

Chapter 20: The Antithesis and Antidote

The story of Esther has at least three key points:

1. **First, it confirms the** _____.

God is still working *even when* _____.

2. **God provides another glimpse of the** _____ **through Esther.**

- a) _____
I ask only one thing from the Lord. This is what I want: Let me live in the Lord's house all my life. Let me see the Lord's beauty and look with my own eyes at his Temple.

Psalm 27:4

- b) Both lived in _____.
Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I say are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me.

John 14:10

- c) For such a _____/In the fullness of _____
"Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Esther 4:14

But when the right time came, God sent his Son who was born of a woman and lived under the law.

Galatians 4:4

- d) Both exposed _____ and were willing to _____ should it come to that.

3. _____ **is an abomination to the LORD. To attack**

_____ **is to attack God.**

And another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns and on his heads were seven diadems. And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven, and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.

Revelation 12:3-5

If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as it loves its own. But I have chosen you out of the world, so you don't belong to it. That is why the world hates you. John 15:18-19

In the story of Esther, we see the antidote to hate: _____.

"All that is necessary for evil to succeed is that good men do nothing."—Edmund Burke

"There are a thousand men hacking at the branches of evil for every one who is striking at its root."

—Thoreau

And what is at the root of hatred? _____.

Today's Equipping Point

All _____ stops with me.

You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Do not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.' But I say, if you are angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the high council. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.

Matthew 5:21-22

These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

John 16:33

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

Romans 8:35, 37

Discussion Questions

1. How often have you used prayer and fasting when faced with a crisis?
2. Has God ever placed you in a position to serve a greater purpose than you imagined?
3. What courage will you display today to defeat hatred in any form?

Teaching Script

In the mid-1930's, there was a man named Casper who lived quietly with his family. He was a Dutch watchmaker who ran a family business, and was known for an open and loving heart. He and his family were Christians, ministering to the downtrodden in the name of Christ, without regard to need or nationality.

Toward the end of the 30's, the family's resolve to bless others endured what would become its greatest test. Their Holland home had always served as a home for anyone in need. But during World War II, their house became much more than a place of hospitality—it became a hiding place for Jews and the Dutch underground. Casper ten Boom and his two daughters, Betsie and Corrie, were compelled by their faith to protect the Jews and others sought by the Nazis. At any given time, there were usually six or seven people living illegally in their safe house. On February 28, 1944, the Gestapo raided their home. They seized thirty refugees who came by that day, as well as Casper, his daughters and three other relatives. All were arrested and imprisoned. The six people that were hidden in the false wall in Corrie's bedroom and remained quietly undetected for 47 hours until Dutch underground workers were able to free them.

After only ten days in Scheveningen Prison, 84-year-old Casper died. When he was asked if he knew he could die for helping Jews, he responded, *"It would be an honor to give my life for God's ancient people."* Corrie and Betsie spent ten months in three different prisons sharing the love of Christ with other prisoners before Betsie died, as did her brother and nephew. Four Ten Booms gave their lives for protecting Jews against the venomous Nazis. Corrie alone survived. The Ten Booms' vibrant faith gave them an understanding of God's Upper Story including a deep love for God's chosen people.

In Chapter 20 of *The Story*, the Jews faced similar circumstances 2,500 years before Hitler. As our story of Esther unfolds today, we see anti-Semitism in its worst form. But we also see, once again, God's amazing provision for His people.

The Persian King in power, Xerxes, had good reason to party. His vast empire was powerful and prosperous. His queen was lovely. His palace was ideal for a celebration befitting such a monarch. In what probably resembled the toga party in *Animal House*, for six months he celebrated with his court. Finally the king summoned Queen Vashti, to put her on display for all the drunken guests. It's safe to say she had been treated like "arm candy" for years—but this time, she refused. Big mistake. Kings do not like to be refused. And so, with his advisors' support, he stripped Vashti of her crown and banished her from his presence.

