

Session 2

April 29, 2018

STAND WITH CONVICTION

Esther 2:21-3:6

Somewhere in my ministerial training, I was taught that *beliefs* are those ideals that you are willing to live for, while *convictions* are those ideals that you are willing to die for. The story of Esther demonstrates what happens when someone of conviction stands his ground.

In this week's lesson, the story shifts from the beauty of Queen Esther to the character of her cousin Mordecai who raised her. As a member of the king's court, Mordecai was "at the king's gate," where he was easily accessible to those for whom he worked. It is here that his character is displayed.

Character is displayed in loyalty to those we serve (2:21-23). We don't yet know much about the relationship between Mordecai and the king, but it's an interesting dynamic. Mordecai is a faithful Jew. Ahasuerus is a pagan king, but he is still the king. That alone makes him worthy of respect (see Rom. 13:1-7). And now that Esther is a part of the royal family, Mordecai has even more reason to keep an eye on things. The details of the conspiracy against the king by two of his attendants is unclear but is likely related to the departure and replacement of Queen Vashti. As guards at the door of the royal bedroom, these two men held an esteemed position and had certainly earned the king's trust. While history tells us that King Ahasuerus was ultimately killed in a similar plot some years later, on this occasion he was saved by the swift intervention of Mordecai the Jew. In this case, God's providence is seen in putting Mordecai in the right place at the right time; in the placement of Esther in the King's favor; and in providing the opportunity to inform Queen Esther of the plot. But further, while Mordecai received no reward for his loyalty at the time, the entire incident was recorded in the daily court records with King Ahasuerus present. This record would prove valuable as the story unfolds (see chapter 6). While God's hand is clearly guiding these events, we must remember that Mordecai's loyalty to the king is pivotal.

Character is displayed in faithfulness to the God we worship (3:1-6). There's a difference between showing honor to someone and worshipping someone. Apparently, Haman was unaware of that fact. His rise to prominence by the hand of King Ahasuerus went beyond the honor due to his position and played to his unfettered arrogance. The terms "bowing down" and "paying homage" do not in themselves mean worship. In fact, the Bible contains many instances of believers bowing in honor before men of prominence. But something in this scenario so offended Mordecai that this normally compliant Jew refused to participate, even though the king himself had ordered it (v. 2). While Haman would view this as Mordecai's pride (likely for being a Jew; see v. 4), just the opposite is true. Mordecai was loyal to the king—and no doubt respectful to Haman, as the king's appointee. But he also understood the First Commandment: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery. Do not have other gods besides Me. Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. *You must not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God...*" (Ex. 20:1-5). The extent of Haman's fury (v. 5) demonstrates his emotional instability: he loves himself supremely and he hates the Jews intensely.

It also demonstrates the differences between these two men. One is willing to kill a nation for love of self. One is willing to die for love of God.