

Openness Mordecai

Some men are larger than others. Mordecai was a spiritual giant. The Puritan divine Wigglesworth said “the inner-man is a thousand times larger than the outer man.” The capacity and potential for such a largeness is an innate quality of any creature made in the image of God. But the fall of Adam has made us such little people! It is only the conversion experience resulting from faith in Christ that opens the gates for us into a much larger universe.

The unregenerate soul is crowded, cramped, and confined by the restraints of self-interest into a very small world. The unregenerate soul is in shackles. Only the believer is free. To study big and little men we need only compare Haman and Mordecai. Remember, man looks on the outward appearance, God looks on the heart. By all outward appearances Haman was a success, Mordecai was a “nobody.” Haman had climbed almost to the very summit of the empire becoming the king’s favorite. Mordecai walked among the foot hills. Haman wore silk and ate at the royal table. Haman had power, it seemed that Mordecai had none. Haman was the typical sycophant that often surrounds the sovereign. Haman is the flesh. Mordecai is the spirit.

Study the largeness and goodness of Mordecai’s heart. Concerned about the well being of his niece, Mordecai “sat in the king’s gate” (2:19). We can only imagine the teeming masses that swirled about him or the powerful processions that marched by him. The king’s gate is a vortex through which a flood of self-interest rushes daily. All the while, there sits a seemingly insignificant soul, yet on his shoulder rests the powerful hand of the Almighty.

It is said that “God” is not found in all of this little book of Esther, but we know better. He is found everywhere. He is found in Esther, and in Mordecai and in every Jew who bows, though in secret, to worship Him. God works through people. We become his hands, his voice, his feet. God gives the thirsty to drink, but the saint holds out the glass. God was pleased to use Mordecai and he is pleased to use all who place themselves at his disposal.

Our hearts are thrilled to read Esther which reminds us that God goes before us. He is working in the beauty of Esther, and even in the virtue of Vashti. While evil forces are plotting to destroy us, God quietly places a yet unknown friend in the king’s gate. We need not fear what men shall do unto us.

As the story goes, two men were angered enough (“wroth”) by some incident that they conspired to kill the king (2:21). Their conversation was heard by Esther’s uncle who then relayed the facts of this mischief to his niece, who in turn told the king himself. An investigation was launched and the would-be assassins were themselves executed. Mordecai was still unnoticed and unrewarded. He received no commendation or thanks, no gratitude, gratuity or reward. Many a lesser man would have launched into an outbreak of self-pity with complaints and criticisms. Many a smaller man would have told and retold the story punctuating it with words like “ingratitude” and such. Many would have counted themselves as being slighted and used the occasion to change political parties, loyalties, or even churches. But we are not talking about a little man. We are talking about Mordecai. He cared less about himself and more about righteousness, less about titles and more about truth. He was too great to remain silent when he heard about evil. He was too great to speak when it was only he who was wronged. Great men are not easily wounded; and when they are, they rarely speak of their wounds. Mordecai simply sat and waited. He was waiting for God.

Although Mordecai received no reward, “*it was written in the book*” (2:14). Be assured that all we do is written in the book. Not one deed, not even a word will be lost, and one day the “books will be



another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Rev. 20:12). From Jesus we learn that we, by our words and works, write our own stories, and our destiny will be determined by what is upon pages written by our own hand. “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.” (Matt. 12:36-37). Had Mordecai not been there to overhear the words of Bigthan and Teresh, be assured God heard it all. And though our enemies plot in a whisper, it all goes down and is “written in the book.”

“After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advance him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him”. (3:1).

Here is a test of patience. Good goes unrewarded and evil receives a crown. Such coronations have tried the faith of saints from the most ancient of days. Asaph asked and then answered his own question in the Book of Psalms. *“Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well neigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked....They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily. ...Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.... When I thought to know this it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God ; then understood I their end” (Ps. 73:1-17).* Perhaps Mordecai was quoting this verse when Haman and those of like nature passed by him as he sat quietly in the gate, waiting for God.

Haman was a wicked man. The blackness of his heart was made all the blacker when he was given place and power. Pride like a fire is never satisfied. It always wants more fuel to feed the furnace of its ego. Eventually pride will consume itself and bring destruction. The story of Haman is a classic example. Along with his promotion and titles came the decree that all subjects of the kingdom were to bow to Haman as a sign of respect. *“All the king’s servants at the king’s gate”* did so, everyone except Mordecai. *“But Mordecai bowed not.”* It is a courageous thing to remain erect when all others bow. It is also a rare thing.

