

Finding our identity is one of our modern world's obsessions. A natural part of growing up is discovering who you are. But our world puts a large emphasis on finding yourself. This pressure is especially felt by the younger generations who have been shipped by social media and the internet. You are no longer just you, you need a brand or a thing. Our identities are found in our sexuality and gender identity. Because those are not just discussions about morality, but about who someone believes they are. Or our identity is found in the kind of shows we like or the team we are fans of.

Whether you are young or not all of us find our identity somewhere. But if you are a Christian, that should not just be part of your identity. It should shape everything else. But the pressure from the world can often push it to the side.

That is the pressure Esther has been facing throughout the book. The empire has pressed down on her and made her hide her true identity as a follower of God. But now the time has come for her to make a decision. Who will she be? And who will we be? Turn with me to Esther 7.

I. [Esther] Identifying with God's people brings deliverance (v. 1-4).

Esther is finally going to reveal herself.

For the last several years, she has hidden her Jewish identity.

For the last several days, she has not told the king what her request is.

But finally, she is going to come clean.

And her reveal is not just revealing what she wants.

At the core this is also Esther standing and identifying with the people of God.

Verse 1, **"So the king and Haman went in to the feast with Queen Esther."**

Quick recap for those of you who have forgotten.

Esther risked her life to go before the king on behalf of her people.

She did and her life was spared.

But she did not ask the king to spare them yet.

She invited the king to a party to tell him her private request.

Then after that party, the king asked what she wanted.

And she invited him to another party.

You may remember at the end of chapter 6.

Haman is grabbed away mid conversation with his wife to come to the party.

Now we are finally going to get what Esther's request is.

Verse 2, **"And on the second day, as they were drinking wine after the feast,"**

Once again the king is doing his favorite activity.

He and Haman have been drinking wine during the feast.

They are drinking even more wine afterwards.

Now the king wants to know.

"The king again said to Esther, "What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom it shall be fulfilled."

He again goes through the same answer.

But he does not have to say it this way.

The first time it was a ritual or part of the political theater.

But he is not under obligation to repeat it each time.

But he has.

It seems to get more sincere that he is promising a positive response to her request.

Three times in fact he has made this promise.

And this is why Esther will answer now.

He has publicly promised to honor her request three times.

He can't back out now without losing face.

That is why Esther waited.

Her patience and wisdom also has made this the perfect time.

God prepared for this moment.

Her delay allowed Mordecai to be honored and thwarted Haman's plans.

Verse 3, **"Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor in your sight, O King, and if it please the king,"**

She carefully chooses her answer.

The king has offered to hear her wish and request.

So she mirrors that.

She appeals to his favor.

She appeals to his pleasure.

Both are things we have seen she has done.

She has repeatedly won the favor of the king.

Over and over she has found favor in his sight.

She has also pleased the king.

Her behavior and actions have pleased the king.

So her request is partially based on how she knows the king feels about her.

She is appealing to what the king has said to be true.

Now she makes the request.

"let me life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request."

She has a wish and a request.

She is listing them separately.

Her wish is that the king would spare her life.

Her request is the king would spare her people's lives.

The key here is that the truth is finally coming out.

Esther has hid her identity for years.

For close to a decade she has not let anyone see even a hint of her Jewishness.

She has changed her name.

She goes by Esther, her Persian name, instead of her Jewish name Hadassah.

She hid her Jewish clothes.

She did not celebrate the Jewish holidays.

She did everything she could to keep her people hidden.
And there is no way she could have done this without compromising spiritually.
She would have had to violate God's commands and laws.
She would have had to eat food that was not allowed.
She probably would have had to make sacrifices or take part in rituals meant to celebrate the Persian gods.
She did whatever it took to stay safe.
She did all of this because Mordecai was afraid that her life would be at risk if she revealed it.
She had kept it secret, and it has kept it safe.
But now she takes it back.

Now she takes a risk.
For the first time in a long time.
She finally is willing to be called a Jew.
She is willing to be identified with the people of God.
Even though doing so risks her life.

It is hard to change.
It is hard to change your habits.
Even small things like what toothpaste you buy or what you normally eat.
But Esther is going to make a massive change.
For years she has been denying God and denying that she is one of His people.
But now she takes the step to come back.

Verse 4, **"For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated."**

She makes it abundantly clear who she is.
She and her people have been sold like property.
They have been dehumanized and treated as nothing.