Kings don't like to be embarrassed, but they also do not like to be queenless. So Xerxes commissioned a kingdom-wide beauty pageant and young women from every province were whisked into the king's harem for a year long visit at the royal spa. One such woman was a Jewish girl named Esther who had been raised by her cousin, Mordecai. Esther won everyone's heart, including the king's. He eventually made her queen but did *not* know she was a Jew. Soon after, Mordecai overheard a plot kill the king. He passed the news to his cousin Esther, and the king was rescued and the conspirators hanged. Fortunately, the royal scribe recorded Mordecai's service in the annals of the king—God knew this event would be critical later.

The other central figure in the story is Haman, King Xerxes' right hand man. Haman's head swelled in his high standing, and pretty soon he was loving the way all the royal officials knelt at his feet—everyone that is, except Mordecai. Because Mordecai refused to kowtow, Haman was enraged. His pride was so offended, that to exact his revenge, Haman deceived the king into issuing a decree to exterminate Mordecai and all his people, the entire Jewish population of Persia. He cast a lot, or pur, and chose a single day of unfettered violence against the Jews.

Mordecai sent word to Esther asking her to beg the king for mercy. Queen Esther feared for her life because no one could legally go before the king without prior permission. But Mordecai's immortal words persuaded her: *"Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"* Her courageous response was, "If I perish, I perish."

They prepared themselves for this dangerous mission the way God's people should: through prayer and fasting. As Esther approached the king, Xerxes welcomed her and offered to grant her heart's desire. She invited the king and Haman to two private banquets. Haman was elated to be the exclusive royal guest but still enraged over Mordecai's insolence. With all the satisfaction of a Cheshire cat, he erected a pole on which Mordecai could be impaled.

Kings with full stomachs must not sleep well, so Xerxes spent the midnight hours listening to the royal decrees. He discovered the account of Mordecai's report that saved his own life and realized this act of loyalty hadn't been rewarded. How might he honor such a man? He put this question to Haman for advice. Arrogantly assuming that *he* was the king's favored, Haman dreamed up an elaborate ceremony. But within moments, through clenched teeth, Haman was giving his nemesis the king's robes, leading him through the streets and singing the praises of Mordecai. God does indeed have quite a sense of humor.

Haman later enjoyed the queen's second banquet until Esther exposed his plot to destroy her people. The king left the room in a fury only to return and discover Haman appearing to assault his queen. He ordered that Haman be impaled on the very pole intended for Mordecai.

The king could not repeal his original edict declaring the destruction of the Jews. But he enabled Mordecai to issue a counter-edict providing for the Jews to take up their own defense. The day planned for destruction became a day of deliverance. Though the lot was cast, God remained the Author of the story. Even in exile, He protected His people, and in Esther, we see God's heart for saving us all.

The story of Esther has three key points.

1. First, it confirms the great Upper Story of God.

Over and over, we have seen God's faithfulness. In spite of idolatry, barrenness, sin, and bad choices, God had sovereignly led His people; and now, He illustrates again that nothing will stop his plan of redemption through Israel.

We've seen this truth time and again through the Old Testament: **God is still working even when we cannot see his plan.**

- God was working His plan even while Joseph was in prison
- God was working His plan even while Moses escaped slaughter as a baby
- God was working His plan even while calling Gideon in hiding
- God was working His plan even while Samson was blinded and made into a spectator sport
- God was working His plan even while Saul was gunning for David
- God was working His plan even while the kingdom was split in two
- God was working His plan even during captivity in Babylon
- God was working His plan as Persia took over and allowed the Jews to return home

If you take away nothing else this morning, put this on your dashboard: *God is still working even when we cannot see His plan.*

- God is working His plan during a time of foreclosure, unemployment and financial meltdown
- God is working His plan despite the ever-present threat of terrorism
- God is working His plan even through the frustrations and hardships in your family

Our first takeaway from Esther is that in the darkest hour, on the brink of ethnic cleansing and facing a potential death sentence for approaching the king, God's plan of redemption continued. And you and I today can have confidence that through divorce, identity theft, and cancer, God is working His glorious Upper Story. That's what faith is: the substance of things we hope for, the evidence of things we do not yet see.