The sacred story of church history is filled with accounts of martyrs who refused to offer a pinch of incense into fires of compromise and as a result were themselves thrown into the flames. Many a reformation believer was burned at the stake because they refused to bow to the god of Rome or his scarlet covered emissaries. Mordecai saw some evil, some darkness, some hatred for good in Haman that prevented him from bending. Sometimes a whole generation is saved because a single man will not bow. Thank God for such men who have touched history, and would to God that there were more of Mordecai in us.

It is impossible for the flesh to stand straight when it wants to bow. It is only the spirit that can so convert the character that it refuses to nod, bow, or curtsy when Satan enters our garden. It is a great affront to him when we fail to acknowledge his power, position, and authority in this world. Jesus refused to show the least respect to this evil one who tempted him to do so on the mount of Temptation (Matt. 4). It is easy for evil to find that one who refuses to bow for he stands towering over spirits that are prostrate.

If we are steeled by Christ’s presence, and strengthened by the “power of his might” (Eph. 3:16) we too will conspicuously stand out in a world that loves darkness rather than light. Perhaps our “other-worldliness” will be exposed when everyone at the table laughs at an unseemly joke told by some powerful figure, and we remain straight faced or even vexed. Perhaps the spirit of Mordecai (no, the spirit of Christ) is manifest in us when others stoop the shoulders of dignity to do some ungodly deed, and we refuse. In this world all the kernels of wheat bend their heads when the wind rolls across the prairie and never know they are moved because they move in unison. It is the single stalk that refuses to bend that is odd.



Day after day, although others tried to persuade him and reason with him, he would not bow. (The test of character is better seen as “tests” for they are many). Why would he not bow? The Bible answer is the best: “*He was a Jew*” (3:4). There was a time when “he is a Christian” would be explanation enough for those who enquired about non-participation in certain activities, but no longer. Christians are bowing everywhere during this age of the luke-warm church, the age of Laodicea. But providence has it that every age has its Mordecais, Macabees, and Martin Luthers who will not bow.

The spirit that indwelt Haman was as the one that indwelt Hitler. He did not settle up with this single man but decided to annihilate the entire race of the man that would not bow.

“And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king’s laws: therefore it is not for the king’s profit to suffer them. If it please the king, let be written that they may be destroyed...”

Haman’s pride caused him to begin building a gallows in his imagination upon which he would hang any who stood in his way, starting with this Jew. Little did he realize that he had just stepped onto an unseen highway and was about to be crushed by the heavy wheels of divine providence. This little man was slipping a noose around his own neck.

Mordecai was, as we have said, a large man. He was large in life because he was large in love. Love makes us larger. The more room we make in our hearts for others the larger we become. The smallest package in the world is a man “wrapped up in himself.” It is unfortunate that many fail to learn this little secret of largeness. Hurts, disappointments, troubles, and sorrows cause them to close themselves off instead of opening themselves up to others. Some, in order to feel safe and secure, and to protect themselves, narrow their circle and shrink their world, allowing very few, if any, to get “too close.” Christian’s need only study Christ to see how he opened the door to all who knocked, and had time for all who came to him. We stand in awe at the grand canyon of John 3:16 and read: God so loved the world...” There was never a person that God did not love.

Mordecai had room in his heart for Esther, for a whole Jewish nation, for a pagan king that was being plotted against. He had room in his heart for God. It was his care about people, it was his concern about truth, justice, and righteousness that makes him tower over most of us who have filled our self with self. Perhaps this is part of what Jesus meant when he said “he who loses himself, finds himself.”

God placed a caring person in a strategic place. While his heart was sensitive with compassion for others it was enveloped with strength of character. While he would welcome good with open arms, evil would not receive so much as a bow.

Once the decree was made, news reached to the farthest corners of the empire (3:13). No doubt many were unnecessarily troubled for no matter how severe the storm, safe is the ship in which the master lies. Providence preserves.



Sackcloth, Scepters, and Insomnia

As God has used many elements to make what we know as nature, he also often takes that which seems natural to make the supernatural. Providence has everything at its disposal.

