UPC Family Devotional

June – Week 3

Memory Verse of the Week:

For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this.

-Esther 4:14

June 13 Monday Esther 2:1-11

The king waits for his anger to cool off before he returns to the matter of how he was embarrassed by his queen’s defiance. Although his treatment of his queen was not wise or loving, he does exercise some self-control, which is laundable for a man in his position. The more power and authority we have, the less likely it will be for others to restrain us, and so we must be more vigilant about exercising self-control. If we act when we are angry, we are likely to say words or do things that will dishonor the Lord. Having people around us who can hold us accountable can be very helpful as we seek to act with decency in times of upheaval.

What do you do to calm down after a distressing situation? In what other situations does it help to pause before reacting?

Esther is an exiled orphan who was raised by her cousin after the death of her parents. Even under these unfortunate circumstances, god has blessed her with natural beauty. We see the hand of God in her being selected as a candidate to become Xerxes’ new queen. God gives Esther favor before the official in charge, and she received premium treatment from the attendants. Our circumstances are part of God’s story of transformation. God’s plan for us far outweighs whatever might seem to put us at a disadvantage, and His purposes for us will be accomplished regardless of our setbacks. Through our position in Jesus Christ, we are guaranteed the eternal favor of God.

What circumstance in life do you consider to be advantageous? How have you experienced God’s favor in spite of them?

June 14 Tuesday Esther 2:12-23

The young women must go through one full year of rigorous preparation before they are presented to the king, with the hope of being chosen to become his queen. Esther chooses to trust Hegai’s wisdom and does whatever he suggests. She probably reasons that since Hegai has worked with the king long enough, he knows what delights him the most. God has given us His Word and His Holy Spirit to guide us so the church might be a perfect bride when Jesus returns. The Holy Spirit plumbs the full depths of God and reveals what we need to know. When we surrender to His leading, He works in us and makes us worthy for the King of kings.

When have you found it difficult to submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit? Why is scripture such an important guide for us?

Mordecai had advised Esther not to disclose her ethnicity as a Jew, and in helping to foil an assassination plot against Xerxes, both Mordecai and Esther secure favor that will later bring great returns. Although they are not fully aware of the implications of these moves, God is sovereignly carrying out his plans behind the scenes. As believers in Christ, nothing happens to us by chance. Our ministry is not only limited to church-oriented activities but involves all spheres of life. God may even call us to serve Him in government, the marketplace, or the entertainment world. Let us, therefore, be faithful wherever God has placed us so that He can showcase His glory through us.

Where has the Lord called you to serve Him? How can you perform your duties in God honoring ways?

June 15 Wednesday Esther 3: 1-15

Haman’s promotion requires that all of the royal officials must bow and pay homage to him. Mordecai, who has made his Jewish identity known, refuses to participate in what amounts to an act of idolatry: ascribing to Haman the honor that is reserved for God alone. Even though our loyalty to Christ may cause us to be rejected or even threatened, Jesus demands that we choose him over anything that may lure our hearts into false worship. Faithfulness to God often results in being exposed and vulnerable to persecution by those who oppose the truth, but let us stand our ground. God will surely receive our devotion as a pleasing sacrifice and reward us in due time.

When have you had to take a difficult stand because of your faith? What personal risks do you continue to face as you serve the Lord?

Haman takes advantage of his special relationship with the king to pursue his personal agenda of annihilating the Jews who live in Babylon. The king blindly grants Haman’s request, effectively decreeing a nationwide genocide. For now, he seems as though nothing can stop this massacre from happening. Likewise, there will be times when the tide turns against us and, from a human standpoint, it may seem that nothing can stop it. In many ways, we currently live in such times as our Christian freedoms seem to be narrowing, whether through societal pressure or even government policy. Yet, God is at work planning and executing our deliverance even when we may not understand all his ways.

What do you do when it seems like everything is working against you? In what ways are you remaining faithful to Jesus?

