terror at Esther's feet, to beg for his life. What! (says the king) *will he force the queen also before me in the house?* Not that he thought he had any such intention, but having been musing on Haman's design to slay the queen, and finding him in this posture, he takes occasion from it thus to vent his passion against Haman, as a man that would not scruple at the greatest and most impudent piece of wickedness. "He designed to slay the queen, and to slay her *wish me in the house*; will he in like manner force her? What! ravish her first and then murder her? He that had a design upon her life may well be suspected to have a design upon her chastity."

IV. Those about him were ready to be the instruments of his wrath. The courtiers that adored Haman when he was the rising sun set themselves as much against him now that he is a falling star, and are even glad of an occasion to run him down: so little sure can proud men be of the interest they think they have. 1. As soon as the king spoke an angry word *they covered Haman's face*, as a condemned man, not worthy any more either to see the king or to be seen by him; they marked him for execution. Those that are hanged commonly have their faces covered. See how ready the servants were to take the first hint of the king's mind in this matter. *Turba Romae sequitur fortunam, et semper et odit damnatos—The Roman populace change as the aspects of fortune do, and always oppress the fallen*. If Haman be going down, they all cry, "Down with him." 2. One of those that had been lately sent to Haman's house, to fetch him to the banquet, informed the king of the gallows which Haman had prepared for Mordecai, v. 9. Now that Mordecai is the favourite the chamberlain applauds him—he *spoke good for the king*; and, Haman being in disgrace, every thing is taken notice of that might make against him, incense the king against him, and fill up the measure of his iniquity.

V. The king gave orders that he should be hanged upon his own gallows, which was done accordingly, nor was he so much as asked what he had to say why this judgment should not be passed upon him and execution awarded. The sentence is short—*Hang him thereon*; and the execution speedy—*So they hanged Haman on the gallows*, v. 10. See here, 1. Pride brought down.

He that expected every one to do him homage is now made an ignominious spectacle to the world, and he himself sacrificed to his revenge. God resists the proud; and those whom he resists will find him irresistible. 2. Persecution punished. Haman was upon many accounts a wicked man, but his enmity to God's church was his most provoking crime, and for *that* the God to whom vengeance belongs here reckons with him, and, though his plot was defeated, gives him *according to the wickedness of his endeavours*, Ps. 28:4. 3. Mischief returned upon the person himself that contrived it, the *wicked snared in the work of his own hands*, Ps. 7:15, 16; 9:15, 16. Haman was justly hanged on the very gallows he had unjustly prepared for Mordecai. If he had not set up that gallows, perhaps the king would not have thought of ordering him to be hanged; but, if he rear a gallows for *the man whom the king delights to honour*, the thought is very natural that he should be ordered to try it himself, and see how it fits him, see how he likes it. The enemies of God's church have often been thus taken in their own craftiness. In the morning Haman was designing himself for the robes and Mordecai for the gallows; but the tables are turned: Mordecai has the crown, Haman the cross. *The Lord is known by such judgments*. See Prov. 11:8; 21:18. *Lastly*, The satisfaction which the king had in this execution. *Then was the king's wrath pacified*, and not till then. He was as well pleased in ordering Haman to be hanged as in ordering Mordecai to be honoured. Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to take vengeance on. God saith of wicked men (Eze. 5:13), *I will cause my fury to rest upon them, and I will be comforted*.

Chapter 8

We left the plotter hanging, and are now to see what becomes of his plot. I. His plot was to raise an estate for himself; and all his estate, being confiscated for treason, is given to Esther and Mordecai (v. 1, 2). II. His plot was to ruin the Jews; and as to that, 1. Esther earnestly intercedes for the reversing of the edict against them (v. 3-6). 2. It is in effect done by another edict, here published, empowering the Jews to stand up in their own defence against their enemies (v. 7-14). III. This occasions great joy to the Jews and all their friends (v. 15-17).