The political climate had turned ugly for God's people. Those very laws that allowed them to survive and thrive, now were bent on destroying them. The political weather in Persia had turned foul. Black storm clouds began to gather and were about to empty their awful contents upon an entire race. Racism is not new. The people who gave the world Jesus have been the target of its hatred from the beginning. As long as Satan is the prince of the power of the air, the evil breath of racism shall poison our atmosphere.

Because of hindsight we know of God's deliverance. Those going through the storms see only the angry waves. There were many ways God could fulfil his promise to Abraham and still allow every Jew in Palestine and Persia to go to the gallows. The salvation of all was by no means a certainty. Mordecai was prepared for the worst. Not every Daniel is delivered from the lions, nor every Lazarus raised from the dead. Hebrew history attests. *"And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth"* (Heb. 11:36-38).

Judaism was handed its death warrant and Mordecai let loose a lamentation (4:1) that quickly spread throughout all the provinces. Dressed in sackcloth and covered with ashes, this great man of God began to mourn for his nation. Drastic circumstances call for drastic measures. *"This kind,"* said Jesus, *"Cometh not out, but by prayer and fasting."* This seemingly powerless man, dressed as a beggar, was about to move heaven and earth.

Faith in providence is no call to resignation. Faith in providence is not an excuse to surrender to circumstance, or run from the battle. Fatalism is seldom found upon its knees pleading in prayer. The church, on the other hand, understands that history often rises up out of the mystery of prayer, and that a battle can turn at the point of a single kneeling figure.

Unable to sit "in" the gate because of his garments of humiliation (4:2) Mordecai got as close as he could. Esther heard of his condition and sent fresh robes to her uncle, but he refused. May the church likewise know when to "mourn" and when to "dance." Esther was exceedingly grieved for her relative's state, she would soon learn to be more concerned about the sins of the world.

Mordecai told her of the decree and produced the document to prove the death warrant had been issued. His warning was perhaps necessary as prosperity can often cloud one's judgment. She had to be reminded of who she was. *"Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews"* (4:13). There was no safe place in Germany for any Jew during WWII. Hitler's ovens billowed night and day with the smoke of many who would have gladly pledged allegiance to the Third Riche, but their Jewish blood sealed their sentence. Esther herself would not survive the "ethnic cleansing." Even her crown could not hide her.

Many a person has remained indifferent to the persecution and suffering of others as long as those flood waters stayed away from their door. World history tells the sad story of many who remained silent as their neighbors were carted away by some tyranny in the middle of the night. Many have turned a deaf ear to the lamentations of those they considered "less" than themselves. What we learn from history and what we learn from the Book of Esther is that we do not learn very well. This awful tale is repeated all too often in every generation. Yet every holocaust has its heroes. There are always some who open their hearts, and then their cellars, and their attics in an attempt to save a few.



If ever the thought might have occurred to this Jewish maid who have become a Queen of Persia, to ignore her origins or the call of duty, Mordecai quickly cast down that imagination. *“Casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”* (2Cor. 10:4). Esther was reminded that providence gives us crowns for reasons that are larger than ourselves. Life is a sacred stewardship and “to whom much is given, much is required.” If we fail to recognize our responsibilities or walk worthy of the vocation where with we are called, God can easily call another. Vashti stepped aside for God, not Esther. If one would not be the “hand maiden” of the Lord, grace would choose another. Life is littered with the tragic legacies of men and women who failed to give God the glory for their rise, only to discover that *“pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”* There is a time to *“hold thy peace”* (4:14), there is also a time when we must speak. Esther knew the difference.

Although she was quite aware that seeking an unannounced audience with the king was very dangerous (death was automatic if the king did not lift his scepter) she spoke those now famous words that have encouraged many a saint when they too would choose to stand up and become the champion for truth, righteousness, or reason: *“If I perish, I perish”* (4:16).

There are worse things than perishing. There are worse things than dying on the battle field for justice. Jim Elliot, the young missionary who was martyred while trying to make contact with the lost and savage tribes of the Amazon wrote these words some time before his death: “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to receive what he cannot lose.” Elliot knew that his life was a brief stewardship. Perishing, for Elliot meant “being with Christ, which is far better.”

May we all draw strength from the example of Esther. May we all determine to defend the weak, oppressed, suffering, and persecuted; and when we give a cup of cold water to those who are in this world thirsty, may we remember the words of our Lord who said, *“If ye do it unto the least of these, ye do it unto me.”*

When Esther appeared in the doorway of the great hall, King Ahasuerus had not seen her for more than a month. He held out the scepter and her dainty little hand gently touched the top of its golden grace (5:2). Grace allows us to touch many golden opportunities. Grace ever greets those who are on a holy errand. God never refuses our desired audiences.

