

Haman's Last Supper

by Ray C. Stedman

Before the death of ex-President Truman, I went to visit the Harry S. Truman Memorial Library in Independence, Missouri, where Mr. Truman had erected a building to preserve the moments of his office. On exhibit were many papers and objects he collected during his time as president which recall momentous events of world importance occurring during his time. We went through the library with a great deal of interest, hoping that perhaps we might run onto Mr. Truman, himself. After we finished our tour I said to the guard, "Has Mr. Truman been here today?" And he said, "Yes, he was out this morning and he said something that was very characteristic. He had forgotten something, and he said to me, 'Why, in blankety-blank does a man forget so much when he's past seventy?'" As I heard that, I thought it rather significant, for here was a man who couldn't remember, and a building which was erected so the world would never forget.

It reminded me of that strange urge for timelessness which we human beings so frequently manifest. There is an instinctive hunger to be remembered in the human heart. To be so alone that no one remembers us or cares about us is an agony the human spirit can scarcely sustain. Yet, in all history only one timeless, eternal event has ever

occurred – the cross of Jesus Christ. Nothing will ever survive the wreckage of human civilization which does not in some way link up with that cross. That is what the Bible declares and what history confirms.

The cross of Christ is the crisis of history and the judgment of every individual life. It not only occurred in time nineteen hundred years ago outside the city of Jerusalem, but it is something which also takes place daily in every Christian's experience. This is why we speak of the cross as a timeless event. The cross of Jesus Christ has been affecting human history long before it occurred in time, even back into the dim reaches of the past in the early dawn of history, or, after the cross, through running centuries from our Lord's day unto our own, because it is a timeless event. It also must take place daily in every Christian's experience, perhaps many times a day. This daily manifestation is what is portrayed for us in this seventh chapter of Esther.

The chapter opens with an intimate supper in a private banqueting room where Queen Esther, the king, and Haman, the evil prime minister, are gathered, and it closes with a man nailed, screaming, to a tree until he is dead. Here is one of those frequent timeless foreshadowings of the cross of the

Old Testament. Here is a king who is ignorant of what is going on in his kingdom. He is troubled, perplexed, concerned, deluded, and unknowing. It is a picture of your human soul with its power of will and choice, but also its blindness and ignorance of the true nature of events in your life. And here is a queen who has been informed by her wise cousin, Mordecai, exactly what is happening. She knows what is going on and is moving to avert disaster. This, as we have seen, is a picture of the regenerate human spirit which, indwelt and taught by the Holy Spirit, is able to recognize the true nature of evil and is the base from which God moves in our lives to prevent disaster. Here is Haman, a descendent of Agag, the Amalekite, the sworn enemy of God, who is plotting to destroy the people of God from the kingdom of Ahasuerus and to exalt himself. What a picture this is of the principle of self in each of us – that deadly ego which has as its central purpose the exaltation of self and which hates the control of God in our lives.

Centuries after this supper, another supper was held in a private banqueting room upstairs in a building in Jerusalem. A similar occasion occurs. Three forces are represented there:

- Here are eleven disciples who do not know what is going on. Their hearts are troubled. They are concerned and perplexed. They are full of questions. They are ignorant and unknowing.
- Here is Jesus Christ, their Lord, their master, the perfect Son of man, indwelt by the Father, filled with the Spirit, aware of everything, fully awake to the danger of the hour and moving to avert the world's greatest disaster.
- And here, also, is Judas, the traitor, intent only on fulfilling his own desires, ready to destroy everything if by hypocrisy and pretense he can get what he wants, unconcerned for the terrible results that will follow his deed because he is intent only upon the fulfillment of his own desire, his own will.

That supper, too, ended with a man hanging upon a tree, nailed, skewered to a gallows.

“Well,” you say, “it wasn't Judas, it was Jesus.” No, you are wrong, for in the record of the Scriptures we read that Judas went out and hanged

himself just as in Esther, Haman, for all practical purposes, hangs himself. And wherever there is cross in Scripture it is always for one purpose only, to put an evil man to death. That is what it will do in your life. And that is what the cross of Jesus was. It was an instrument on which an evil man met death!