Verses 1-2

It was but lately that we had Esther and Mordecai in tears and in fears, but fasting and praying; now let us see how to them there arose light in darkness. Here is, 1. Esther enriched. Haman was hanged as a traitor, therefore his estate was forfeited to the crown, and the king gave it all to Esther, in recompence for the fright that wicked man had put her into and the vexation he had created her, v. 1. His houses and lands, good sand chattels, and all the money he had heaped up which he was prime-minister of state (which, we may suppose, was no little), are given to Esther; they are all her own, added to the allowance she already had. Thus is *the wealth of the sinner laid up for the just*, and the *innocent divides the silver*, Prov. 13:22; Job 27:17, 18. What Haman would have done mischief with Esther will do good with; and estates are to be valued as they are used. 2. Mordecai advanced. His pompous procession, this morning, through the streets of the city, was but a sudden flash or blaze of honour; but here we have the more durable and gainful preferments to which he was raised, which yet the other happily made way for. (1.) He is now owned as the queen's cousin, which till now, though Esther had been four years queen, for aught that appears, the king did not know. So humble, so modest, a man was Mordecai, and so far from being ambitious of a place at court, that he concealed his relation to the queen and her obligations to him as her guardian, and never made use of her interest for any advantage of his own. Who but Mordecai could have taken so little notice of so great an honour? But now he was brought *before the king*, introduced, as we say, to kiss his hand; for now, at length, *Esther had told what he was to her*, not only near a-kin to her, but the best friend she had in the world, who took care of her when she was an orphan, and one whom she still respected as a father. Now the king finds himself, for his wife's sake, more obliged than he thought he had been to delight in doing honour to Mordecai. How great were the merits of that man to whom both king and queen did in effect owe their lives! Being brought before the king, to him no doubt he bowed, and did reverence, though he would not to Haman an Amalekite. (2.) The king makes his lord privy-seal in the room of Haman. All the trust he had reposed in Haman, and all the power he had given him, are here transferred to Mordecai; for the ring which he had taken from Haman he gave to Mordecai, and made this trusty humble man as much his favourite, his confidant, and his agent, as ever that proud perfidious wretch was; a happy change he made of his bosom-friends, and so, no doubt, he and his people soon found it. (3.) The queen makes him here steward, for the management of Haman's estate, and for getting and keeping possession of it: *She set Mordecai over the house of Haman*. See the vanity of laying up treasure upon earth; he that *heapeth up riches knoweth not who shall gather them* (Ps. 39:6), not only *whether he shall be a wise man or a fool* (Eccl. 2:19), but whether he shall be a friend or an enemy. With

what little pleasure, nay, with what constant vexation, would Haman have looked upon his estate if he could have foreseen that Mordecai, the man he hated above all men in the world, should have *rule over all that wherein he had laboured*, and thought that he showed himself wise! It is our interest, therefore, to make sure those riches which will not be left behind, but will go with us to another world.

Verses 3-14

Haman, the chief enemy of the Jews, was hanged, Mordecai and Esther, their chief friends, were sufficiently protected; but many others there were in the king's dominions that hated the Jews and desired their ruin, and to their rage and malice all the rest of that people lay exposed; for the edict against them was still in force, and, in pursuance of it, their enemies would on the day appointed fall upon them, and they would be deemed as rebels against the king and his government if they should offer to resist and take up arms in their own defence. For the preventing of this,

I. The queen here makes intercession with much affection and importunity. She came, a second time, uncalled into the king's presence (v. 3), and was as before encouraged to present her petition, by the king's holding out the golden sceptre to her, v. 4. Her petition is that the king, having put away Haman, would put away the mischief of Haman and his device against the Jews, that that might not take place now that he was taken off. Many a man's mischief survives him, and the wickedness he devised operates when he is gone. What men project and write may, after their death, be either very profitable or very pernicious. It was therefore requisite in this case that, for the defeating of Haman's plot, they should apply to the king for a further act of grace, that by another edict he would reverse the letters devised by Haman, and which he wrote (she does not say which the king *consented to and confirmed with his own seal*; she leaves it to his own conscience to say that), by which he took an effectual course to *destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces*, v. 5. If the king were indeed, as he seemed to be, troubled that such a decree was made, he could not do less than revoke it; for what is repentance, but undoing, to the utmost of our power, what we have done amiss? 1. This petition Esther presents with much affection: She *fell down at the king's feet and besought him with tears* (v. 3), every tear as precious as any of the pearls with which she was adorned. It was time to be earnest when the church of God lay at stake. Let none be so great as to be unwilling to stoop, none so merry as to be unwilling to weep, when thereby they may do any service to God's church and people. Esther, though safe herself, fell down, and begged with tears for the deliverance of her people. 2. She expresses it with great submission, and a profound deference to the king and his wisdom and will (v. 5): *If it please the king and if I have found favour in his sight* and again, "If the thing itself seem right and reasonable before the king, and if I that ask it *be pleasing in his eyes*, let the decree be reversed." Even when we have the utmost reason and justice on our side, and have the clearest cause to plead, yet it becomes us to speak to our superiors with humility and modesty, and all possible expressions of respect, and not to talk like demandants when we are supplicants. There is nothing lost be decency and good breeding. As *soft answers turn away wrath*, so soft askings obtain favour. 3. She enforces her petition with a pathetic plea: *"For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come upon my people?"* Little comfort can I have of my own life if I cannot prevail for theirs: as good share in the evil myself as see it come upon them; for *how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred*, that are dear to me?" Esther, a queen, owns her poor kindred, and speaks of them

with a very tender concern. Now it was that she mingled her tears with her words, that *she wept and made supplication*; we read of no tears when she begged for her own life, but, now that she was sure of that, she wept for her people. Tears of pity and tenderness are the most Christ-like. Those that are truly concerned for the public would rather die in the last ditch than live to see the desolations of the church of God and the ruin of their country. Tender spirits cannot bear to think of the destruction of their people and kindred, and therefore dare not omit any opportunity of giving them relief.