Esther was not foolhardy or reckless. She did not “rush in where angels fear to tread.” She seriously solicited the help of heaven before she tried to move the earth. “Fast for me,” she said. While planning a feast for the king, her friends were fasting before the King of Kings. She also abstained from food and water for three days as she prepared for the most important audience in her life.

How serious are we in seeking the salvation of souls? Every sinner has the death sentence upon them already (John 3:18). Every soul without Christ is in jeopardy. Seldom is it heard that churches fast and pray for souls these days.

Esther and Mordecai became two factors darkness had not counted on. These two formed a resistance movement that would be celebrated in every Jewish generation to our present day. A master of diplomacy, Esther set the stage and created an atmosphere in which an appeal might best be made. She understood human nature and made the most of it. She understood that petitions are more readily received when given graciously. She would remain poised and composed before the enemy holding her fire until she had a clear shot at the target. Every preacher knows, as did Nathan before David, that the congregation must be drawn close before they can clearly see the truth. Haman was coming close.

Haman went home so full of himself that he failed to realize he was living his last day. Along the way he passed Mordecai who again failed to stand and bow in recognition of his greatness. Irked beyond description, Haman recounted to his wife the audacity of this Hebrew and the pain that his irreverence was causing. Her solution was so— so human. “Build a gallows and hang the man,” she said.



And through the night carpenters constructed a gallows meant to remove from the earth the single figure accustomed to sitting at the king's gate that so galled Haman.

While hammers were pounding in the distance the king had a case of insomnia. As do often boring sermons cause men to slumber, Ahasuerus summoned his scribe to read the kingdom's own Book of Chronicles in an attempt to induce sleep. As providence would have it, the account of the king's own salvation was told and the monarch heard of the conspiracy both exposed and crushed. *"What honor and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this,"* he asked. The reply: *"There is nothing done for him,"* must have awakened the conscience of the king. He met the dawn with a determination to correct an oversight.

Early that morning an anxious Hamon sought permission to hang his nemesis; but before he could attend to this awful business, the king spoke of honor and glory. *"What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor?"* asked the king. So obsessed with himself, Haman was certain that he was the object of such royal admiration and gratitude. *"Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head: And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honor, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honor."*

We can only imagine the startled look on Haman's face when he discovered that the king was speaking of Mordecai, rather than him. The blood must have drained from that very same face when he also learned that he himself was to deliver the glorious apparel and horse to the king's unknown relation. All joy and appetite gone, Haman was soon summoned to the scheduled feast Esther had prepared.

Esther made a most eloquent appeal. *"Let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage."* Surprised that his own wife needed to plead for her life and the life of her people, the king demanded to know how such a thing had come to be, and who was responsible. At that moment the earth might well have opened up beneath the feet of Haman as she identified him as the scoundrel. Events went from bad to worse for him and the last time he was seen he was being led to the very gallows he had built for another. "Be sure your sins will find you out."

If the Scriptures are true (and they are) Haman ever swings upon the gallows of hell for all eternity. Haman's end shall be shared by all who have rejected the God of the Bible and worship at the altar of self. Woe to those who lift up their heel against God's chosen race. Woe to a world that is indifferent to the spectacle of God's only Son being led to the gallows of the 'Old Rugged Cross.' Woe to those who aspire to greatness and lust for this world's glory. Woe to these. Every selfish deed is a hammer blow pounding out its own eternal reward.

Mordecai cared nothing for ease or opulence. He never dreamed of royal apparel or ivory palaces. He only dreamed of God, of righteousness, and of grace. He sought only God's glory and never his own. He cared for others and interceded for them. He sat in the lowest seat, it was God who raised him up.



Saved

“Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king’s name, and seal it with the king’s ring: for the writing which is written in the king’s name, and sealed with the king’s ring, may no man reverse” (Est. 8:8.). The law of the Medes and the Persians was irreversible and has become proverbial. It was that law that led Daniel to the Lion’s den and that law that held Judaism in jeopardy. While it could not be cancelled, it could be overcome. As the law of gravity is overpowered by the law of aerodynamics, so Ahasuerus gives these people wings. They shall be permitted to war against her enemies, and her enemies were only those who would dare to be so.

