**Rise of the Nemesis: Our Enemy**

**Esther 3**

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Our Senior Pastor, Ritch and his wife, Kimberly are away on Sabbatical for a few weeks, so we’re currently on a detour from the study of Romans to enjoy the dramatic story of Esther. It’s a narrative we’re reading in preparation for that profound promise of Romans 8:28. For those who love God and are called according to His purpose, all things work together for good. That’s quite a statement! And Esther shows how it happens.

This is a true historical account that not once mentions God’s name, and yet marvelously showcases His glory. We read Esther to celebrate the beauty of destiny. We have eight chapters left and four more weeks. To get the most out of each lesson, I recommend that you try to read ahead, if you can. My hope is that we spend the bulk of our time looking for God, that our hearts might be transformed. Grab your Bible, buckle up, and get ready for Esther: The Beauty of Destiny.

Last week, we did chapters 1 and 2 and revealed what’s wrong with this picture in *Trouble in Paradise*. And today we ponder together where evil comes from and examine our enemy in *Rise of the Nemesis*.

In 2015 he celebrated his 91st birthday. The estimated cost for his party in Victoria Falls was around $1,000,000. About 20,000 guests attended the meal hosted by the exclusive resort. Dining included an elephant, two buffaloes, two sables, five impala’s, and seven cakes. One was the shape of the continent of Africa. The rest were the size of mattresses. For gifts, he received a stuffed lion, a stuffed crocodile, and forty live cows. What would you do with forty cows? For the president of this sub-Saharan country, such luxury was nothing new. Years ago, he and his wife were married in what was called then, “the wedding of the century.” Later, in a trip to Europe, it was widely reported that in a single shopping spree, she spent around $120,000. And over the course of just a few years, she withdrew from the national bank nearly $5,000,000. She organized the building of two palaces. One was a gift from their national political party and ended up costing around $26,000,000. The lavish lifestyle of this First Family stands in glaring contrast to the poverty and starvation of their people. At one point, unemployment had risen above 70%. Inflation was up to 500. Their currency was effectively worthless. And the president restricted all political media opposition, even to the point of blocking food aid. There were multiple accusations of human rights violations. Thousands were dead and tens of thousands more were suffering. It is said that in one year alone, the government killed or tortured at least 70,000 people. And yet here on his 91st birthday, he enjoys the feast of a lifetime. How could God permit the rise of such evil?

Esther is now a Persian Queen. This beautiful Jewish orphan won a royal beauty contest and was chosen by King Xerxes as first among the women in all his global empire. The position had opened up after the king, in a fit of drunkenness, got a big head. He ordered his former trophy wife, Vashti, to appear so he could show her off, and was denied. So in rage, he banished her as a warning to all women. In the search for a replacement, it led him to this young girl named Esther.

Her cousin Mordecai raised her after the death of her parents, and he serves at the King’s Gate. He happens to overhear this assassination plot by two Secret Service guards. He informs Esther, she relays the intel to the palace, the investigation ensues, the schemers are executed, a report is filed, the case is closed, and Mordecai returns to normal duties. This is the life of two Jews in Persia.

Until now, at Mordecai’s request, Esther has kept her background and family secret because the Jews are far from home. This isn’t their land. It’s a foreign country with countless enemies. They are exiles in this kingdom, survivors after the destruction of home and the abduction of their families. Just as the ancient warnings had predicted, Israel had forsaken God, so God had forsaken her. It was almost as if He had vanished. And for many Jews, the legend of Yahweh was all but forgotten. And now they suffer the rule of mighty Xerxes--lavish banquets, opulent feasts, drinking habits and rash decrees, warmongering and womanizing--with only one hope. An ancient promise. A promise that the people of God would one day be restored through a child, a Messiah, a deliverer who would lead them to inherit their land. A kingdom, a home. There was a promise from Yahweh that the children of Abraham would never be forgotten. But for now, they wait. And in the silence, a dark enemy appears. He is a power-hungry leader named Haman.