II. The king here takes a course for the preventing of the mischief that Haman had designed. 1. The king knew, and informed the queen, that, according to the constitution of the Persian government, the former edict could not be revoked (v. 8): *What is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may not, under any pretence whatsoever, be reversed.* This was a fundamental article of their *magna charta*, that no law or decree, when once it had passed the royal assent, could be repealed or recalled, no judgment vacated, no attainder reversed, Dan. 6:15. This is so far from bespeaking the wisdom and honour of the Medes and Persians that really it bespeaks their pride and folly, and consequently their shame. It is ridiculous in itself for any man, or company of men, to pretend to such an infallibility of wisdom as to foresee all the consequences of what they decree; and therefore it is unjust, and injurious to mankind, to claim such a supremacy of power as to make their decrees irrevocable, whether the consequences prove good or bad. This savours of that old presumption which ruined us all: *We will be as gods.* Much more prudent is that proviso of our constitution, that no law can, by any words or sanctions whatsoever, be made unrepealable, any more than any estate unalienable. *Cujus est instruere, ejus est destruerethe right to enact implies the right to repeal.* It is God's prerogative not to repent, and to say what can never be altered or unsaid. 2. Yet he found an expedient to undo the devices of Haman, and defeat his design, by signing and publishing another decree to authorize the Jews to stand upon their defence, *vim vi repellere, et invasorem occidere—to oppose force to force, and destroy the assailant.* This would be their effectual security. The king shows them that he had done enough already to convince them that he had a concern for the Jewish nation, for he had ordered his favourite to be hanged *because he laid his hand upon the Jews* (v. 7), and he therefore would do the utmost he could to protect them; and he leaves it as fully with Esther and Mordecai to use his name and power for their deliverance as before he had left it with Haman to use his name and power for their destruction: *"Write for the Jews as it liketh you* (v. 8), saving only the honour of our constitution. Let the mischief be put away as effectually as may be without reversing the letters." The secretaries of state were ordered to attend to draw up this edict on the twenty-third day of the third month (v. 9), about two months after the promulgation of the former, but nine months before the time set for its execution: it was to be drawn up and published in the respective languages of all the provinces. Shall the subjects of an earthly prince have his decrees in a language they understand? and shall God's oracles and laws be locked up from his servants in an unknown tongue? It was to be directed to the proper officers of every province, both to the justices of peace and to the deputy-lieutenants. It was to be carefully dispersed throughout all the king's dominions, and true copies sent by expresses to all the provinces. The purport of this decree was to commission the Jews, upon the day which was appointed for their destruction, to draw together in a body for their own defence. And, (1.) To stand for their life, that, whoever assaulted them, it might be at their peril. (2.) They might not only act defensively, but might *destroy, and slay, and cause to perish, all the power of the*

people that would assault them, men, women, and children (v. 11), and thus *to avenge themselves on their enemies* (v. 13), and, if they pleased, to enrich themselves by their enemies, for they were empowered to take the spoil of them for a prey. Now, [1.] This showed his kindness to the Jews, and sufficiently provided for their safety; for he latter decree would be looked upon as a tacit revocation of the former, though not in expression. But, [2.] It shows the absurdity of that branch of their constitution that none of the king's edicts might be repealed; for it laid the king here under a necessity of enacting a civil war in his own dominions, between the Jews and their enemies, so that both sides took up arms *by* his authority, and yet *against* his authority. No better could come of men's pretending to be wise above what is given them. Great expedition was used in dispersing this decree, the king himself being in pain lest it should come too late and any mischief should be done to the Jews by virtue of the former decree before the notice of this arrived. It was therefore *by the king's commandment*, as well as Mordecai's, that the messengers were *hastened and pressed on* (v. 14), and had swift beasts provided them, v. 10. It was not a time to trifle when so many lives were in danger.