The *second takeaway* is related:

2. God provides another glimpse of the Messiah through Esther.

Once again, a shadow of the Messiah appears, this time through a woman. God's chosen people experienced a miraculous day of deliverance. Just as Moses led them from Egypt after the death of the firstborn to establish Passover, so Esther's courage leads to the establishment of the Feast of Purim.

Freedom from bondage always requires a celebration. People often remember the month and day they received Christ and were saved, or the date of their baptism. Alcoholics often carry a coin with them that marks the date of their sobriety. We celebrate anniversaries of the day we stopped smoking or the day our children came home. And like Passover, the Feast of Purim celebrates *delivery*.

The Jews even now celebrate the survival of their people with great merriment. Next month, on March 9-10, the Feast of Purim will be held again. The Book of Esther will be read in the synagogue. People will send gifts of food to their neighbors and part of the celebration will be to also provide food for the poor. People will dress in costumes representing Esther, Mordecai, Haman, and Ahasuerus, the king, and hold carnivals.

Esther's delivery of her people is another royal precursor to Jesus Himself:

- **Beauty**

I ask only one thing from the Lord. This is what I want: Let me live in the Lord's house all my life. Let me see the Lord's beauty and look with my own eyes at his Temple.
Psalm 27:4

- **Both lived in submission to authority.** While Esther was subject to King Xerxes and his invitation, Jesus was submitted as well:

Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I say are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me.

John 14:10

- **For such a time as this/in the fullness of time**

"Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Esther 4:14

But when the right time came, God sent his Son who was born of a woman and lived under the law.

Galatians 4:4

- **Both exposed evil and were willing to die should it come to that.**

Gender doesn't matter—Esther is yet another in a long line of forerunners of Jesus Himself.

And the third takeaway:

3. **Anti-Semitism is an abomination to the LORD. To attack His people is to attack God.**

The book of Esther teaches us the dangers of anti-Semitism, the Divine protection of Israel, and the consequences to those who attack the chosen people of God. There is something more profound than "normal racism" against a people group when it comes to the Jews. I submit to you that it is nothing short of Satanic.

Here's why: from the Garden, man has been in need of a Savior. The separation caused by the sin of Adam would require a perfect, sinless man to restore the relationship between God and mankind. No sinful man could possibly bridge that gap. Therefore God promised that one day a seed from the woman would bruise the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). Satan has been attempting to defeat God and His redemptive purpose ever since by eliminating the line of the coming Redeemer.

Consider Revelations 12:

And another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns and on his heads were seven diadems. And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven, and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.

Revelation 12:3-5

A few verses later, the dragon is clearly identified as Satan (Revelation 12:9). The child can be none other than Jesus who was caught up to the throne of God and is the King of Kings who is to rule all nations. This is a battle that has been fought through the ages.

Had Pharaoh's or Herod's infanticide succeeded, the line of the Messiah would have been cut off completely. Had Haman been successful, the line of the Messiah would have been completely exterminated.

But the plan of God was formed before the foundation of the world, to pursue and rescue humanity from Haman, from Hitler, from Satan himself.

Jesus said,

"If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as it loves its own. But I have chosen you out of the world, so you don't belong to it. That is why the world hates you."

John 15:18-19

Forces of darkness have always been aligned against not just *Jesus*, but his *followers*. New Testament believers experienced persecution in nearly every city—the letters to Philippi, Thessalonica, the Hebrews, and from James all spoke of tribulation and sharing Jesus' sufferings because we are different.

From the Crusades to the Holocaust, the persecution of God's people has always been with us. Why? Because people who hate cannot understand a community built on love.

And in the story of Esther, we see the antidote to hate: the courage of love.