They are going to be destroyed.

They will be killed.

They will be annihilated.

She referring exactly to Haman's decree.

She uses the wording.

And she acknowledges that this includes her.

She numbers and counts herself among her people.

Her people are facing execution.

They are standing in the gallows.

And instead of standing silently with the crowd thinking it was wrong.

She is willing to stand up next to them and die as one of them.

"If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have been silent, for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss of the king."

This is an interesting statement.

She says, that if her people were only made slaves, then she would not have said anything.

Slavery is not that bad.

She wouldn't have complained.

She would not have protested.

She would have remained completely silent.

And her reasoning is strange.

She says she would be silent, because their suffering is nothing compared to the king's loss.

Another way to say it, she understands the king would lose money if he lost slaves.

Or she understands the king's economy would suffer if he had lost slaves.

She would endure any kind of suffering or mistreatment her people faced.

The only reason she is speaking up now is because they and she will die.

But this is not just empty language or fancy rhetoric.

This is literally true.

Her people were destroyed and conquered by the empire.
They were sold into slavery.
Esther herself has been sold.
She was taken as a young virgin and forced to enter the king's harem.
She did not get a vote.
She did not volunteer.
She was forced into sex slavery herself.
And she endured it silently.
Her people's slavery, and her own slavery did not make her speak up.
But now she does.

Now she publicly identifies as one of God's chosen covenant people.
But it is her willingness to be counted with the people of God that will
brings deliverance.
Mordecai told her back in chapter 5 that unless she was willing to be
counted as one of God's people, they would not be saved.
It does not just bring deliverance for herself,
But next week we will see that all of her people will be saved because of
her actions.

And what does this have to do with us?
I think it is a reminder that we need to be counted among God's people.
That we need to remember our core identity is a Christian.
We have lots of other things that pull for our attention.
There are plenty of places that want to pull at our identities.
Our national identity as Americans.
The empire of the world wants us to primarily think of ourselves as citizens
of this country instead of as citizens of heaven.
We are in the middle of local elections heading towards a presidential
election.
There more than ever political parties will be pulling for your identity.
They will want your vote and party to be the core of who you are.

These things and many others tempt us to downplay who we are as Christians.

Or worse, they make us think being that thing, whatever it is, is what it means to be a true Christian.

The path to salvation is only found in Jesus.

And we can only be identified by His people if we have been adopted by Christ into His family.

If we repent of our sins.

If we turn from our old life.

If we renounce the world and turn to Jesus Christ alone.

Then and only then can we find salvation.

And this is what Esther has to do.

She has to return to her identity as one of God's people.

And her decision to do that brings salvation.

II. Being identified as God's enemy brings judgment (v. 5-10).

Verse 5, **"Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?"**

The king is filled with rage.

He cannot believe this is happening.

He wants to know who is behind this plot.

Who has been conspiring to destroy his queen and her people?

This is a good response.

This is what Esther has been hoping and praying for.

This is what the Jewish people have been fasting and praying for three days for.

They prayed and hoped the king would be moved to care for their plight.

But there is also some irony here.

The king should know.

Esther is not exactly being coy.
She has been using the language of the decree the king sent out.
The king agreed to let a people be destroyed, killed, and annihilated.
He agreed to let all of the women and children be murdered.
But apparently he has forgotten about it.
Or it did not consider it that important at all.
He did not care genocide would be committed against a people in his empire because it would make him rich.

But now he realizes what he has done.
He recognizes what someone has tricked him into agreeing to.
And he wants to know who would dare to do such a thing.

Verse 6, **"And Esther said, "A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!"**

This is the dramatic moment.
Haman's true identity is revealed.
I imagine her saying this as she points at him during dinner.

Haman was called an enemy of the Jews back in chapter 3.
We were introduced to him as one of the Amalekites, one of the ancient enemies of God's people.
And he decided to kill them all after Mordecai refused to show him some respect.
He has been a foe.
And he certainly is wicked.
But now the mask comes off.
He can no longer pretend he is just trying to protect the empire.
He is revealed as what he is, an enemy of God.

"Then Haman was terrified before king and the queen."

That is an appropriate response to have.
Moments before Haman was enjoying himself.
The night before he was bragging to all his friends and family how powerful and lucky he was.

He was so happy to be included in this elite gathering with only the king and queen.

But now he recognizes he is about to lose everything.

All of his power is slipping through his fingers.