Verses 15-17

It was but a few days ago that we had Mordecai in sackcloth and all the Jews in sorrow; but here is a blessed change, Mordecai in purple and all the Jews in joy. See Ps. 30:5, 11, 12. 1. Mordecai in purple, v. 15. Having obtained an order for the relief of all the Jews, he was easy, he parted with his mourning weeds, and put on the *royal apparel*, which either belonged to his place or which the king appointed him as a favourite. His robes were rich, *blue and white, of fine linen and purple*; so was his coronet: it was *of gold*. These are things not worth taking notice of, but as they were marks of the king's favour, and *that* the fruit of God's favour to his church. It is well with a land when the ensigns of dignity are made the ornaments of serious piety. The *city Shushan* was sensible of its advantage in the preferment of Mordecai, and therefore *rejoiced and was glad*, not only pleased in general with the advancement of virtue, but promising itself, in particular, better times, now that so good a man was entrusted with power. Haman was hanged; *and, when the wicked perish, there is shouting*, Prov. 11:10. Mordecai was preferred; and, *when the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice*. 2. The Jews in joy, v. 16, 17. The Jews, who awhile ago were under a dark cloud, dejected and disgraced, now had *light and gladness, joy and honour, a feast and a good lay*. If they had not been threatened and in distress they would not have had occasion for this extraordinary joy. Thus are God's people sometimes made *to sow in tears* that they may *reap in* so much the more *joy*. The suddenness and strangeness of the turn of affairs in their favour added much to their joy. They were *like those that dream; then was their mouth filled with laughter*, Ps. 126:1, 2. One good effect of this deliverance was that *many of the people of the land*, that were considerate, sober, and well inclined, became Jews, were proselyted to the Jewish religion, renounced idolatry, and worshipped the true God only. Haman thought to extirpate the Jews, but it proves, in the issue, that their numbers are greatly increased and many added to the church. Observe, When *the Jews had joy and gladness* then *many of the people of the land became Jews*. The holy cheerfulness of those that profess religion is a great ornament to their profession, and will invite and encourage others to be religious. The reason here given why so many became Jews at this time is because *the fear of the Jews fell upon them*. When they observed how wonderfully divine Providence had owned them and wrought for them in this critical juncture, (1.) They thought them

great, and considered those happy that were among them; and therefore they came over to them, as was foretold, Zec. 8:23. *We will go with you, for we have heard, we have seen, that God is with you, the shield of your help, and the sword of your excellency*, Deu. 33:29. When the church prospers, and is smiled upon, many will come into it that will be shy of it when it is in trouble. (2.) They thought them formidable, and considered those miserable that were against them. They plainly saw in Haman's fate that, if any offered injury to the Jews, it was at their peril; and therefore, for their own security, they joined themselves to them. It is folly to think of contending with the God of Israel, and therefore it is wisdom to think of submitting to him.

Chapter 9

We left two royal edicts in force, both given at the court of Shushan, one bearing date the thirteenth day of the first month, appointing that on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month then next ensuing all the Jews should be killed; another bearing date the twenty-third day of the third month, empowering the Jews, on the day appointed for their slaughter, to draw the sword in their own defence and make their part good against their enemies as well as they could. Great expectation there was, no doubt, of this day, and the issue of it. The Jews' cause was to be tried by battle and the day was fixed for the combat by authority. Their enemies resolved not to lose the advantages given them by the first edict, in hope to overpower them by numbers; the Jews relied on the goodness of their God and the justice of their cause, and resolved to make their utmost efforts against their enemies. The day comes at length; and here we are told, I. What a glorious day it was, that year, to the Jews, and the two days following—a day of victory and triumph, both in the city Shushan and in all the rest of the king's provinces (v. 1–19). II. What a memorable day it was made to posterity, by an annual feast, in commemoration of this great deliverance, called "the feast of Purim," (v. 20–32).

Verses 1-19

We have here a decisive battle fought between the Jews and their enemies, in which the Jews were victorious. Neither side was surprised; for both had notice of it long enough before, so that it was a fair trial of skill between them. Nor could either side call the other *rebels*, for they were both supported by the royal authority.

I. The enemies of the Jews were the aggressors. They hoped, notwithstanding the latter edict, *to have power over them*, by virtue of the former (v. 1), and made assaults upon them accordingly; they formed themselves into bodies, and joined in confederacy against them, *to seek their hurt*, v. 2. The Chaldee paraphrase says that none appeared against the Jews but Amalekites only, who were infatuated, and had their hearts hardened, as Pharaoh's against Israel, to take up arms to their own destruction. Some had such an inveterate implacable malice against the Jews that Haman's fall and Mordecai's advancement, instead of convincing them, did but exasperate them, and make them the more outrageous and resolute to cut all their throats. The sons of Haman, particularly, vowed to avenge their father's death, and pursue his designs, which they call *noble and brave*, whatever hazards they run; and a strong party they had formed both in Shushan and in the provinces in order hereunto. Fight they would, though they plainly saw Providence fight against them; and thus they were infatuated to their own destruction. If they would have sat still, and attempted nothing against the people of God, not a hair of their head would have fallen to the ground: but they cannot persuade themselves to do that; they must be meddling, though it prove to their own ruin, and roll a burdensome stone, which will return upon them.

