

Uncovered And Undone

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I'd like us to turn together back to Esther, and we're continuing our study in this book. We have been doing our study of Esther in the mornings, and I had planned to do seven sermons in Esther, but I ended up wanting to do one more, so it's going to be eight, and so I wanted to, in order to get the timings to work out with other things in the calendar, I had to put one of my morning sermons into the evening. So tonight we're doing part six of Esther, and then we'll have the final two sections next week and the week after in the morning.

We've come to chapter seven, and let me read these words again from verses three and four. Then Queen Esther answered, If I found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleased the king, let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request, for we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we'd been sold merely slaves, men and women, I would have been silent, for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king. Our series in Esther is called The Good, The Bad, The Ugly, and The Beautiful, and we've given it that title because when you look at the book of Esther, you actually find it's actually a much more complicated and actually a much messier book than we maybe first imagine.

There's lots that's good, lots that's bad, lots that's ugly, but lots that's beautiful. And the point we keep coming back to is the fact that our lives are actually exactly the same, and so this book has got so much to teach us and so much to help us. The chapter that we've reached tonight is maybe the ugliest of all, and in it we see Haman's horrific plan to destroy the Jews gets exposed, and by the end of the chapter, Haman is impaled on a pole that he had set up for the execution of Mordecai, and it's all very graphic and all really quite shocking. But at the same time, these are the events that lead to the deliverance of Esther and Mordecai and the Jews. So in amongst all that's ugly, I hope we're going to see that we're also discovering something very beautiful.

Our title tonight is Uncovered and Undone, and we're going to look just at two headings as we unpack these. The plot is uncovered and the enemy is undone. So just to recap, as we think about the plot, it's good to just to remind ourselves what's going on. Everything in the book is coming to a head in a fateful two-day period in the lives of Esther, Mordecai, Haman, and King Ahasuerus. In chapter 5, Esther had taken her life into her hands to approach the king, to ask him if he might help her and the Jews because of the situation that they were facing.

She didn't know how the king would react. She may even have been killed for approaching him uninvited. But the king welcomes her and agrees to accept her invitation to come to a banquet along with Haman. At that feast, the king says, well, what is your request? And she delays telling them and she says, well, please come to another feast tomorrow with Haman, and then I'll tell you what my request will be. So Haman goes home that night, delighted that everything is going so well, but disgusted because Mordecai still refuses to bow down to him as he passes by. So Haman decides, once and for all, I'm going to kill Mordecai. He gets a gallows set up in his home for him to be hung on the next day. And his plan is to go to the king in the morning and to request his execution.

[3 : 43] That night, the king couldn't sleep. And so he asks for the historical records to be read. He discovers that Mordecai had foiled an assassination plot, but had not been rewarded. That morning, Haman arrives to seek permission for Mordecai's execution. The king asks Haman, what should be done to the man whom the king likes to honor? Haman thinks he must be talking about me and talks about all the things that he wants to be done to him. And the king says, excellent, go and do all of that to Mordecai. And Haman is humiliated and he goes home dejected, as we read at the end of chapter 6.

At that moment, the king's eunuchs arrive to take Haman to the feast that Esther had prepared. He and the king, Haman and the king, arrive at the feast. And now, at last, the king can ask Esther, what is your request, even up to the half of my kingdom? And it shall be fulfilled. Everything is about to be uncovered.

And so, Esther has to uncover her identity. And so, for the first time, she is publicly revealing that although she has blended into palace life perfectly since the day that she came forward in the big beauty contest to find the replacement for Queen Vashti, she's blended in perfectly. For the first time, the truth is coming out that she belongs to a different people. And she uncovers the danger that they're in. She and my people have been sold to be destroyed and to be killed and to be annihilated. And these words here, destroyed, killed, annihilated, they're actually just quoting from the words of the edict that had been issued earlier. So, you've got destroyed, killed, annihilated there.

Back in chapter 3, you have the same language in the edict, the instruction to destroy, kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day. The language is brutal. The danger is severe.

And most significantly of all, the king says to Esther, who is it who would do this? And Esther uncovers the fact that the man behind it all is Haman. I just circled the wrong Haman, but anyway, it's the same guy. This wicked Haman is exposed. And so, Esther's identity is uncovered.

[6 : 21] Haman's wickedness is uncovered. Haman's wickedness is uncovered. And everything is now out in the open. Everything's getting uncovered. There's two really important things that arise from this that I want to just unpack a wee bit together under this first heading. The first is to notice that that for Mordecai and the Jews, they are only going to benefit if Esther uncovers who she really is.