He has been foiled, fooled, and defeated by a queen he almost certainly overlooked.

And now he is terrified of what will happen to him.

Verse 7, **"And the king arose in his wrath from the wine-drinking and went into the place garden."**

The king is so angry and filled with wrath that he has to leave.

He needs time to think about what he is going to do.

He is so made he decides to even take a break from drinking.

He needs a clear head to decide what to do.

Because here is the problem.

The king does not know what to do.

He does not know how to get out of this problem.

Now don't get confused.

The king is not upset that the Jewish people would have to face this suffering.

He is not concerned about how he can save them.

He is trying to save face.

He is thinking about his own reputation.

Because this is his law.

He allowed this to pass and it has gone forth throughout the entire empire with his name on it.

And the law cannot be overturned.

But this means his queen will die.

He has to confront and remove Haman.

But how can he do that without looking like a fool?

He does not know what to do.

He leaves to try and come up with a solution.

"But Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that harm was determined against him by the king."

Haman knows he is cooked.

If he tries to run away, he will be seen as guilty and die.

Even if he was allowed to run away.

He does not want to try to talk to the king because he can tell he can't change his mind.

His only chance to try and risk talking to Esther.

He will now go to her to beg for his life.

Things have been reversed.

Esther came to bow before the king to beg for her life.

Now Haman falls at her feet asking for mercy.

Verse 8, **"And the king returned from the palace garden to the place where they were drinking wine, as Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. And the king said, "Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?"**

Now the king returns.

We don't know if he has come up with a solution.

We don't know if he has calmed down completely.

But he comes to find Haman falling over.

Now, it seems unlikely that Haman is trying to sexually assault the queen right now.

That would be incredibly foolish for him to do at now of all moments.

It would be a death sentence for him to even enter the harem where the king's wives and concubines are.

It seems like he has tripped, or fallen down where Esther is.

Providentially, he falls at the worst possible moment for him.

You might remember his wife warned him in chapter 6.
He went in to have Mordecai hanged, but instead had to parade Mordecai through the town as the king's favorite.
His wife said that he had only begun to fall and was going to fall before the Jewish people.
Now he literally falls.
And that literal fall completes his fall from grace.
The physical fall dooms him.

The king is using this fall as an excuse.
It would have been embarrassing to try and remove Haman before.
But now he has a great excuse.
He can claim Haman was trying to assault his wife.

"As the word left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face."

This means they put a bag over his head to prepare him for execution.
You still see this plenty in our world today.
We know for certain it was a tradition in the Greek and Roman world.
It appears to be a tradition in the Persian empire as well.

Verse 9, **"Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, "Moreover, the gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, is standing at Haman's house, fifty cubits high."**

One of the eunuchs nearby speaks up.
He speaks up in order to help the king, and it seems on behalf of Esther and the Jewish people.
The king is reminded of how Mordecai saved his life, again.
Which is a good reminder because the king already forgot that fact once.

This is also the king being informed of Haman's other plan.
Haman has been plotting to kill his queen.
Haman has also been plotting to kill someone who saved the king's life.

Haman wants to kill someone the king just publicly applauded and celebrated as someone worthy of honor.
This is the absolute worst possible time for Haman's plot to be revealed.
For Haman at least.
But God has been working everything together.
God has been in control.
And Haman's plot to destroy God's people will fall apart at the perfect time.

"And the king said, "Hang him on that."

The king loves having his decisions made for him.
And he commands Haman die.

Verse 10, **"So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai."**

This is also when we discover that the gallows was made in Haman's own house.
It is on his property and in his yard.
He wanted to watch Mordecai die from the comfort of his own chair.
Now he will die there instead.
The evil he plotted against others comes back on his own head.

"Then the wrath of the king abated."

Now the king is no longer angry.
The problem of his embarrassment and wrath has been dealt with.
His wrath fades as justice has been done.

There is a foreshadowing quality to this though.
It is hard to read this and not think of the wrath of another king.
The wrath of God which exists and is towards those who would harm and destroy His people.

Where Ahasuerus is only concerned for himself, God was concerned for us.
God was not concerned about an abstract need for justice.

He is not concerned about His own reputation.
Ahasuerus was looking for excuses and technicalities to deal with his wrath.
Jesus looked for how to satisfy justice and deliver sinners to salvation.
Ahasuerus' wrath abated when the wicked died.
The wrath of God abated when Jesus died for the wicked.