II. But the Jews were the conquerors. That very day when the king's decree for their destruction was to be put in execution, and which the enemies thought would have been *their day*, proved *God's day*, Ps. 37:13. It was *turned to the contrary* of what was expected, and *the Jews had rule over those that hated them*, v. 1. We are here told,

1. What the Jews did for themselves (v. 2): *They gathered themselves together in their cities*, embodied, and stood upon their

defence, offering violence to none, but bidding defiance to all. If they had not had an edict to warrant them, they durst not have done it, but, being so supported, they strove lawfully. Had they acted separately, each family apart, they would have been an easy prey to their enemies; but acting in concert, and gathering together in their cities, they strengthened one another, and durst face their enemies. *Vis unita fortior—forces act most powerfully when combined.* Those that write of the state of the Jews at this day give this as a reason why, though they are very numerous in many parts, and very rich, they are yet so despicable, because they are generally so selfish that they cannot incorporate, and, being under the curse of dispersion, they cannot unite, nor (as here) *gather together*, for, if they could, they might with their numbers and wealth threaten the most potent states.

2. What the rulers of the provinces did for them, under the influence of Mordecai. All the officers of the king, who, by the bloody edict, were ordered to help forward their destruction (ch. 3:12, 13), conformed to the latter edict (which, being an estoppel against an estoppel, had set the matter at large, and left them at liberty to observe which they pleased) and *helped the Jews*, which turned the scale on their side, v. 3. The provinces would generally do as the rulers of the provinces inclined, and therefore their favouring the Jews would greatly further them. But why did they help them? Not because they had any kindness for them, but because *the fear of Mordecai fell upon them*, he having manifestly the countenance both of God and the king. They all saw it their interest to help Mordecai's friends because he was not only great in the king's house, and caressed by the courtiers (as many are who have no intrinsic worth to support their reputation), but *his fame* for wisdom and virtue *went out thence throughout all the provinces*: in all places he was extolled as a great man. He was looked upon also as a thriving man, and one that *waxed greater and greater* (v. 4), and therefore for fear of him all the king's officers helped the Jews. Great men may, by their influence, do a great deal of good; many that fear not God will stand in awe of them.

3. What God did for them: he struck *all people* with a *fear of them* (v. 2), as the Canaanites were made afraid of Israel (Jos. 2:9, 5:1), so that, though they had so much hardiness as to assault them, yet they had not courage to prosecute the assault. Their hearts failed them when they came to engage, and *none of the men of might could find their hands*.

4. What execution they did hereupon: *No man could withstand them* (v. 2), but *they did what they would to those that hated them*, v. 5. So strangely were the Jews strengthened and animated, and their enemies weakened and dispirited, that none of those who had marked themselves for their destruction escaped, but they *smote them with the stroke of the sword*. Particularly, (1.) On the thirteenth day of the month Adar they slew in the city Shushan 500 men (v. 6) and the ten sons of *Haman*, v. 10. The Jews, when on the feast of Purim they read this book of Esther, oblige themselves to read the names of Haman's ten sons all in one breath, without any pause, because they say that they were all killed together, and all gave up the ghost just in the same moment.—*Buxt. Synag. Jud.* c. 24. The Chaldee paraphrase says that, when these ten were slain, Zeresh, with seventy more of his children, escaped, and afterwards begged their bread from door to door. (2.) On the fourteenth day they slew in Shushan 300 more, who had escaped the sword on the former day of execution, v. 15. This Esther obtained leave of the king for them to do, for the greater terror of their enemies, and the utter crushing of that malignant party of men. The king had taken account of the numbers that were put to the sword the first day (v. 11), and told Esther (v. 12), and asked her what more she desired. "Nothing," says she, "but commission to do such another day's work." Esther surely was none of the blood-thirsty,