Does that shock you? One of the most amazing sentences in all Scripture is that word from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians where he says, “He who knew no sin was made sin for us,” {cf, 2 Cor 5:21}. That is, on the cross, Jesus became Haman. Jesus was made selfish, cruel, grasping, proud, cunning, slimy, and evil. And the only answer that God has to that is to nail it to a cross. Put it to death! And that is the end of Haman. That is what the Bible says took place on the cross of our Lord Jesus; he became sin, and God put him to death.

Now what is true of a timeless event becomes part of our experience when we reenact it in our own lives. This is why the cross of Jesus Christ, with all its possibilities of salvation and deliverance, can be an utterly useless thing as far as you are concerned if it finds no translation into your own experience. When we believe, and act (that is what belief is, acting on the principles set forth in that cross), then it becomes true in our experience. This is what we have in Chapter 7. The action of this chapter is a picture of the only way a Christian can find real victory over the subtle, crafty, self-loving, self-pleasing, self-pitying, self-defending, self-asserting urges that arise within.

There are three steps here which I will take briefly. In these we come to the climax of the story of Esther. How is the king at last delivered from the chicanery, subtlety, and casuistry of this man Haman? How, at last, does he finally learn the truth? There are three steps:

First of all we have, **The Revelation of Evil:**

So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. And on the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, “What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.” Then Queen Esther answered “If I have found

favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king.” Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, that would presume to do this?” And Esther said, “A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!” {Est 7:1-6a RSV}

This is the moment in your life when, in a flash of insight, you see yourself as you really are. Do you remember those moments of truth that have come when you suddenly catch a glimpse of the way you look to others and you are horrified by what you see? You see in a flash that the problem that has been distressing you is not in others, but is within you. God permits some circumstance to open your eyes and you see that some evil attitude which you have been treating like a friend, defending, protecting, building little fences about, making excuses for, you now see in its true light. And you are horrified by what you find.

You discover that it is not others' thoughtlessness that is the problem – it is your selfishness. It is not their malice, as you have been accusing them of – it is your lovelessness. They are simply reacting to what you are doing to them. You don't like their reactions but now you see that the problem is really you. It is not others' coldness that bothers you – the real trouble is your own self-pity that makes people avoid you because you are so unpleasant to be with. It is not others' weakness as you have imagined, but it is your relentless nagging that drives people to react the way they do. It is not their fickleness – it is your jealousy. So there comes from the Spirit of God these tremendous, helpful moments of insight when we see ourselves. What a shattering time it is! Haman, the friend, is revealed as Haman, the traitor, the enemy, the double-dealing foe!

And when we see this it is almost always followed by **A Conflict Within:**

And the king rose from the feast in wrath and went into the palace garden; but Ha-

man stayed to beg his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king. {Est 7:7 RSV}

Why does the king leave now that he knows whom the real enemy is? Now that he knows the whole evil plot why doesn't he simply shout, "Off with his head," like the queen in Alice in Wonderland? But now, he rises and goes off into the garden alone. You can see him pacing up and down, struggling with himself. He is angry at Haman, quite properly so, and Haman knows this bodes no good for him. But the king is uncertain what to do, for after all, Haman is the prime minister. He has deeply entrenched himself in the affairs of the kingdom and the king knows that if he does anything to Haman it will upset the whole kingdom. It is a radical step to execute a prime minister. It must necessarily involve a great deal of distress throughout the kingdom and change the whole pattern of life of that empire.

How do you feel when you finally see yourself in the wrong, perhaps after years of justifying and excusing yourself, and suddenly you see that the principle you have been living by has been the problem? How do you feel? You know that if you admit it and renounce it, it will mean a deep and radical adjustment on your part. Perhaps a deep-seated habit of life must be eradicated and a whole life needs to be changed. What do you do then? Aren't you tempted to compromise? Don't you struggle with yourself and feel a strong urge to smooth it over if you can and go on, perhaps improve conditions a bit and try harder to control yourself? You are tempted to compromise. Well, that is the trouble there.