Prior to this chapter, she's quite possibly the one Jew in the whole empire who is safest, because she's blended right into the palace. She probably did that by disobeying many of the laws that God had given to the Jews. Most commentators are pretty certain that it would have been impossible for her to have blended in so well had she not compromised hugely in terms of the dietary laws and even marrying a foreign king would be to contravene God's law as well. She's blended right in. She's compromised. But because of that, she was probably the Jew who was the safest.

Because even if somebody had said to her, oh, she's one of them, I'm pretty sure that if she denied it and said to the king, this man's lying about me, kill him, I would imagine that the king would have listened to her. So it's quite probable that she wasn't at a huge risk herself, but her people are.

And in order to help them, she needs to make herself vulnerable. In other words, for the Jews to move from a position of danger to safety, Esther has to move from a position of safety to danger.

And this raises a really important point about our discipleship and one that we maybe don't get to talk about enough because it's actually crucial. Because at one level, one of the key truths of the gospel and one of the big focal points of the gospel is the fact that all of us need to have an individual personal relationship with Jesus. We all need to each individually put our faith in Jesus. We need to trust him. We need a personal relationship with our heavenly father. We all need to respond to the call that God has issued to us to follow Jesus. But there's a danger that because so much of that's focused on each individual. There's a danger that that individual emphasis then dominates all of our discipleship. And the result is that we can move on in our lives as Christians and the dominant thought in our minds is ourselves and our own welfare. And the danger is that we can very easily give little attention and little consideration to others. And the big problem with that is that it means that we we might find ourselves in situations where we face decisions that might not have a big impact on us, but they can have a huge impact on other people. And sometimes we might face situations like Esther faced, where it's only by making ourselves vulnerable and uncomfortable.

[9 : 37] uncomfortable for you, but which are actually wonderful for others in the life of the church and as we follow Jesus together. Here's three examples, and they're probably very obvious, but they're so worth thinking about. Number one, coming to church.

You might never have thought about this, but you coming to church is a massive encouragement to a lot of people. Seeing people come is such a blessing and an encouragement to so many.

And it's so easy to miss that, to think, well, if I go or don't go, what difference does it make? No one really notices. I'll just stay at home. It doesn't really matter. Actually, the truth is, you being here tonight brings joy. It brings so much joy. And the effort that you make to be here is so appreciated. And if you didn't push past the temptation to just stay at home, then that joy would never come to the rest of us. And there's such a collective benefit from the individual decision that you make to come to church. So often, people can approach church with the mindset, well, you know, what am I going to get out of it? And, you know, we always hope that somebody will get a lot out of coming to church, but if that's just our focal point, then often it can lead to quite a negative mindset where we think, well, I didn't get much out of that. And instead of thinking, well, what am I going to get out of church? It's so good to think, well, what am I bringing to church? Because even you being here is such a blessing and encouragement to others. Related to that, the second example, that's the example of serving in church. And that can be in any way, whether that's helping on door duty to welcome people in, or whether it's supporting a ministry like our finders, our youth group, whether it's inviting somebody to your house, welcoming them for a meal, whatever it might be, these might feel uncomfortable to you. They're a huge blessing to others. And sometimes we can make the mistake of living out our discipleship as though Jesus had said that the two most important commands are to love God and to love ourselves. And we can think like that, yes, I'm committed to Jesus, I know I need him, I love him, and I want to serve him, but I also want to just stay within the boundaries of what I like and what I'm comfortable with. But the pattern of discipleship is not to love God and love ourselves, it's to love God and to love one another, and to always be thinking about how we can benefit and help and serve one another. And sometimes the greatest joys and greatest triumphs that we're going to experience will come when we step forward into what feels uncomfortable, but we're doing that for the benefit of others, even when it would feel so much easier to stay back. And this leads to the third example, which is maybe all of this applies so much to professing your faith in Jesus. There are many secret believers on the Isle of Lewis, and some of them live in Carloway. And if that's you, or if it's you at home watching online, at one level, I'm pretty sure you will know, you'll think, well, I know that I'm trusting in Jesus, and I know that that means that I'm safe, and I'm secure, and nothing can snatch me out of his hand.

And you'll also know, I'm sure, that actually being, you know, on the membership list of a particular congregation, or actually sitting at the Lord's table, or even simply telling other people that you're a Christian is not strictly, completely, totally necessary for you to be saved. And you may well think, well, and actually taking the step of publicly professing my faith, taking that step of uncovering who I really am, is going to feel so uncomfortable, and it makes me feel so vulnerable, and I don't feel like I can do it.