In Esther chapter 3, evil is on the move. This is nothing new. God’s people have always faced evil. They have before, and they do now. They face social pressure, professional criticism, legal persecution, political agendas. These are not problems of the past. In the face of such evil our own nation totters on the brink of moral sanity. In spite of all our best efforts and intentions, evil is on the rise. Where does it come from? How does it get such power? Last week we discussed our depravity, yes, but why does our enemy enjoy such success? How could a good God let such abuse go unchallenged? This chapter doesn’t give all the answers, but it supplies some hints through the window of history that remind us that evil has a reason. Today we’ll walk through chapter 3 and uncover maybe three reasons why evil rises, and how we can rightly respond. So there are three reasons why evil enjoys strength and how we can react appropriately.

**Reason #1: Because sin has consequences. (3:1-6)**

Consequences are the results, the effects of an action. Sin costs! It always costs.

Victor was born in Naples to a wealthy Genevan family. His father, Alphonse Frankenstein, always encouraged Victor and his brothers to pursue education through science. One day, his mom catches Scarlet Fever. So he buries himself in his experiments and he stumbles upon this secret method of imparting life to nonliving matter. He creates this 8 foot humanoid creature. And when he sees how hideously the beast becomes, he heartlessly abandons it. He runs away. And it’s a mistake he’ll come to regret. The giant goes on to dispatch of his family, his friends, and his fiance. This monster, Frankenstein. And Victor has to face the fact that this beast was a monster he himself had created.

Many consequences we face in life are monsters of our own making. Today’s sinister monsters are yesterday’s sinful mistakes. Sin always has consequences. And the first reason evil rises is because of the consequences of sin.

Chapter 3 can be divided into three parts. It is three scenes, all focused on this new character named Haman. Scene 1 is verses 1-6. It unveils Haman’s pride. Scene 2, verses 7-11, uncover Haman’s plot. And Scene 3, verses 12-15, unleash Haman’s purge. His pride, his plot, and then his purge. First, Scene 1. The fragile image of Haman’s pride opens after the events of chapter 2. Esther is queen. Conspiracy has been suppressed. Xerxes chooses a second-in-command named Haman. A man we’ll come to find is exceedingly evil and unbearably prideful. And in Scene 1, his pride is on full display.

*1 After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, and advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who were with him. 2 And all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him.*

As if Haman’s pride isn’t encouraged enough with the promotion above all other officials, the king reinforces it by commanding the unique honor of every servant bowing in homage. “All Hail Haman!” This is an honor in which he very much delights. The reinforcement of Haman’s pride is official by order of the king. It is emphatic by the commandment of showing homage. But most of all, it is ominous. It is threatening. It is worrisome because as readers, we’re let in on the secret of his dark lineage, his family, where he comes from. Haman is an Agagite, a descendant of Agag. Well, who cares about that? We’ll think about it in a moment. But first, let’s keep reading. In verse 2, Haman’s promotion leads to a major conflict with our character, Mordecai.

*But Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage.*

In spite of his memories of what happens to those who disobey Xerxes, he defies the king’s command and refuses to bow. This is called standing out, but not in a good way. He draws all the wrong kind of attention. And his castle colleagues want to know why. So they question his refusal.

*3 Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, “Why do you transgress the king's command?”*

“Pssst! It’s Haman! Why aren’t you bowing? Everybody’s bowing! You just saw what happened to Vashti and no offense, but you’re no Vashti.”

*4 And when they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's words would stand, for he had told them that he was a Jew.*

Why did they tell Haman? In order to see whether Mordecai’s words would stand. He had told them he was a Jew. So they’re pestering him. “Why don’t you bow?” And the only thing we’re told is that the conversation centers around the fact that Mordecai is a Jew.

Scholars are split here about the reason for Mordecai’s defiance. Was it appropriate or not? I think like much of Esther, it’s morally and intentionally ambiguous. At best, it is questionable. And we don’t have enough details to do more than speculate, but I very much doubt that this is a simplistic similarity to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego’s refusal to bow to an idol. This doesn’t seem to be a matter of pure conscience as much as a matter of personal grievance. And why do I say that? Well, because the focus of the defiance is the rift between Haman and Mordecai’s ancestry. What would a Jew have against an Agagite? It’s a good question. Again, you have to wait. Keep reading!

So the servants have said, “You think you’re special because you’re Jewish? Well, let’s find out.” And the curious servants report his defiance to Haman. “Your Majesty, that guy over there refuses to bow. It’s something about being a Jew…” Like throwing a scorpion and a spider in the same jar and shaking it up, they want to see what happens. Haman’s pride is spitefully provoked. He’s going to ensure his honor is zealously defended. Like the king, he overreacts with excessive overkill.