none of those that delight in slaughter, but she had some very good reasons that moved her to make this request. She also desired that the dead bodies of Haman's ten sons might be hanged up on the gallows on which their father was hanged, for the greater disgrace of the family and terror of the party (v. 13), and it was done accordingly, v. 14. It is supposed that they were hanged in chains and left hanging for some time. (3.) The Jews in the country kept to their orders, and slew no more of their enemies than what were slain the thirteenth day, which were in all, among all the provinces, 75,000, v. 16. If all these were Amalekites (as the Jews say), surely now it was that the remembrance of Amalek was *utterly put out*, Ex. 17:14. However, that which justifies them in the execution of so many is that they did it in their own just and necessary defence; they *stood for their lives*, authorized to do so by the law of self-preservation, as well as by the king's decree. (4.) In these several executions it is taken notice of that on the prey they laid not their hand, v. 10, 15, 16. The king's commission had warranted them to *take the spoil* of their enemies *for a prey* (ch. 8:11), and a fair opportunity they had of enriching themselves with it; if Haman's party had prevailed, no doubt, they would have made use of their authority to seize the goods and estates of the Jews, ch. 3:13. But the Jews would not do so by them, [1.] That they might, to the honour of their religion, evidence a holy and generous contempt of worldly wealth, in imitation of their father Abraham, who scorned to enrich himself with the spoils of Sodom. [2.] That they might make it appear that they aimed at nothing but their own preservation, and used their interest at court for the saving of their lives, not for the raising of their estates. [3.] Their commission empowered them to destroy the families of their enemies, even the *little ones* and *the women*, ch. 8:11. But their humanity forbade them to do that, though that was designed against them. They slew none but those they found in arms; and therefore they did not take the spoil, but left it to the women and little ones, whom they spared, for their subsistence; otherwise as good slay them as starve them, take away their lives as take away their livelihoods. Herein they acted with a consideration and compassion well worthy of imitation.

5. What a satisfaction they had in their deliverance. The Jews in the country cleared themselves of their enemies on the thirteenth day of the month, and they rested on the fourteenth day (v. 17), and made that a thanksgiving day, v. 19. The Jews in Shushan, the royal city, took two days for their military execution, so that they rested on the fifteenth day, and made that their thanksgiving-day, v. 18. Both of them celebrated their festival the very day after they had finished their work and gained their point. When we have received signal mercies from God we ought to be quick and speedy in making our thankful returns to him, while the mercy is fresh and the impressions of it are most sensible.

Verses 20-32

We may well imagine how much affected Mordecai and Esther were with the triumphs of the Jews over their enemies, and how they saw the issue of that decisive day with a satisfaction proportionable to the care and concern with which they expected it. How were their hearts enlarged with joy in God and his salvation, and what new songs of praise were put into their mouths! But here we are told what course they took to spread the knowledge of it among their people, and to perpetuate the remembrance of it to posterity, for the honour of God and the encouragement of his people to trust in him at all times.

I. The history was written, and copies of it were dispersed among all the Jews in all the provinces of the empire, *both nigh and far*, v. 20. They all knew something of the story, being nearly concerned in it—were by the first edict made sensible of their

danger and by the second of their deliverance; but how this amazing turn was given they could not tell. Mordecai therefore *wrote all these things*. And if this book be the same that he wrote, as many think it is, I cannot but observe what a difference there is between Mordecai's style and Nehemiah's. Nehemiah, at every turn, takes notice of divine Providence and the *good hand of his God* upon him, which is very proper to stir up devout affections in the minds of his readers; but Mordecai never so much as mentions the name of God in the whole story. Nehemiah wrote his book at Jerusalem, where religion was in fashion and an air of it appeared in men's common conversation; Mordecai wrote his at Shushan the palace, where policy reigned more than piety, and he wrote according to the genius of the place. Even those that have the root of the matter in them are apt to lose the savour of religion, and let their leaf wither, when they converse wholly with those that have little religion. Commend me to Nehemiah's way of writing; *that* I would imitate, and yet learn from Mordecai's that men may be truly devout though they do not abound in the shows and expressions of devotion, and therefore that we must not judge nor despise our brethren. But, because there is so little of the language of Canaan in this book, many think it was not written by Mordecai, but was an extract out of the journals of the kings of Persia, giving an account of the matter of fact, which the Jews themselves knew how to comment upon.

II. A festival was instituted, to be observed yearly from generation to generation by the Jews, in remembrance of this wonderful work which God wrought for them, that *the children who should be born* might know it, and *declare it to their children, that they might set their hope in God*, Ps. 78:6, 7. It would be for the honour of God as the protector of his people, and the honour of Israel as the care of Heaven, a confirmation of the fidelity of God's covenant, an invitation to strangers to come into the bonds of it, and an encouragement to God's own people cheerfully to depend upon his wisdom, power, and goodness, in the greatest straits. Posterity would reap the benefit of this deliverance, and therefore ought to celebrate the memorial of it. Now concerning this festival we are here told,

1. When it was observed—every year on *the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the twelfth month*, just a month before the passover, v. 21. Thus the first month and the last month of the year kept in remembrance the months that were past, even *the days when God preserved them*. They kept two days together as thanksgiving days, and did not think them too much to spend in praising God. Let us not be niggardly in our returns of praise to him who bestows his favours so liberally upon us. Observe, They did not keep the day when they fought, but the days when they rested, and on the fifteenth those in Shushan, and both those days they kept. The sabbath was appointed not on the day that God finished his work, but on the day that he *rested from it*. The modern Jews observe the thirteenth day, the day appointed for their destruction, as a fasting-day, grounding the practice on v. 31, *the matters of their fastings and cry*. But that refers to what was in the day of their distress (ch. 4:3, 16), which was not to be continued when God had turned their fasts into *joy and gladness*, Zec. 8:19.