To this day I remember the deep struggle in my own life when it dawned upon me one day that the problem of touchiness which had so affected and bothered me, which continually caused me agony of soul so I would go aside for long hours of licking my wounds and wallowing in a morass of self-pity, was not others' fault, it was mine. It was my own selfishness and self-centeredness that caused it. I remember how I struggled with that awareness, and how I tried to temporize by resolving to control it better. I didn't want to admit that it was self-centeredness. The conflict raged in my own heart whether to face this for what it was and treat it as selfishness, or simply to try and repress it a bit

longer and subdue it if I could. After an hour or more of deep struggle over this, I came to the place where I was able to say, "God has shown me the truth and this is the way that I must view it."

When the rich young ruler came to the Lord Jesus, in a few sentences the Lord revealed that young man's heart and showed him how his love for what money could give him possessed and owned his life. Then Jesus said to him, "Go and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor and come and follow me," {cf, Matt 19:21}. We read that he went away sorrowfully, filled with a struggle, not willing yet to call that thing the enemy that it was, and cut it off sharply and completely. And the Lord, looking after him, was grieved because he loved him.

There is only one way out. The only possible escape from Haman's tyranny, the only real deliverance, is to pronounce **The Sentence of Death:**

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?" As the words left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face. Then said Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, "Moreover, the gallows which Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, is standing in Haman's house, fifty cubits high." And the king said, "Hang him on that." So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated. {Est 7:8-10 RSV}

What a picture! When the king returns from the garden, he sees Haman half fallen on the queen's couch, clawing at her, cravenly pleading for mercy, down on his knees, seeking to move the queen if he can. The sight of it revolts and disgusts the king. Sarcastically he says, "Why, is he even trying to attack her in my very presence?" And at that moment a courtier reminds him, "You know sir, there are the gallows in the house of Haman which he built for Mordecai, the man who saved your life." Thus, reminded of Haman's true character and conscious of the evil plot against his

friend, the king pronounces Haman's doom, "Hang him on that tree!"

Note that it is not until the king says this that Haman's evil is ended. And it is not until you agree with God that these evil things have no longer a right to live in your life that you will find deliverance from their power. In the language of Romans 6,

... consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. {Rom 6:11 RSV}

"Hang it on that tree" – that is the sentence that brings victory. No other way will work. It needs to be said every time Haman arises, for while we are here in the body we are never delivered from the attempts of the flesh to influence us. But Haman never need be victorious for if we believe that what has been revealed to us about this evil thing that has arisen – jealousy, resentment, bitterness, malice, lust, whatever it may be – and recalling that this is what put Jesus Christ to death, this is what made Judas do what he did, this is what Jesus became when he took our place on that tree, say, "Yes, Lord, hang it on that tree."

- When jealousy burns within you, hang it on that tree!
- When self-pity comes moaning along and tempts you to feel sorry for yourself, hang it on the tree. Put it in the place of death.
- When self-will rises up and says, "I am going to have my way, I don't care what," hang it on the tree!
- When resentment flames because you have been ignored or mistreated, hang it on the tree.
- When a critical spirit whispers to you to destroy a reputation or harm someone, hang it on the tree.

Say it, pray it!

Say, "Lord Jesus, because I see this through your eyes as the evil thing that it is, then, standing here in the light of your cross, I put my will along side yours, Lord, and I agree, 'Hang it on that tree! Put it in the place of death where it belongs. Hang it there.'"

This is the way of victory, the only possible way.

Prayer:

Our Father, thank you for these times of self-humiliation, when we do not see ourselves as the cause of all our problems, and we stop blaming others and stop blaming our circumstances, and come to grips with this thing and put it in the place of death where you put it, and recognize that it has no right to live any longer, for when it was

brought out in the light, in the cross of Jesus Christ, you condemned it, sentenced it, executed it, and put it to death in him. Lord, grant us faith to believe, and willingness to act upon your sentence of death and treat these things as an enemy, a Judas, a traitor within, which with a kiss would betray us. To do as you have bade us in this story – to hang it on the cross, on that tree. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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