Haman faces justice and death because he is an enemy of God's people.
And it can be easy for us to clap and cheer.
Even someone who is not religious can be excited here.
Because we can all agree that trying to commit genocide is wicked.
That is something even the most ardent atheist can agree on.

But the reality is if you are not a part of God's people,
If you have not given your life to Jesus.
If you do not believe Christ is the only path to salvation.
Than you are an enemy of God.
Because of your sin and your rebellion.
You might not like it.
It may feel way less wicked than the sins of people like Haman.
And it certainly may be less wicked or bad.
But apart from the grace of Christ, all of us are sinners.
We are all guilty.
We are all enemies of God.
Whether we want to identify ourselves that way or not.
Being God's enemy will bring justice and judgment.
But it does not have to.

III. [Jesus] Jesus identifies with His enemies.

One of the great reversals of the gospel is not that the wicked have their sin turned against them.
It is that the righteous Christ dies for the unrighteous.
Jesus did not come down to destroy and hand out justice.

He came to endure justice on our own behalf.
Jesus cares for and loves even bad guys, sinners, and his enemies.

There is a trend in certain circles to really hammer home how sinful and wicked we are apart from Jesus.
To really beat down the depth of our sin and brokenness.
And I get that impulse.
Because the truth is, everyone who has not embraced Jesus as their savior is an enemy of God.
But the point of telling us we are enemies, is to make us see how much God loves us.
That no matter how deep our sin.
No matter how wicked we are.
No matter how far gone, even though we are so often worse than we realize.
Jesus loves us.
Jesus did not come to destroy His enemies, but to die for them.

Our affliction is nothing compared to the loss of the king.
This is what Esther said the king of Persia.
This is not true for earthly kings.
Their own suffering is more important than the suffering of their people.
They typically care about themselves more than anyone else.

I enjoy studying the United States Presidents.
And I am always amazed how much through history they will refuse to do certain things because of what it might cost them personally.
JFK is a great example.
He was an advocate for civil rights.
He saw and knew segregation, Jim crow laws, and the way our country treated black people and minorities was wrong.
And he believed the government needed to step in and put a stop to it.
He even believed it was his moral responsibility to do so.
But he knew it would be unpopular.

And he had only barely won his first election.
reelection was coming up.

And he did not want to risk his reelection by trying to pass this kind of
legislation.

The affliction of the American people was nothing compared to his own
loss.

And it is easy to pile on him for that decision.

And we should because it was morally wrong.

Almost all of our presidents have done something similar.

They refused to do something they knew was right because it might cost
them.

Every earthly ruler has been that way.

But not Christ.

Not Jesus.

Our Savior was willing to suffer loss.

In fact, He did not consider His own suffering.

Our call to worship this morning was from Romans 5.

It is all about how Jesus died for his enemies.

"While we were still weak, Jesus died for the ungodly."

He was willing to come down to Earth.

He was willing to subject Himself to horrible suffering.

He was willing to suffer humiliation, shame, rejection, and crucifixion.

All for us.

That through His suffering, we might find deliverance and salvation.

That we might find an end to our own suffering.

And He did not just do this for His children.

Any parent would be willing to suffer greatly for their children.

All of us would be willing to suffer and risk hard for those we love.

But Jesus did so for those who hated Him.

Jesus did so for those who cursed Him.

Jesus did so for those who killed Him.

He forgave them and He died for them.

"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

"while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son."

This is the greatness of Jesus.

He dies and suffers not just for those who love Him, but for those who hate Him.

Even the greatest enemies of God can be reconciled and brought back home.

Jesus identifies with his enemies.

Not just by feeling empathy for our suffering and plight.

He became one of us.

He took all of our sin upon Himself.

He bore it on the cross and died in our place.

He did so that we could be reconciled to God and find salvation and new life.

No longer would we be enemies, but children of God.

And this salvation is available to anyone who believes in Christ.

CONCLUSION:

1. Identifying with the people of God brings salvation. Being identified as an enemy of God brings judgment. But it does not have to because Jesus identifies with his enemies.
2. Everyone everywhere will fight over your identity. They will try to tell you who you are and who you are not. But ultimately it does not matter who they tell you you are. It does not matter who you believe you are. It matters who God says you are. You are made in the image of God. You are loved by Jesus. And He wants you to be a part of His family. Embrace who God made you to be. Come and be with Jesus.