2. How it was called—*The feast of Purim* (v. 26), from *Pur*, a Persian word which signified *a lot*, because Haman had by lot determined this to be the time of the Jews' destruction, but the Lord, at whose disposal the lot is, had determined it to be the time of their triumph. The name of this festival would remind them of the sovereign dominion of the God of Israel, who served his own purposes by the foolish superstitions of the heathen, and outwitted the *monthly prognosticators* in their own craft (Isa.

47:13), *frustrating the tokens of the liars and making the diviners mad*, Isa. 44:25, 26.

3. By whom it was instituted and enacted. It was not a divine institution, and therefore it is not called a *holy day*, but a human appointment, by which it was made a *good day*, v. 19, 22. (1.) The Jews ordained it, and took it upon themselves (v. 27), voluntarily *undertook to do as they had begun*. v. 23. They bound themselves to this by common consent. (2.) Mordecai and Esther confirmed their resolve, that it might be the more binding on posterity, and might come well recommended by those great names. They *wrote*, [1.] *With all authority* (v. 29), as well they might, Esther being queen and Mordecai prime-minister of state. It is well when those who are in authority use their authority to authorize that which is good. [2.] *With words of peace and truth*. Though they wrote with authority, they wrote with tenderness, not imperious, not imposing, but in such language as the council at Jerusalem use in their decree (Acts 15:29): "If you do so and so, *you shall do well. Fare you well.*" Such was the style of these letters, or such the salutation or valediction of them: *Peace and truth be with you*.

4. By whom it was to be observed—by *all the Jews*, and by *their seed*, and by all such as *joined themselves to them*, v. 27. The observance of this feast was to be both universal and perpetual; the proselytes must observe it, in token of their sincere affection to the Jewish nation and their having united interests with them. A concurrence in joys and praises is one branch of the communion of saints.

5. Why it was to be observed—that the memorial of the great things God had done for his church might never *perish from their seed*, v. 28. God does not work wonders for a day, but to be had in everlasting remembrance. *What he does shall be for ever*, and therefore should for ever be had in mind, Eccl. 3:14. In this affair they would remember, (1.) Haman's bad practices against the church, to his perpetual reproach (v. 24): *Because he had devised against the Jews to destroy them*. Let this be kept in mind, that God's people may never be secure, while they have such malicious enemies, on whom they ought to have a jealous eye. Their enemies aim at no less than their destruction; on God therefore let them depend for salvation. (2.) Esther's good services to the church, to her immortal honour. When Esther, in peril of her life, *came before the king*, he repealed the edict, v. 25. This also must be remembered, that wherever this feast should be kept, and this history read in explication of it, this which she did might be *told for a memorial of her*. Good deeds done for the Israel of God ought to be remembered, for the encouragement of others to do the like. God will not forget them, and therefore we must not. (3.) Their own prayers, and the answers given to them (v. 31): *The matters of their fastings and their cry*. The more cries we have offered up in our trouble, and the more prayers for deliverance, the more we are obliged to be thankful to God for deliverance. *Call upon me in the time of trouble*, and then *offer to God thanksgiving*.

6. How it was to be observed. And of this let us see,

(1.) What was here enjoined, which was very good, that they should make it, [1.] A day of cheerfulness, *a day of feasting and joy* (v. 22), and *a feast was made for laughter*, Eccl. 10:19. When God gives us cause to rejoice why should we not express our joy? [2.] A day of generosity, *sending portions one to another*, in token of their pleasantness and mutual respect, and their being knit by this and other public common dangers and deliverances so much the closer to each other in love. Friends have their goods in common. [3.] A day of charity, sending *gifts to the poor*. It is not to our kinsmen and rich neighbours only that

we are to send tokens, but to *the poor and the maimed*, Lu. 14:12, 13. Those that have received mercy must, in token of their gratitude, show mercy; and there never wants occasion, for the poor we have always with us. Thanksgiving and almsgiving should go together, that, when we are rejoicing and blessing God, the heart of the poor may rejoice with us and their loins may bless us.

(2.) What was added to this, which was much better. They always, at the feast, read the whole story over in the synagogue each day, and put up three prayers to God, in the first of which they praise God for counting them worthy to attend this divine service; in the second they thank him for the miraculous preservation of their ancestors; in the third they praise him that they have lived to observe another festival in memory of it. So bishop Patrick.