It takes great courage to love selflessly and completely, because unconditional love carries with it great risk: the risk of rejection. Anybody can hate—but only those with real backbone and fortitude have the mettle and courage to love regardless.

I don't know—perhaps Casper Ten Boom and his family were inspired by the 18th century British statesman Edmund Burke:

All that is necessary for evil to succeed is that good men do nothing.—Edmund Burke

Gentlemen, we will be required to take a stand. Passivity is NOT an option.

To love courageously is the antidote to every kind of hate, racism, and anti-Semitism. But let us ensure we strike accurately.

Thoreau said: *There are a thousand men hacking at the branches of evil for every one who is striking at its root.*

So let's zero in. **What is at the root of hatred?** Of Anti-Semitism? Of bigotry? The same thing that was at the root of Haman's anger: **pride**. He loved the honor bestowed by the king, and when Mordecai refused to be a yes man—refused to brown-nose the second in command, look what happened: an attempt at mass genocide.

The damage that pride has done over the ages is staggering. With Eve, it took the form of not believing what God said, but suspecting she hadn't been told everything. With Haman, it was people don't treat me the way I think I should be treated. With Hitler and

with white supremacists, it was a conviction that others not like them are somehow defective.

With you and me, what does pride look like? Perhaps belittling someone because they don't share my political view or because they cut me off on the highway. Perhaps pride for me is an inability to say "I'm sorry," or an unwillingness, and inflexibility to change my mind about something.

So this morning, let us stop for a moment before sharpening our machetes and consider the wisdom of Thoreau: before you start chopping at leaves and branches, take one good swing at the *root* of evil: your pride.

And so there's our Equipping Point for today. How do you lead well?

All hatred stops with me.

And that doesn't just mean racial or ethnic bigotry. Hatred is what Jesus said it is:

You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Do not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.' But I say, if you are angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the high council. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.

Matthew 5:21-22

This is hatred because when we get to the point where our anger will not subside, or we can casually call someone an idiot, or curse someone, our pride has taken over. And here's why it's that dangerous—we talked about this when we read through the Gospels a couple of years ago, but it bears repeating. When we adopt this viewpoint toward someone—an ability to discard someone, to denigrate them with names, to deny they too are made in the image of God, we have adopted the enemy's view of him. We see him as Satan does: worthless and dispensable.

God sees all of mankind—ALL of mankind—as worthy of Christ's death. But when our pride takes over, we see them as inconsequential and insignificant. Could there be an emotion further from the heart of God? Jesus warns us about hating, about lasting anger, about retaining bitterness. Be careful, He said; when you disdain, you label as unimportant—and nothing could be further from Jesus' view of that same person.

And so today, I challenge us—all of us—to stand against hatred of all kinds. In the vernacular of Edmund Burke, "I say thee nay." We must resolve, here and now, that our view of others: the last and the least; Republicans and Democrats; our view of anyone unlike us can have nothing to do with our prejudices, and everything to do with Jesus' estimation that all of humanity was worth dying for. May it never be said of the men of

the Next Level that we see anyone: an ex-wife, a distracted driver, a wayward child, a victim of AIDS, or any person, male or female, slave or free, Jew or Gentile, as dispensable. For under the cross we are ALL one in Christ Jesus. Amen??

May we love others like Jesus, who prayed for His tormentors. May we have the courage to unswervingly follow a Savior who, just hours before His death, bizarrely said, "Take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

The book of Esther teaches us first that God can be trusted for deliverance even though His ways are unknown to us; but it teaches us further that if we do not wait on Him, if we demand illumination rather than faith, demand our timetable over God's sovereignty, it's likely that it is our pride that requires these things.

If it is nothing else, the story of Haman is a testimony to what we are capable of if our pride goes unchecked. May we, in the words of Peter, humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may lift us up in due time. This was the final triumph of both Esther and the Messiah she prefigured: a humility that, in the fullness of time, brought the perfect antidote to hatred and prejudice. This antidote is a love that was willing to die so that redemption could come to the world, even to the likes of you and me.