The very ring which once graced Haman’s finger now glittered on Mordecai’s. With that ring came power and authority. A new edict was dictated by Esther’s uncle which allowed every Jew to *“stand for their life”* (8:11). This became gospel and was sealed with the stamp of the king.

What a glorious parallel is impressed upon us which reflects every believer’s experience. If the word of the Medes and the Persians was steadfast, how much more is the eternal word of God. Jesus said, *“heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away”* (Matt. 24:35). We rest, trust, and stand upon God’s word. *“For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us. Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.”* (1Cor. 1:20-22). *“May no man reverse”* is more true for us and with greater weight and authority than that of any mortal king. The salvation of the Christian is as certain as the veracity and power of God.

Pressed into the wax was the image and authority of all the kingdom. The decree of Mordecai was *“sealed with the king’s ring.”* We too have been sealed with the very image and likeness of the Lord. *“All authority is given unto me”* said Jesus *“in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world”* (Matt. 28:19-20) We have all the weight and authority of heaven behind us as believers. We have been entrusted with a glorious decree of deliverance and salvation to all who want it.

“And he wrote in the king Ahasuerus’ name, and sealed it with the king’s ring, and sent letters by posts on horseback, and riders on mules, camels, and young dromedaries.” To all who were last seen *“mourning”* their desperate state (4:3) how wonderful must have been the good news brought from Shushan. The church must use every means available whether horseback or camel to carry the message of Salvation into every province. Unlike the Jews, however, who were given authority to *“stand and fight”* we need only to *“stand”* for Jesus has already won that battle on Calvary’s cross for us.

The closing words of this little book inaugurate the feast of Purim which is a continual reminder of God’s deliverance. It is a joyous holiday celebrated by Jewish children among which was a most comely one, little Jesus. The New Testament tells us nothing, but it would have been impossible for our Lord to have escaped such an annual memorial. Every generation has observed this special event remembering yet another close call in Hebrew history.

The final pages describe an ironic and a prophetic twist. *“The Jews had rule over them that hated them.”* Now the world has the upper hand. Now the world laughs at piety and persecutes purity. Now the world oppresses, and distresses the righteousness for it is still night time. The dawn is coming. Some golden daybreak Jesus will come and turn the tables on darkness. The wicked will go to their own gallows and inherit their own eternal reward. *“And the Jews had rule over them that hated them.”*



Unseen Hand

After the story of Esther and her uncle Mordecai, the holy history turns our attention to events in Jerusalem. Ezra begins to tell his own story beginning with the seventh chapter of the book that bares his name. Nearly sixty years had passed since the work on the temple was completed under the leadership of Zerrubbal, Haggai and Zechariah (515BC- 458BC).

Fourteen generations are listed as the pedigree of this most famous scribe. He was clearly able to trace his heritage back to Aaron himself. Ezra was a link in a long golden chain of faith and obedience. His calling was the same as that of his holy ancestors, to proclaim and enforce obedience to God's law.

The ministry of the law has always been to reflect man's desperate need for God's grace. Where there is no teaching of the law there can be no conviction of sin, and thus no repentance, and no salvation. Jesus was clear about it: *"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt. 5:17-19).

Those who forget the law will soon forget God and even believers are in danger of taking grace for granted. When a Christian hears the law taught, he finds neither teeth nor terror in it, but only relief that he has been delivered from its awful judgment.

Ahasuerus' son Artaxerxes had been on the throne for seven years when God moved his heart to send Ezra and a contingent of Hebrews to Jerusalem. The story of Ezra holds a simple secret of true success. It is found in the genesis of his own journey to the holy city: *"the hand of the LORD his God [was] upon him"* (7:6). Nothing in this life can compare with the hand of God's blessing. Nothing can stop the man or the woman who is strengthened by that unseen hand. There are no tasks too great, enemies too fierce, or needs too large for the saint who enjoys the company of the Almighty. For him, "nothing shall be impossible."

How is it that we can know such a hand gently resting on our shoulder? How can we be assured that in times of doubt that hand shall continue to kindly point the way? How can we enjoy the ever present comfort that comes from the assurance that we never walk alone? Ezra describes himself to us *"Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments"* (7:10). *"To seek, to do, and to teach,"* here are the dynamics of godly leadership. *"Seek and ye shall find,"* said Jesus. We will eventually find what we are looking for. He who searches the scriptures for precious pearls of wisdom will not be disappointed. He who seeks the eternal underpinnings of character and the catalyst for godly conduct shall find them when they search for them with all their heart.