June 16 Thursday Esther 4: 1-17

Esther's hesitation to act on behalf of her people illustrates the internal struggle between her identity as queen of a foreign empire and as a fellow Jew. Not only is there the threat of death, but there is also the temptation to hide behind the safety and comfort of her coveted position. We sometimes find ourselves in a similar situation, where our identity as Christians feels uncomfortably at odds with our identities at school or in our careers. Perhaps we struggle to be open about our faith in our workplace and among our friends, for fear of losing a part of our lives that we may have grown used to. May God remind us that before we are anything else, we are His.

What identity are you most comfortable with around non-Christians? How can you root your identity more in Christ and less in your secular status?

Esther faces a test where her life and the lives of her fellow Jews hang in the balance. She chooses faithfulness to God and his people and asks Mordecai and the Jews to fast on her behalf. Each day, we are faced with critical moments in which our faith and character are tested. Some of them are small, like whether to engage in gossip. Some of them are weightier, like whether to marry an unbeliever. When these tests come, we can choose to be faithful to God as we remember who we are in Christ and the things He has called us to. We can also seek the support of God's people who can pray and offer wise counsel as we encounter difficult decisions.

How has God helped you make difficult life choices for His glory? What current struggles in your life demand faithfulness?

June 17 Friday Esther 5: 1-14

Esther’s entrance into the kings inner court is not an ordinary event. She had previously disclosed that her life may be at risk if she offends the king. But by God's Providence, Esther finds favor in the king's eyes, and what is more, the king takes interest in her request that he and Haman attend a feast she has prepared. Esther comes to the king with a plan, and it is not far-fetched to assume that this plan was conceived during her three days of fasting and prayer. Esther's determination is accompanied by her resolve to pray and seek God's wisdom. May we exhibit this same willingness to bring our requests before God, plan in prayer, and trust him for the outcome.

What have you resolved to do that has yet to see progress? How can you pray and plan until your resolve comes to fruition?

Haman’s pump is not snuffed out when he sees Mordecai still not giving him the honor he seeks. To alleviate his anger, Haman surrounds himself with friends who fill his ears with what he wants to hear. Haman pouts before his friends and they devise for him a wicked plan to murder Mordecai and make an example of him for all to see. Haman shows no restraint when it comes to getting what he wants. And though his acts are hideous, we do well to heed Scriptures’ warning. It is easy to want to surround ourselves with people who will approve of our sinful desires and deeds. But it is far more challenging - and profitable - to surround ourselves with those who challenge our pride.

Do you only surround yourself with people who agree with what you want? Who among the people you know can help you discern God's will?

June 18 Saturday Esther 6:1-14

It is no random circumstance that King Xerxes has trouble sleeping. His sleeplessness is orchestrated by God and as he listens to the royal chronicles, he is reminded of how Mordecai foiled an assassination plot and saved him, yet has never been rewarded. Meanwhile, Haman happens to be standing outside the king’s courts and Xerxes has him brought in to consult him on the matter. Even though God is not mentioned by name in the book of Esther, His fingerprints are noticeable in the events that unfold. The same is true in our Christian walks. Though God’s physical presence is invisible to us, it is evident as we see His plans unfold to bring about His blessing.

Look back on the past few months of your life and praise God as you notice the ways He has let you. What can you do to regularly bring to mind the wonderful things God has done?

Believing himself to be the one worthy of the highest honors, Haman goes in to find details about the extravagant rewards that should be given. But the crushing blow is dealt when he discovers that the king intends to honor Mordecai. He is then tasked with bestowing upon Mordecai all the honors he himself coveted. In addition, his wife and advisors are now convinced that his downfall, not Mordecai’s, is certain. How the tables have turned! But we are not too surprised, for the Bible is full of stories where planned evil actually works for the good of God's people. The best example of this is the story of our redemption- the planned crucifixion of the son of God, which has saved us from sin and death.

What are some situations in which you feel like someone hostile to you is in control? How do you strengthen yourself in God in such instances?