*5 And when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury. 6 But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.*

He defends his pride earnestly. He’s filled with fury. And he’ll defend it excessively, to the max. He won’t settle for the blood of just one man. He’s going to defend his pride expressly with the target set upon the people of Mordecai, the Jews.

Why does this personal vendetta escalate so suddenly? Look back at verse 1, that ominous lineage, where he comes from. Haman was an Agagite. Why does that matter? Well since you keep asking, 1 Samuel 15. Over 500 years earlier, when Israel lived in their own land, they had been commissioned as God’s instrument to destroy a wicked, child sacrificing, temple prostituting, idolatry promoting enemy called the Amalekites. But Israel had stubbornly refused. So for years, the Jews had actually suffered trouble and oppression. And their disobedience had dived even deeper when they demanded that God would grant them a king. And so, God gave them one. He was a tall, handsome Benjaminite named Saul. And once he was chosen, God gave him a message through the old prophet Samuel.

1 Samuel 15:1-35 “And Samuel said to Saul, “The Lord sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.’”

So Saul summoned the people and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand men on foot, and ten thousand men of Judah. And Saul came to the city of Amalek and lay in wait in the valley. Then Saul said to the Kenites, “Go, depart; go down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the people of Israel when they came up out of Egypt.” So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. And Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt. And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive and devoted to destruction all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction.

The word of the Lord came to Samuel: “I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.” And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the Lord all night. And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. And it was told Samuel, “Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself and turned and passed on and went down to Gilgal.” And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, “Blessed be you to the Lord. I have performed the commandment of the Lord.” And Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?” Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the Lord your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction.” Then Samuel said to Saul, “Stop! I will tell you what the Lord said to me this night.” And he said to him, “Speak.”

And Samuel said, “Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. And the Lord sent you on a mission and said, ‘Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.’ Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the Lord?” And Saul said to Samuel, “I have obeyed the voice of the Lord. I have gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal.” And Samuel said, “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king.”

Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may bow before the Lord.” And Samuel said to Saul, “I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel.” As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe, and it tore. And Samuel said to him, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.” Then he said, “I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may bow before the Lord your God.” So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul bowed before the Lord.

Then Samuel said, “Bring here to me Agag the king of the Amalekites.” And Agag came to him cheerfully. Agag said, “Surely the bitterness of death is past.” And Samuel said, “As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women.” And Samuel hacked Agag to pieces before the Lord in Gilgal.

Then Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul. And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the Lord regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.”

Upon first reading, you might think God was overreacting a bit. He was too harsh! But you fast forward 500 years to the rise of Haman, a distant descendant of Agag, and an Amalekite. There is the sense that this is the result of a job Saul left unfinished. This Haman is defied by Mordecai, the Jew. And he is not just any Jew. Like Saul, he was a Benjaminite. This is a royal rumble rematch. And this pride of Haman so ignorantly reinforced by Xerxes, so dangerously defied by Mordecai, so spitefully provoked by the servants, so zealously defended by the man himself, this Haman is a monster created so very long ago as a consequence of sin. And in Saul’s mind, God was blowing things out of proportion, but if Mordecai could travel back, he would have a few words for Saul. Obedience is always a big deal. And now God’s nation and His promise hang in the balance. So you’re saying, “Is all this evil Saul’s fault?” Not entirely. God is clear that every generation is responsible for their own choices and sin. But, do consequences carry on from past generations? Absolutely!

Now, do you want to open up a can of worms? Do you want a question to keep you up at night? Saul might have failed, but whose idea was it to choose Saul anyway? Is it fair for God to kill the Amalekites? Where do they come from? Amalek. Who is Amalek’s grandpa? Esau. Is it fair for God to have chosen Jacob over Esau? Who is this God? This is a can of worms. And we’re going to just kick it until Pastor Ritch can get to Romans later on.

As always, we worry about the things that we don’t know rather than the things that we do. And we need to focus on what God says, which is that sometimes evil rules. Men like Haman rise not because of God’s absence, but because of His people’s disobedience. And here’s a point in which we can be sure. Sin costs! It always costs. It has consequences.

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

Evil rises because sin has consequences. There are two realities about sin’s consequences. They are very simple.

