



## “Malice in the Palace”

### *The Book of Esther*

Last week many of the children in our families returned to school. Parents and children alike were grateful for new teachers, new classrooms, and new friends. In my neighborhood live two wee girls, ages 5 and 9. Both were eager to get back to school.

The week before school resumed, 5-year-old Kate visited her new school for the first time. She saw her classroom, met her teacher, and tried to prepare herself for the adventure ahead.

In the carpool line on her first day, Kate’s dad asked if she wanted him to walk in with her. She said, “No, I’m ok.” When Dad reminded her to look for the classroom door with the palm tree on it, Kate replied, “Dad, it’s a star.” He was about to mention another issue she needed to be aware of. Kate interrupted, saying, “Dad, I’ve got this.”

Sometimes when we pray, we are tempted to treat God like a 5-year-old. Not only do we bring Him our worries and concerns, we are also tempted to instruct Him on the best way to answer our prayers. We tell Him how to answer, when to answer, and who should be involved.

The book of Esther in the Old Testament, set in ancient Persia in the 5th century B.C., recounts a remarkable story of rags to riches, plain to beautiful, weak to strong. In it we read of a young woman whose attributes of dignity, wisdom, and strength overcome the plans and schemes that threaten to wipe out an entire race of people. The story is a fascinating read, loved throughout the centuries, and yet, paradoxically for a biblical book, does not mention God. No obvious miracles take place; no angelic appearances are recorded; there is no mention of a Messiah still to come. As we explore the book, however, we discover once again the wonder of the invincibility of God’s grace and the hidden work of His hand. Esther is a captivating study of charm and elegance, restraint and self-control, modesty and transparency, all seen in

an individual born “for such a time as this.”

The phrase “for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14) is perhaps the best known phrase in the unfolding drama. It is a phrase that dominates the reader’s mind as we grasp the enormity of all that unfolds.

The narrative features several characters: King Xerxes, Queen Vashti, Esther, Mordecai, and Haman. Haman is a pernicious individual who manipulates the king into issuing a royal edict that would have resulted in the annihilation of all Jewish people across the empire. But between the lines, behind the scenes, out of focus, incognito, God brings to pass His purpose and will.

It is quite simply impossible in this short column to do justice to everything we find in the book of Esther, but let’s look at one outstanding theological truth that comes directly from this remarkable event.

### **The Invincibility of Grace**

In Esther we see the interplay between human responsibility and divine sovereignty. As the story develops, Esther’s intricate plan to speak to King Xerxes on behalf of her people is a necessary part of the process of bringing Haman to justice and securing safety for her people. The plan requires a combination of subtlety, boldness, and strength.

Yet Esther’s plan by itself is not what turns around the fortunes of God’s people. The key event in chapter 6 does not directly involve either Esther or Mordecai, but is instead a seemingly insignificant detail in which the hidden hand of providence may be discerned, though only with careful hindsight. We also recognize that God works through the faithful efforts of His people, just as much as through a remarkable provision of God’s own providence.

It is always a comforting thought to realize that God never moves in our lives against our wills. He lovingly and consistently wins our deepest affections by revealing His love for us through the circumstances we face or the decisions before us, and then convicts us of what is best for us. As He does this, we find ourselves submitting and surrendering to His rule and reign in our lives, gladly and joyfully

embracing His purpose and will, while seeking—with a supernatural peace—to follow Him.

Does this mean that as Christian people we float on a cloud of ecstatic contentment from one blessed experience to another? No. Does it mean we will never face a difficult moment, never find ourselves in a heartbreaking crisis? Once again, No.

But what we can be sure of is this: Regardless of the circumstances that come our way, God will be there with us in the midst of it all. Esther came to realize that although God may at times appear to be silent, He is never absent. Although things may look bleak, God is always there. When facing major decisions, it is always a healthy experience to train your heart and soul to listen for Him. Develop the spiritual discernment to sense Him at work. Immerse yourself in His Word. Get on your knees. And wait. Wait for Him to work.

Remember that the workings of God are not related to your schedule. So while you are waiting, prayerfully look beyond the present. Talk to Him; retune your deepest affections; hand over your deepest cares and most intense longings. Then trust Him.

How perfectly He works, how sovereignly He controls, how remarkably He transforms what He touches! Chuck Swindoll, in his excellent book on Esther, writes, “A queen who was once passive is suddenly in charge. A king who was once duped is now informed. An enemy who was only moments away from exterminating a nation is now an object of scorn.”

The Scriptures are clear. God is as much at work in the Oval Office as He is in the pastor’s study. He is as much at work on the floor of the Senate as He is in the school play yard. There is no barrier too high, no chasm too wide, no place too dark that He cannot reach you. His hand is upon your life. He is calling you to Himself, for “you were born for such a time as this.”

*Dr. Gibbons messages are available online at [FirstPresGreenville.org](http://FirstPresGreenville.org) (click the Media tab) and on Fox Carolina Sundays at 10:30am.*