"But," someone says "does not the law kill?" "Are we not to recoil from such a legalism?" Jesus told people to obey the law but follow him. He warned them to avoid following the Pharisees who did not practice what they preached. They had become hypocritical. They pretended to love God when in fact they loved themselves more. A teacher who teaches truth, but lives a lie is a phoney. However, their breach of character and conduct in no way destroys the integrity of God's Word. Notice Luke's description of the Lord Jesus in the book of Acts: *"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach"* (Acts 1:1).

Let all who wish to know the "hand of GOD" upon them determine to prepare their heart to look for him each



his hand upon their life for another day.

Everything rises and falls on leadership. At the head of every movement there is some man or woman leading the way. True leadership employs no constraints. Those who followed Ezra went *“of their own free will”* (7:13). Men don’t go to heaven in chains. Providence does not have a heavy hand. The Bible is clear, *“whosoever will may come.”*

When a man determines to do God’s will, he may be assured that God will provide. Artaxerxes said *“whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it [shall] be done speedily”* (7:21). Paul said, *“but my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”* Jesus said, *“And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye ask any thing in my name I will do it”* (Jn. 14:13-14). We can hardly believe the words that came out of the king’s mouth. *“Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?”* (7:23). He seems to understand God more with his fear than some believers comprehend God with their faith. If an unbeliever can so give the Almighty a “blank check” should we not also trust God to never withdraw from our account more than he deposits. The mother of Jesus told the servants at Cana *“whatever he saith unto you, do it.”* That has always been good advice, especially to those who hope to see water change into wine, especially to those who wish to see a miracle.

Equipped with authority and letters, Ezra paused to thank God and praise the God of providence. *“Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king’s heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem”* (7:27). As the wind carries pollen on its wings and often fertilizes a plant miles away, so too God can gently pollinate a monarch’s mind with an idea or suggestion that shall give life to some plan of heaven. And when that idea blossoms as a thought in the king’s own garden, he considers it his own and raves about its beauty.

The journey from Ahava to Jerusalem would be a dangerous and arduous one. The way was rife with bandits and thieves. Ezra had often preached about the provision and protection that came from the “hand of God.” He was ashamed to ask for a carnal escort (8:22) as it would deny that very testimony. He had boasted that “God takes care of those who trust and obey him.” How could he now ask for help from man? Instead, he fasted and prayed. And because the *“hand of God was upon [them]”* they had all the protection they needed (8:31).

This champion of the law found that the inhabitants of Israel did not share his zeal for God’s commandments. It was discovered that the *“people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons; so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands; yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass”* (9:1-2). Separation is an important principle to the survival of God’s holy remnant. Separation must be invoked with a right and humble spirit if it is to be true biblical separation, but God calls for separation still. *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you”* (2Cor. 6:14,17). When we blur the lines between light and darkness through compromise we confuse the world, and corrupt the church, and cripple our influence. When we fail to walk in the light then we must live in darkness.

Ezra’s pulpit did not thunder as much as it rained. Tears flowed from the eyes of this pastor/teacher as he declared *“I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God”* (9:6). How could these people, so blessed, so gifted with grace (9:8), forsake God’s simple laws of separation? How could these so quickly forget God’s goodness? How could they fail to see that had God rewarded them according to their iniquities they would all be destroyed? Ezra’s rent garments and his weeping broke their stubborn hearts; not unlike the preaching of Peter which pricked the hearts of many that heard him, and caused them to cry out “what must we do?”



A real pastor/teacher never says “they,” but rather “we.” “We have sinned,” “we have failed,” “we have forsaken thee, Oh God.” And so it was with Ezra as he cast himself down before the house of the Lord. The book of Ezra ends with a kind of judgment day. All those who had taken “strange” wives put them away. The sheep were separated from the goats. The day will come when God will judge our homes and our hearts. The day will come when we will give an account of our lives.

Ezra means “help.” His name was a constant reminder of his need for God. His name was the simplest of prayers. His name is a testimony to God’s grace. *“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need”* (Heb. 4:16). Those of us who trust the God of providence are never far from heaven’s aid. Praise God for the unseen hand that holds and helps us along the way.