1. The consequences of sin are surprisingly long-lasting.

There was 500 years from Saul to Haman. The costs of disobedience endure. And they were far before Saul’s time, even. Sin lasts so much longer than you can imagine.

2. The consequences of sin are painfully far-reaching.

Now Haman plots a genocide. An entire nation is affected. A brutal mass murder is on the horizon. Sin’s consequences are surprisingly long-lasting and painfully far-reaching. How do you respond?

**Response: Count the cost: embrace the urgency of simple obedience.**

We deal with sin seriously because the consequences are relentless. And we count the cost sensibly. We think twice before we just shrug off God’s commandments as if they don’t matter, before we go back to our subtle compromises. We remember that it’s shocking how long they last. And we think selflessly bigger than ourselves, because our choices affect so many people. It’s painful how far they reach. Count the cost. Embrace the urgency of simple obedience.

And you say, “I get that. I know the cost, but I keep making these choices. My life is a mess! Why am I like this?” Our costly depravity comes as a consequence of that very first sin in the garden. You don’t need to lose hope because the consequences of that sin, the cost of every sin, has been paid for those who put their faith in Jesus.

As we’ve been going through Romans, chapter 5 reminds us:

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

Romans 5:19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

This is the obedience of Jesus.

Romans 5:21 so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

He is the reason why sinners like us can be freed from fear. We’re not afraid. We know that the

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 …unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

How can people like us come to church and enter God’s kingdom? Because you were washed. You were sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. Through Jesus the ultimate consequence for sin has been paid. And through Jesus, we have hope to be cleansed and to be changed. Evil is everyone’s problem and the only answer is Jesus. And suddenly, we catch a glimpse that the evil rises for a reason: to showcase the glory of God. And while you wait, as the story unfolds, will you trust in the work of His wisdom? Evil rises because sin has consequences. But there’s more to evil than just our sin.

**Reason #2: Because Satan has some control (3:7-11)**

Sin comes with consequence, yes, but Satan has influence. Sin costs! It always costs. And Satan kills! He always kills. He has influence. It means control. He is a player in this field of life. He and his demons are working even now. Jesus calls him the ruler of this world. Paul calls him the prince of the power of the air. He has influence.

Theoden was a good king, but somewhere along the way, he acquired a very evil and aptly named adviser called Grima Wormtongue. He is one of the most hated characters in the *Lord of the Rings* novels. Wormtongue! He speaks sweet poison into the ear of this king persuading him to make weak decisions, to diminish his rule. But Wormtongue is not acting alone. He is being moved by an even darker power that is unseen. It is a distant force that stems from an evil alliance between two towers. It is through this invisible influence that evil exerts great control.

You may not see it, and it may be pretty frightening, but in this world, Satan has powerful influence. After Haman’s pride, we move to Haman’s plot. We’ve seen his fragile image and now we consider his fiendish strategy. His honor has been assaulted, and so now he designs his revenge. There are three steps in this scene. His plot is first planned, then presented, and then approved. First, it is carefully planned. It is planned superstitiously. For blessing, Haman consults the occult.

*7 In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, they cast lots) before Haman day after day; and they cast it month after month till the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.*

Esther has been queen for five years. They cast lots day after day, trying to find the right day. They were superstitiously casting lots, using this pagan method of choosing days. They were looking for omens and signs. Maybe he was tossing pot shards or pebbles on the ground, studying the way they landed. The word for “lot” here is “Pur.” It’s also the word for fate. It’s an important word to remember later in the story. But this planning is happening very superstitiously and specifically. What do you know? By luck of the draw, the date chosen is almost an entire year away. And if you read ahead, you’ll find out that Haman’s reliance on fate will lead to his own demise and his lots become a sort of tragic 8 ball, predicting his own doom. But nonetheless, Haman’s plot is very carefully planned.

And second, his plot is craftily presented. He’s not risen to power without some skill. He knows exactly how to persuade the king and how to advance his scheme. He’s an artistic weaver of propaganda. And he makes his pitch elegantly and irresistibly.