What I want you to think about, if that's you, is that at one level, I want to say, I understand everything that you're feeling. I want to say that I understand everything that you're feeling, but what I want you to think about is that, I don't know, I'm worried saying this, because it's going to sound like I'm guilting people, and I don't ever want to guilt people, and so please don't take it in that way. But what I'm trying to say is this, by doing that, by staying secret, by keeping it covered, you are preventing so many people from rejoicing.

[14 : 38] Because when somebody publicly says, I love Jesus, and he's changed my life, oh my goodness, it's so good to hear that. It's such an encouragement, and such a joy, and such a blessing to so many people. And, you know, if you're a believer, your faith has already made heaven rejoice.

And to just take that step and publicly say that you're a follower of Jesus, that allows the rest of us to rejoice as well. And you might think, I'm not ready, you might think I don't know enough, you might think I'm stumbling along.

Honestly, we are all stumbling along, and none of us feel ready, and none of us feel like we know enough. But, you know, even if you feel like the most unqualified, least good, most unsuitable Christian that has ever lived, if you stand and say, that's who I am, the rest of us will rejoice.

There's so much joy in seeing people come to faith and follow Jesus. The Jews were able to rejoice because Esther uncovered who she really was.

And I hope that you're going to do the same. So there's that big lesson that so much benefit came from Esther actually taking that step and uncovering who she really was. The second big lesson is, I guess, more of a theological lesson under this whole heading of being uncovered. And that's really this, it's the fact that in the gospel, ultimately, nothing is hidden. In the gospel, ultimately, nothing is hidden.

[16 : 29] And that's one of the big points that we keep coming back to in Esther, the fact that this book, this whole book, where everything becomes untangled and everything becomes clear and revealed, is a picture of actually what's going to happen in the whole of history.

That everything will be uncovered, every secret will be revealed, every question will be answered. It's something Jesus spoke about in various different places. Here's an example in Matthew 10.

He speaks about, this is in the context, I think, of the Pharisees' kind of hypocrisy, sort of on the outside one thing, on the inside another. Jesus said, Now, that's where Jesus' perspective is different from ours, because there's so much in our lives, that is hidden, in terms of our individual lives, and there's so much in other people's lives, that we don't know. So many times, we see situations around us, but we don't know the full story.

So, we get frustrated with decisions that our government makes, but we don't know the full story, as to why those decisions were made. We see criminal cases, and we're wondering, are they guilty? Are they not guilty? Who's right? Who's wrong? And we don't actually know the full story.

We see marriages break up in our community, and we'll maybe pick a side, but we don't know the full story. We see children misbehaving, but we don't know the full story of what lies behind that.

[18 : 11] We see people spiral into addiction. We don't know the full story as to what's led them down that path. We see people who, you know, we think, well, they're not very nice. They seem cruel, or harsh, or maybe arrogant, but we don't know the whole story of what's going in their lives. We see somebody in their distant, or offish.

We don't know the whole story. We're so quick to judge, and yet, rarely, if ever, is our judgment fully informed.

We never know the full story. With God, nothing is hidden. And when Jesus returns, nothing will remain concealed.

And that's why he and he alone is the perfect judge. But the absolutely amazing thing about Jesus is that he doesn't just know the whole story. He rewrites the whole story.

Because Jesus knows the whole story of my sin, and of yours. I can't hide anything before Jesus, and I can put on a good impression to a lot of people, but there's so much in here that I want to keep hidden.

[19 : 24] But he knows the whole story about it, but he rewrites that story. And he transforms the outcome. Because where sin abounds, grace abounds so much more.

And the whole point of the gospel is that Jesus has come to change all of our stories, and to heal us from our sin, to give us hope, and healing, and salvation.

That's what makes the gospel so amazingly powerful and beautiful. Because as you come to Jesus, you are totally uncovered.

And you are totally safe. So nothing's hidden from him. Nothing surprises him.

And that means that something can't creep out of the closet of your heart to wreck your relationship with him. Everything is totally uncovered, and yet you are totally safe.

[20 : 37] Totally his. eternally secure. Because that's what he's come to do for all of us. To save us. And so that uncovering, at one way, at one level, it can leave us feeling very unsettled, but it actually points us to the amazing, amazing security that the gospel gives us.

Our second heading is that the enemy is undone. As we said this morning, the whole narrative of Esther hinges on an astonishing reversal that we're right in the middle of in chapters 6 and 7.