(3.) What it has since degenerated to, which is much worse. Their own writers acknowledge that this feast is commonly celebrated among them with gluttony, and drunkenness, and excess of riot. Their Talmud says expressly that, in the feast of Purim, a man should drink till he knows not the difference between *Cursed be Haman*, and *Blessed be Mordecai*. See what the corrupt and wicked nature of man often brings that to which was at first well intended: here is a religious feast turned into a carnival, a perfect revel, as wakes are among us. Nothing more purifies the heart and adorns religion than holy joy; nothing more pollutes the heart and reproaches religion than carnal mirth and sensual pleasure. *Corruptio optimi est pessima* *What is best becomes when corrupted the worst.*

Chapter 10

This is but a part of a chapter; the rest of it, beginning at v. 4, with six chapters more, being found only in the Greek, is rejected as apocryphal. In these three verses we have only some short hints, I. Concerning Ahasuerus in the throne, what a mighty prince he was (v. 1, 2). II. Concerning Mordecai his favourite, what a distinguished blessing he was to his people (v. 2, 3).

Verses 1-3

We are here told,

I. How great and powerful king Ahasuerus was. He had a vast dominion, both in the continent and among the islands, from which he raised a vast revenue. Besides the usual customs which the kings of Persia exacted (Ezra 4:13), he laid an additional tribute upon his subjects, to serve for some great occasion he had for money (v. 1): *The king laid a tribute*. Happy is our island, that pays no tribute but what is laid upon it by its representatives, and those of its own choosing, and is not squeezed or oppressed by an arbitrary power, as some of the neighbouring nations are. Besides this instance of the grandeur of Ahasuerus, many more might be given, that were *acts of his power and of his might*. These however are not thought fit to be recorded here in the sacred story, which is confined to the Jews, and relates the affairs of other nations only as they fell in with their affairs; but they are *written in the Persian chronicles* (v. 2), which are long since lost and buried in oblivion, while the sacred writings live, live in honour, and will live till time shall be no more. When the *kingdoms of men*, monarchs and monarchies, are destroyed, and *their memorial has perished with them* (Ps. 9:6), the kingdom of God among men, and the records of that kingdom, shall remain and be *as the days of heaven*, Dan. 2:44.

II. How great and good Mordecai was.

1. He was great; and it does one good to see virtue and piety thus in honour. (1.) He was great with the king, next to him, as one he most delighted and confided in. Long had Mordecai sat contentedly in the king's gate, and now at length he is advanced to the head of his council-board. Men of merit may for a time seem buried alive; but often, by some means or other, they are discovered and preferred at last. The declaration of the greatness to which the king advanced Mordecai was *written in the chronicles of the kingdom*, as very memorable, and contributing to the great achievements of the king. He never did such acts of power as he did when Mordecai was his right hand. (2.) He was *great among the Jews* (v. 3), not only great above them, more honourable than any of them, but great with them, dear to them, familiar with them, and much respected by them. So far were they from envying his preferment that they rejoiced in it, and added to it by giving him a commanding interest among them and submitting all their affairs to his direction.

2. He was good, very good, for he did good. This goodness made him truly great, and then his greatness gave him an opportunity of doing so much the more good. When the king advanced him, (1.) He did not disown his people the Jews, nor was he ashamed of his relation to them, though they were strangers and captives, dispersed and despised. Still he wrote himself *Mordecai the Jew*, and therefore no doubt adhered to the Jews' religion, by the observances of which he distinguished himself, and yet it was no hindrance to his preferment, nor looked upon as a blemish to him. (2.) He did not seek his own wealth, or the

raising of an estate for himself and his family, which is the chief thing most aim at when they get into great places at court; but he consulted the welfare of his people, and made it his business to advance that. His power, his wealth, and all his interest in the king and queen, he improved for the public good. (3.) He not only did good, but he did it in a humble condescending way, was easy of access, courteous and affable in his behaviour, and spoke peace to all that made their application to him. Doing good works is the best and chief thing expected from those that have wealth and power; but giving good words is also commendable, and makes the good deed the more acceptable. (4.) He did not side with any one party of his people against another, nor make some his favourites, while the rest were neglected and crushed; but, whatever differences there were among them, he was a common father to them all, recommended himself to *the multitude of his brethren*, not despising the crowd, and spoke peace *to all their seed*, without distinction. Thus making himself acceptable by humility and beneficence, he was universally accepted, and gained the good word of all his brethren. Thanks be to God, such a government as this we are blessed with, which *seeks the welfare of our people, speaking peace to all their seed*. God continue it long, very long, and grant us, under the happy protection and influence of it, to *live quiet and peaceable lives, in godliness, honesty, and charity!*