*8 Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, “There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king's laws, so that it is not to the king's profit to tolerate them. 9 If it please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay 10,000 talents of silver into the hands of those who have charge of the king's business, that they may put it into the king's treasuries.”*

His pitch is elegant. When he brings up the people, he’s ambiguous and negative. “Oh, there’s just seditious, independent troublemakers. And they’re all over the place.” His pitch is irresistible. He knows what makes Xerxes tick. A major military loss. His bank account is a bit low. He offers 10,000 talents of silver, an amazing amount of money. And it seems clear that Haman assumes he’ll be getting plenty of money from the Jewish property he plans to steal. Haman’s plot is craftily presented.

And third, it’s tragically approved. Xerxes permits this scheme. Through his ring of power, he gives them verbal approval. The signet ring is the one used to sign official documents. It’s like a blank check, like a signature.

*10 So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. 11 And the king said to Haman, “The money is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you.”*

In Esther, Xerxes never says no to anyone. He takes the path of least resistance. He’s a “ready, fire, aim” kind of king. Haman’s plot is carefully planned, craftily presented, and tragically permitted. His dark agenda proves that he is the villain, the archenemy, the nemesis of God’s people. So why does all this come about? Do you think this is all just coincidence and that these are just natural human factors at play? Based on the rest of Scripture, I think with confidence that there are far larger spiritual factors at work. And just like God is not mentioned but we see His fingerprints everywhere, it seems appropriate to assume Satan has a hand in what’s happening here. Satan kills! He always kills. And whether Cain’s murder of Abel, or Pharaoh and Herod’s genocide, infanticides, he is the great murderer. He is the great deceiver. Such that Jesus could say to those who rejected Him in John 8:

John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Evil rises because Satan has some control, some influence. And there are a couple things we need to remember about his influence. There are three reminders here.

1. His influence is restricted/limited.

It is not restricted like the website blocker that you can kind of get around. No, it is restricted like a prisoner in chains. He can only do what God permits. And there is evidence of this restriction in verse 7. How is the date of genocide chosen? He’s casting lots in the lap. But who is really in charge of that? Every decision is from the Lord. And we’ll find that the date chosen is going to turn on its head and God is in control. We can trust that He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). Satan’s influence is restricted. It is limited. But, even though it is limited and restricted,

2. His influence is tricky.

It’s limited, but when it comes out, it seems so logical. It is so frighteningly subtle. Like Haman, Satan is wise in temptation. He is so seductive, so elegant, enticing. His influence is very tricky.

3. His influence is real.

Yes, it is limited, but it is literal. He has real control at times, where God will give something into his hands. And if you need evidence, you just flip a few pages over and look at the book of Job. For some reason, God sometimes permits Satan to succeed. He allows Satan some measure of influence. And it seems like this is one of those times. God allows Haman’s plan to go forward. Yet, it is all according to God’s wisdom. I think perhaps it’s the same way in Luke 22 when Jesus tells His enemies,

Luke 22:53 When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.

While Satan’s control is restricted and tricky, it is real and God grants him some measure of influence. How do we respond when we think about that truth?

**Response: Stand your ground: face the fervency of spiritual battle.**

This is a war! This is the principle of vigilance. We deal with Satan soberly because he is ruthless, but we stand our ground. We stand it courageously and firm because Satan is restricted and God is sovereign and there’s not a thing Satan can do without His consent. By God’s wisdom, the roll of the lots will bring about the salvation of God’s people. We trust God’s wisdom and we stand firm with courage. God’s will is that we would submit ourselves to Him and resist the devil, and that he would flee (James 4:7).

We grab hold of God’s grace and stand firm with courage. But we stand our ground carefully, very carefully. We watch out because Satan is so very tricky. He is so subtle and so sneaky. His lies are so elegant and enticing. We’re not passive like Xerxes. We recognize that he is at work and he is a master at not being seen. You recognize that Satan looks for opportunities when we fail to count the cost. When you fail to count the cost, you’re not able to stand your ground because Satan is looking for opportunities of sin, of anger, of disunity, of jealousy. These are the opportunities he seizes, so that Paul would say,

Ephesians 4:26-27 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.

Recognize how Satan works. He’s after tripping up God’s people and looking to destroy them. His method has been subtle. He tempted Eve with the slippery serpent. And he betrayed Jesus by His own disciple, right under the noses of all his followers. Satan is so tricky! He is defeated, yes, but he is still dangerous. There is such a helpful passage in 1 Peter 5.

