

LIGHTS OUT IN THE KINGDOM

Esther 4.3: Because of Haman's Decree, the Jew's “testimony” fails!

Theme: Look at your testimony to those around you and use that to evaluate whether or not you are walking after the flesh or the Spirit.

Haman's decree made an immediate impact on Mordecai:

- Last message we took a look at Esther 4.1-2 and saw that Mordecai's response to Haman's “law of sin and death” was immediate and visible.
- Mordecai *grieved* over the decision Ahasuerus made that resulted in the decree Haman made!
- And the Spirit of God (pictured in Mordecai) also grieves when we make decisions to follow our old man, decisions to give the flesh what he wants.

Today we want to take a look at Esther 4.3 and the impact this decision has on the rest of the kingdom.

- How do the Jews in the kingdom of Ahasuerus react? And what can that teach us about decisions we make to allow the flesh to run our “kingdoms” (our lives)?
- **Remember:** (Mat 5.16) The Jews in the kingdom are a picture and type of the different “points of light” in our lives where people can see the “light” of the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- What impact do our carnal decision have on the “light” of the gospel in our lives? Or do they at all...?

I. (v3a) The Scope of the Decision in the Kingdom

A. The decree affects every Jew in “*every province*” whithersoever the command went.

1. (Est 3.13) And the commandment went by postal delivery into “*all* the king's provinces.”
2. Because of one, small decision by the king (a decision that took him less than a minute to make), every province of his entire kingdom has been affected.

B. As we've seen before, even the smallest decision to follow the flesh will have far-reaching results in every area of our lives.

1. You may think you've made a small decision... You may think that decision was made in your own little private world...
2. But, that decision will affect your family, your friends, your co-workers... every area of your life sooner or later, one way or another. And that's what we need to talk about next...

II. (v3b) The Effects of the Decision in the Kingdom

A. **Two Quick Rabbit Trails:** Fasting and Prayer

1. Before we get into some specifics about how our decisions to follow the flesh will affect our lives, I'd like to take advantage of one thing this verse *says* and one thing it does *not say*...
2. **First:** *Prayer* is never mentioned in this verse.
 - a) Isn't it interesting that *God's* people would not run to *God* in a trying time such as this? Why didn't they pray?!
 - They mourned, they fasted, they wept, they wailed, they put on sackcloth, and they lay down in ashes. All of that... but no prayer is ever mentioned. Why do you think that is?
 - b) Remember the time frame (the history): The story recorded in the Book of Esther took place *after* God's call to the Jews to return to the Land and rebuild the Temple.
 - (1) The Jews in Ahasuerus's kingdom are the Jews who decided to *stay* in his kingdom—they are the Jews who decided to *not* place themselves in the will of God.

- (2) These were the Jews who decided to stay in relative comfort, in their lives in the world, rather than submit to God's will and suffer a little bit for the Mission He gave them.
- (3) Of course they're not going to pray! They are outside the will of God!
- c) Do you feel like drawing close to God and praying for His help when you are in disobedience to His Word?
 - (1) Of course you don't! It's very difficult to draw nigh to the Lord when you want nothing to do with His will and plan for you life.
 - (2) Prayer would have to be preceded by repentance (turning from self to the Lord), a turning from “my will” to the Lord's will. And that might mean... sacrifice and discomfort.
- d) How's your prayer life?
 - (1) Use the answer to that question as a measuring stick of your submission to the will of God.
 - (2) If you're walking close to the Lord, submitted to His will, your prayer life will be something that's “first on the list” (unlike the list we see in Esther 4.3).
 - (3) But, if your prayer life is non-existent (very much like the list we see in Esther 4.3), then maybe you ought to take a step back and evaluate why that is.
 - Could it be that you, like the Jews in Ahasuerus's kingdom, have decided against sacrifice and discomfort in the Mission, opting rather to “stay in the world” rather than suffer because of God's will?
- e) This absence of prayer in Esther 4.3 should lead us to another question (another rabbit trail) about what we do see in this verse: **Fasting**.