Haman has plotted so viciously against the Jews, and everything was looking great for him. And then everything reverses. He gets humiliated. He gets exposed.

And then at the end of this chapter 7, he gets executed. All along, he has been the enemy. And now, the enemy is undone. And one of the fascinating emphases of the narrative is that the force of Haman's aggression is no match for the subtlety of God's timing.

And although God's not mentioned in the book of Esther, the manner in which so many details are just woven together are such a clear indication that God is in control, God's providence is lying behind all that's happening.

[22 : 00] So, you've got Mordecai going home one night and he's going home to dream about executing Mordecai. The very same night, the king can't sleep. And he finds out that actually Mordecai is the one who saved him.

Mordecai was able to save him because he was in the right place at the right time. So, he was the one who was at the door. And so, you see that when you see the narrative the narrative of how Mordecai had been sitting at the king's gate and he overheard the plot from Big Thana and Teresh.

And so, Mordecai was in the right place at the right time at the king's gate. And yet, that's the very location that Haman hated seeing Mordecai because the fact that Mordecai was at the king's gate and wouldn't bow down to him infuriated Haman and fueled his hatred.

So, the very place that prompted Haman's hatred is the very place that secured Mordecai's deliverance. And then, we read about how Haman built the gallows for Mordecai and yet, he ends up getting hung on it himself.

And then, when Esther exposes Mordecai, the king goes outside and we think that's probably because the king had to figure out what to do because Esther has exposed this murderous plot and yet, it was the king who'd signed the edict to do it.

[23 : 23] And so, the commentators think that he's outside thinking, what do I do here? How do I sort this out? And just when he comes in, it's the moment when Haman is falling on Esther to beg of his life and in that moment, the king says, are you assaulting my wife?

And it kind of gives him the excuse he needs to execute Haman without making himself look bad. and you have this kind of irony. One commentator spoke about how Esther who had planned, who had made this plan that would culminate in Esther's life being taken is now begging her for his own life and the man who wanted to kill all the Jews because one Jew wouldn't bow down to him, he is now bowing down before Esther falling on her and in fact, he's actually going to get killed for falling on her, falling before a Jew inappropriately.

And so the whole thing is woven together and you see that what was said at the end of 6.13, Haman's wife said, if Mordecai before whom you've begun to fall is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but you will surely fall before him.

And of course the whole problem in Haman's head was that Mordecai wouldn't fall before him. And so you see so much has been woven together to show that the force of Haman's aggression is no much for God's purposes.

I want to highlight three things very quickly before we finish. Number one, this whole chapter, chapter 7 and what we see happening to Haman, it's telling us that the destructive power of sin will culminate in self-destruction.

[25 : 11] The destructive power of sin will culminate in self-destruction. So Haman had this ruthless obsession with destroying Mordecai and the Jews.

He ended up destroying himself. And that's the pattern that you see again and again in history and again and again in history, in Scripture and in history. You see the destructive power of sin in an individual's heart actually culminates in their own destruction.

You see that at the level of Haman when you see leaders from history like Hitler or Ceausescu or others who lived lives that were so destructive for others but actually culminated in their own destruction.

But what's probably more important for us to think about is the fact that the same patterns can manifest itself in a hundred little ways in our hearts. So if you or I, if we're jealous of friends or colleagues then that jealousy is actually going to destroy our self-esteem.

And if we are out of control in terms of what we put into our bodies that's going to destroy our health. And if we are aggressive and arrogant then that's going to destroy the relationships that we have with family and friends.

[26 : 20] And as Christians if we're critical and judgmental of other Christians then that's going to destroy our fellowship with them that Christ died in order to establish. And it's reminding us that sin never ever ever wants to do you any favours.

Sin only wants your destruction. Often in life people will hurt us and so often our temptation is just to respond and to get them back.

But we've got to remember that sin, I don't know if this is a helpful illustration but sin is never a sniper rifle. So you think of a sniper rifle where you can sneak, I don't know if any of you watch your children play Fortnite, you get a sniper rifle and you can shoot from miles away and you can zoom in and shoot somebody.

So I can pick up my sniper rifle and I can shoot Tixie in the tech booth. And not that I would want to shoot Tixie. But sin is not like that. It's not like that you can just fire it from a distance, get somebody and it does no harm to you as you wander off.

Sin is like dropping a grenade in a locked room. And so it might hurt the other person in the room but it's going to hurt you as well. Sin is always so destructive and so damaging and that's why it's so, so important for us.

[27 : 35] When things go wrong, when we're hurt, when we feel that urge to take revenge, we remember, Lord Jesus, you are judge. I'm leaving it with you. I'm turning to take a different path.