1 Peter 5:8-11 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

He will restore what has been broken. He will confirm what was questioned. He will strengthen what was weak. He will establish what had been lost. And when you’re watching the news and you’re discussing strategies at work, and stress about the conflict and circumstances that surround you, do not forget to

Ephesians 6:11-13 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

You stand your ground! And when things go downhill, when it seems like evil is winning, you stand your ground consciously knowing that Satan does have real control and there are times when God is permitting it. We trust the wisdom of God because there’s more at work than we can see. So we stand our ground. And the reason why you can, why you can fight this battle, is because of one man. He is the only man who resisted Satan fully. He is Jesus, the man full of the Holy Spirit, led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit, tempted for forty days. Unlike Israel, He resisted. He didn’t cave to Satan. This man came to defeat Satan. He said the ruler of this world is judged. (John 16:11) He is cast out (John 12:31). How? By this Jesus allowing Himself to die on a cross so that

Colossians 2:13-15 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

All that sin and the costs that we failed to count, were nailed to the cross. This great accuser is triumphed over by Jesus. Jesus has

1 Peter 3:22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

This is Jesus!

Colossians 1:13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,

We think about what was said in Romans 8.

Romans 8:36-39 As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Through Jesus, the destructive influence of Satan is permanently defeated. Evil is everyone’s problem and the only answer is Jesus. And suddenly, we get a glimpse that evil rises for a reason: to showcase the glory of God. And while you wait, as the story unfolds, will you trust in the work of His wisdom? Evil rises because sin has consequences. It rises because Satan has some control. But the infection of evil has spread beyond even the devil and our own disobedience.

**Reason #3: Because society is corrupt (3:12-15)**

All of society has become corrupt. Sin has consequences, Satan has influence, and our society is beset with impotence. That is, inability to address the problem. Weakness, unable to do what is needed. Sin costs! It always costs. Satan kills! He always kills. Society caves! It always caves. Corruption. Impotence. That means we’re unable to do what is required. Like a boat that has been capsized, we cannot right ourselves.

When the World War ended in 1945, President Eisenhower forced the German people to walk through Concentration Camps to witness the carnage. Countless lives were murdered in utter brutality right in their very backyards. This was the nearby evil that they had allowed to survive. Some plead ignorance, but Eisenhower knew better and current research supports him, that these people were some who had permitted the atrocities to take place next door. Evil can rise when people pretend that it isn’t there. They want to ignore it. They are either corrupted by it, or confused on how to deal with it. This is the world in which we live. Society is utterly impotent and unable to solve this problem, to halt evil’s advance. We don’t hope in this world.

After Haman’s pride and his plot, we move to Haman’s purge. We’ve seen his fragile image and his fiendish strategy, and now we cringe at his fanatical agenda. A murderous purge where Haman commands and celebrates a Jewish genocide. First we see that his purge is quickly commanded with the same zeal that Xerxes had judgment in chapter 1. Only now, Haman is in charge. He unveils this scheme for an almost final solution.

*12 Then the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and an edict, according to all that Haman commanded, was written to the king's satraps and to the governors over all the provinces and to the officials of all the peoples, to every province in its own script and every people in its own language. It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring.*

This is going everywhere.

*13 Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with instruction to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods. 14 A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province by proclamation to all the peoples to be ready for that day. 15 The couriers went out hurriedly by order of the king, and the decree was issued in Susa the citadel.*

You see how chapter 3 closely parallels chapter 1. We have a ruler filled with pride, demanding complete submission and honor. And a single subject refuses to obey, publicly humiliates the authority and provokes them to fury. And the king is warned that such rebellion is contagious. The recommended solution is a brash, excessive decree that is carried out in haste. This is a similar pattern of events, but this one is much darker. The stakes are much graver. This is a reversal of 1 Samuel 15. Since Israel disobeyed and didn’t destroy the Amalekites, now here is an Amalekite who wants to destroy Israel. And the comprehensive nature of this extermination is shown by these words, “destroy, kill, annihilate.” It’s just like Samuel. Only there’s a difference. In Samuel, God forbids Saul from taking the spoil. That’s why he failed. And here Haman will add insult to injury and he commands that they plunder the Jews’ spoil. This is something to remember for later on.