3. Second: **Fasting** is mentioned in the verse. Where did that come from?!

- a) When we refuse to live in the will of God, we won't walk according to the ways of God (like prayer: we won't do it!). And that will also lead us to do things that are spiritual and religious, but not... biblical. Like fasting...
- b) What is fasting?
 - (1) (Mat 15.32) Fasting refers to not eating.
 - (2) (Zech 7.5-6) Fasting can also include not drinking.
- c) Why do people fast? What's their purpose in fasting (in not eating and/or not drinking)?
 - (1) Plain and simple: People fast to “get something from God.”
 - (a) Sometimes in the Bible we see people fasting as an expression of grief and sorrow, much like we see in Esther 4.3. There is grief over the decreed genocide of the Jews.
 - (b) But, in Esther 4.3 we also know the Jews desire deliverance (cf. Est 4.14). They need God to do something for them. The need Him to deliver them. And so they fast...
 - (2) (Ezra 8.21-23) Ezra shows us the heart and purpose behind fasting.
 - (a) (v21) Fasting is a form of penance—it is afflicting oneself (imposing voluntary suffering on your body, making yourself feel bad).
 - (b) (v22) And regardless of how noble the intention behind it...
 - (c) (v23) Fasting is a way to afflict yourself (to make yourself feel bad) in an effort to get something from God in return.
 - (d) Fasting is a way to “impress” God or “twist His arm” to get Him to do what you want.
- (3) Why do Christians fast today?
 - Same reason, same purpose: “We are fasting and praying because we want to see the Lord [*insert whatever it is you want God to do for you*].”

- d) Where did fasting come from?
- (1) Most people *run* to the New Testament to point that *Jesus fasted! Paul fasted! the Apostles fasted! the early church fasted!* But...
 - (2) They seem to never go back to the beginning: How did fasting start? Where did it come from? Did *God* tell men to fast?
 - (3) First Mention: (Jdg 20.26) The first mention of fasting in the Bible is Judges 20.26.
 - (a) (Jdg 21.25) That ought to send up red flags immediately if you know anything about the Book of Judges!
 - (b) Let's set the context:
 - i) (Jdg 20.21) Israel is at war with the tribe of Benjamin, and Benjamin has just “whooped ‘em up” good: They killed 22,000 men!
 - ii) (Jdg 20.25) They “cast their vision” anew and stepped forth again to do battle! And... this time they lose 18,000 men!
 - iii) Things are bad. What do we do...?
 - (c) (Jdg 20.26) They wept (like the Jews in Ahasuerus's kingdom) and they *fasted* (like the Jews in Ahasuerus's kingdom). This is the *first mention* of fasting in the Bible.
 - (4) Why did they fast? The answer is simple: To get something from God!
- e) Where did Israel learn to fast? Was it from God?
- (1) No! It was *not* from God! God *never* told the Jews (in all the Law of Moses) to fast.
 - (2) First: (Jdg 21.25) They chose to fast because it seemed like a good idea *to them*.
 - (3) Second: It appears they got the idea from the Gentile nations around them.
 - (a) In times of apostasy, God's people step away from the Word of God and adopt the practices of the ungodly nations around them (just look at the modern church).
 - (b) God did not tell the Jews to fast, so either they invented it themselves or they adopted the practice from the Gentile nations around them.
 - (c) Either way, one thing is clear: Fasting did not come from God!
- f) (Isa 58.1-12) Some 1300 years later (1300 years after Judges), God finally gives the Jews instructions on the way He wanted them to practice fasting.
- It's as if God let them “sleep in the bed they made” for 1300 years, and when He saw that they refused to give up their pagan practice of fasting, He stepped in and corrected them.
- g) What does all this mean for us?
- (1) Go back to the *definition* of fasting: It is an effort to afflict yourself (to inflict physical discomfort on your body).
 - (2) Go back to the *purpose* of fasting: You fast to make yourself suffer so that God will give you what you want.
 - (3) Now *ask* yourself: Can I get more from God if I make myself suffer in the flesh?
 - (a) Can you add *anything* to the suffering that Christ has already endured for you?
 - (b) (Eph 1.3) Because of Christ's suffering, you have been given *all* spiritual blessings. What can you add to that by going hungry?
 - (c) (Col 2.9-10) Can you add *anything* to yourself or to your life by going hungry that you did not receive by grace at the moment of salvation?

- (4) If we have a need in our lives, what should we do if not “fast and pray”?
- (a) (Jam 4.2) First problem: You have not because you ask not. So... *ask*! Just ask!
- (b) (Jam 4.3 cf. 1Jn 5.14-15) Second problem: You have not because you're not asking for the right things. So... *ask biblically*!

h) Biblical Conclusion:

- (1) There is no prohibition against fasting in Scripture. If you want to go hungry, by all means please do! You have all the liberty in Christ to abstain from food! Have at it!
- (2) However, there is no promise in Scripture to those who fast.
- (a) God does not want you to fast:
- His Son already suffered on your behalf, and for you to place your pathetic “suffering” on the table in an effort to get what you want is an insult.
- (b) God never gave you instructions on fasting.
- i) You won't find any instructions in the New Testament about how or when to fast.
 - ii) You'd think if God wanted you to do something, He'd tell you to do it, then give you a little insight on how to do it and when.
- (3) So, if you want to fast, fast! But, don't think you'll “get something” from God for your suffering. Don't think you'll be able to “impress” the Lord or “twist His arm” and get Him to do something He wouldn't otherwise do. Christ's suffering was more than sufficient!
- (4) And this would lead us back to Esther 4.3: The Jews in Ahasuerus's kingdom are in apostasy!
- (a) They have refused to obey God's Word and return to the land and continue the mission.
- (b) And so whenever God's people turn *from* God's Word, they naturally turn *to* their own devices:
- i) They can't turn *to* God in prayer because they've turned *away from* him in apostasy. So we don't see prayer mentioned in Esther 4.3.
 - ii) And because they've turned from Him in apostasy, they begin to invent ways (pagan practices!) to get God to do for them what they want. E.g.: Fasting.
- (c) And what is the result of all this... Ahasuerus's decision, Haman's decree, and the Jews' reaction in their apostasy...?

B. One Ruined Testimony: Who wants to be a Jew in Ahasuerus's kingdom now?

1. God called the Jews to be a light to the nations and draw men to Himself. Well, who wants to be a Jew now? No one!
 - a) When Ahasuerus put Haman in charge, *no one* wanted to be a Jew because to do so meant death.
 - b) And with Haman in charge, to be a Jew meant only weeping, wailing, fasting, and wallowing around in ashes while you were dressed in sackcloth! Great! Hey, sign me up! ...not!
2. Our testimony to those around us goes beyond the words to speak to them.
 - a) Don't misunderstand me: The power to save is found in the seed, not in the sower.
 - (1) (John 12.32) The power to save is found in Christ's promise to draw all men to Himself after He was raised up.
 - (2) (John 16.7-11) The power to draw men to Christ is found in the work of the Holy Spirit who convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come.

- (3) (Rom 1.16; 10.13-17) The power of God unto salvation is found in the gospel and it is manifested for the salvation of those who hear it through the preaching of the gospel.
- (4) The power to save is found in the seed (the Word preached), not in the sower...
- b) However, the sower can certainly be a stumbling block for the gospel being sown!
 - (1) (Php 1.27) Your conversation (your lifestyle, how you live) should “become” (beautify) the gospel.
 - (2) (Php 2.15-16) As we hold for the word of life (as we preach the gospel), we should pay attention to how we live (blameless, harmless, without rebuke) so that our testimony is not a hindrance to the gospel.
 - (3) (Titus 2.10) Our lives (lifestyles, actions, works) should *adorn* the gospel!
 - (4) (Titus 2.7-8) We should always, in all things, show a pattern of good works so that we don't give unbelievers any excuse to reject the gospel.
 - (5) (1Pet 3.1) Don't think your “conversation” (lifestyle, how you live) has nothing to do with the salvation of the lost! It does!
 - (a) A woman who nags a man continually about getting saved can, at times, only push him farther and farther away from the Lord.
 - (b) And a Christian with a poor testimony (a Christian who shows the lost how utterly *rotten and miserable* it is to be a Christian) is a stumbling block to those he's called to reach.
 - i) (1Pet 2.11) When we let Haman run the kingdom...
 - ii) (1Pet 2.12) ...we not be a light to the Gentiles as God desires.
- 3. If we chose to live in sin (if we chose to follow the flesh, feed the flesh, allow the flesh to make or influence decisions in our lives), the lights will go out in the kingdom!
 - a) All that people will see in us is Haman's decree of death: Being like us means death, destruction, and misery. So why in the world would anyone want to be like us?
 - b) All that people will see in us is the pain and misery that Haman's “law of sin and death” has caused: weeping, wailing, sackcloth, and ashes.
 - c) “*If being a Christian means living like that... no thanks!*” And the lights go out in the kingdom!

Esther 4.3: Because of Haman's Decree, the Jew's “testimony” fails! Lights go out in the kingdom!

- So, knowing that your lifestyle (how you live) will affect the progress of the gospel, let's do this...
- Let's look at our testimony to those around us and use that to evaluate whether or not we are walking after the flesh or the Spirit.
 - ✓ Is our life such that people are attracted to Christ? Do we adorn the gospel with our lives? Is our life “becoming” of the gospel?
 - ✓ Or is our life like that of the Jews in Esther 4.3: Miserable, awful, wretched, and ugly? If it is like this, then God calls us to repentance!

(2Cor 7.9-11) If we see in our lives a need for a better testimony to be light to the lost, then let's be zealous for the Lord and repent! Let's change our attitudes and then let that change of heart change our actions (how we live)!

- I'm tired of the status quo. I'm tired of “maintenance” rather than “mission.” I'm tired of wasting time.
- I want a vehement desire and a zeal for God and the mission He gave me. And that means I gotta stop following Haman and put Mordecai in charge.
- And that means I have to make some decisions about my life (time)... because something needs to change.