I'm going to follow you and fix my eyes on you. So the destructive power of sin will culminate in self-destruction. Number two, this chapter is also teaching us that the saving promises of God will always culminate in fulfillment.

The saving promises of God will always culminate in fulfillment. That's one of the big messages of Esther, that God has not abandoned his covenant promises to his people. It's important for us to always remember that Esther is set in the exile, it's near the end of the Old Testament chronologically, it's at the lowest point of Old Testament history in terms of how the people are getting on.

They've completely stuffed up, they've lost their nation, their temple's destroyed, everything's a mess and yet even in the midst of that lowest point, God is reminding his people that he has not abandoned his covenant promises.

And Esther, like every other book in the Old Testament, is a shadow pointing us towards the full reality that's going to come in the New Testament, that when Jesus comes and in and through everything that Jesus does, the promises of God's salvation are going to be fulfilled.

[28 : 54] Because every promise of salvation that God makes culminates in fulfillment. fulfillment. And Esther is an amazing example of what Jesus said to Peter, that he's going to build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

And it's an amazing reminder that the opposition that the gospel faces today will never prevail. And when we hear about persecuted Christians throughout the world, we know that that opposition is not going to prevail.

And it's a reminder for you if you're a Christian or for you if you become a Christian, that God's promise to save you will always, always culminate in total, perfect, magnificent fulfillment.

fulfillment. And the day will come when Jesus will welcome you into his new creation and he'll say everything's fulfilled.

And you are here with me forever. God's promises always culminate in fulfillment. fulfillment. The last thing I want to say very, very quickly is that this chapter is teaching us that when you choose an enemy, it will have an incredibly powerful influence over you.

[30 : 27] So when you choose an enemy, it'll have a very powerful influence over you. Haman chose Mordecai and the Jews as his enemy and it consumed all his energy. It meant that he couldn't even enjoy what seemed like the most triumphant moment of his life when everything was looking good for him yet he couldn't enjoy it because he's still seeing Mordecai and couldn't stand him.

And so the fact that he had chosen Mordecai and the Jews as an enemy had a massive influence over him. The same for Esther. She realized that Haman was an enemy so she had to take the biggest risks of her life.

She had to go before the king. She had to uncover her identity. She had to take action. She took a massive risk. She was pressed into doing things that otherwise she wouldn't have wanted to do because the influence of an enemy is so powerful.

It shapes your thinking. It forces your actions. It pushes you where otherwise you wouldn't have gone. And we see that in places of conflict throughout the world. Both aggressor and defender they're having to go into places they don't want to go all because of an enemy.

And that's such an important thing to think about. And the question you have to ask, well there's two questions we have to ask. One is, what's your enemy? Because whatever it is will control what you do.

[31 : 42] So if your enemy is rejection, then you'll do anything to fit in. And if your enemy is failure, you'll do anything to be successful.

And if your enemy is weakness, you'll do anything to look strong. And if your enemy is being ugly, you'll do anything to try and look attractive.

And if your enemy is boredom, you'll do anything to keep yourself entertained. And if your enemy is illness, you'll do anything to try and stay well. The enemy that you choose is going to be an incredibly powerful influence on your life.

The even more important question to ask is this. what's God's enemy? And the answer is that God's enemy is death.

I just realized, I think I forgot to put the, oh no, it's here, is it here? There we go. I thought I lost the slide. There it is. God's enemy is death. This takes us back to where we read from at the very, chapter we read from at the very start of the sermon at the service.

[32 : 53] First Corinthians 15. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order, Christ the firstfruits, then it is coming those who belong to Christ.

Then comes the end when he delivers the kingdom to the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

God's enemy is death. And that has prompted the most amazing action on God's part because he has resolved to defeat death and to take all the consequences of sin and death upon himself.

To send his son to die in our place, to take our sin upon him. Jesus who came and who stood beside us and who walked among us and who was exposed to all the fragility of humanity and all the brutality of humanity.

Who went willingly to the cross and there the power of sin and death was emptied upon him. But the amazing reality of the gospel is that because the power of sin and death was emptied onto Jesus, the power of sin and death now lies empty.

[34 : 05] And that's why he rose again in unstoppable power. Sin conquered. Death defeated. Salvation accomplished.

God made death his enemy and he has won a total victory and he did it all so that you can be his.

So that you can be his child. So that you can be his friend. And that is one of the many reasons why the gospel is just amazing.

Amen. Let's pray. Amen. Amen.