No one stands up to him, not even the king. This genocidal purge is quickly commanded, and all the officials comply. And the people go into a panic. I mean, what could happen next if you could just sentence an entire nation to death? And in verse 15, Haman callously celebrates this purge. While the city spirals in confusion, he celebrates with the king. He is as cold as Elsa’s ice castle, here. Welcome to the Callous Palace.

*And the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was thrown into confusion.*

The purge is celebrated by a blind king, ignorant that he just sentenced his own wife to death. And this is celebrated by the blissful Haman, indifferent to the city’s desperate panic. Evil rises because society is corrupt. They’re crippled, completely impotent, unable to address the issue. And here are two truths about their corruption, their impotent society, their weakness.

1. It’s pervasive.

They are captives. This is our world. It is bound, stuck in evil, unable to resist its force. And this is how we all are, born into this world.

Ephesians 2:1-2 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.

This is pervasive and complete captivity. This is our world.

2. It’s puzzling.

They’re not only captives, but they are confused. Yes, they’re bound, but they’re broken. They’re really stuck, but they’re rightly scared of this evil and unable to make sense of it.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

They’re confused, bound and blind. They are unwilling to accept God’s word, but unable to solve their problems without it. This is the corruption and confusion of society. And it doesn’t surprise the Christian that we’re told

1 John 3:13 Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.

1 Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

This is something we should expect. We recognize that society is crippled and corrupt. We read about it all in Romans chapter 3. So what do we do in a society that is unable to do anything?

**Response: Call for backup: confess the necessity of sincere prayer.**

This is how we enter into spiritual warfare. We pray! We deal with society spiritually because without God, society is hopeless. We call for backup fervently. We cry out because the world is not getting better. It’s getting more corrupt. It’s unable to right itself. We need God. We need Him in our country. We need Him in our families. We need Him in our church. We don’t have solutions without God. We pray. That’s why Timothy says

1 Timothy 2:1-4 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

We cry for backup, fervently! It is God’s Spirit who needs to come and set the world free. We call for backup fervently and lovingly because the world is blinded by their sin. We show compassion and be soft toward others. When we endure their mockery and their persecution, we pray on their behalf, because they are ignorant of their own doom. This is how we all are without God. We pray that God might show mercy. This is why in 2 Timothy chapter 2 we are told

2 Timothy 2:24-26 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

We call for backup. Pray lovingly. By God’s power we see the light of hope because before Jesus left, He promised

John 14:16-17 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

Romans chapter 8, the chapter of the Spirit and of prayer and of groaning. This Spirit of God is the one who opens our eyes. When the world and society is corrupt and their eyes are blinded so that they can’t see the light of Jesus, we pray that God, the same God

2 Corinthians 4:6 For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

We pray that this same God would shine in their hearts. We say with Paul

2 Corinthians 4:8-18 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, “I believed, and so I spoke,” we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Doesn’t this sound like Romans 8? Through Jesus, the corruption of society can be overturned. It’s just a matter of time. Evil is everyone’s problem and the only answer is Jesus. He paid the cost of sin. He overpowered the control of Satan. He can purify the most corrupt society. Will you wait as the story unfolds and trust in the work of His wisdom? We need the comfort of His Spirit because we all face this enemy of evil, compounded by sin and encouraged by Satan, this corrupted society. And why does it rise? To showcase the glory of God.

Claude Monet was a founder of the French impressionist painting. His works are cherished around the world. If you’ve ever seen one of his paintings of lilies or haystacks or bridges, you’ll notice his style. Up close, you can hardly tell what the painting is about. It just looks like globs and splotches, like a kid did it. But once you step back and you get the full perspective, what comes into view is this beautiful masterpiece. Up close in the details of life, it is not possible to see what God is doing. Sometimes it feels like a total disaster. But as you study the blotches of your life and wait for the painting to come into focus, will you trust in the work of God’s wisdom?

You say, “What’s going to happen to God’s people? What will happen to Mordecai? What will happen to Esther?” Listen! They’re going to be okay. And if you keep reading, you’ll find out. You say, “What’s going to happen to me? What’s going to happen to my job? What’s going to happen to my home, my country, my church? What will happen? How could God let such evil rise?” Remember, evil rises for a reason. And justice will come soon enough. But before it does, we’ll have to wait until next week to look at what we do while we wait. And we’ll study our strategy in part 3, *Leap of Faith*.