

## Session 3

May 6, 2018

### STAND DOWN

Esther 4:1-3, 10-16

Blatant and obvious injustice calls for a response. From the Boston Tea Party to the Civil Rights Movement, much of our nation's history has been marked by grassroots movements voicing opposition to unwanted public policy. But along with appropriate public protests, the Bible reminds us to focus our attentions upward, as well as outward.

In this week's lesson, God's people learn of the pending persecution headed their way by the hand of wicked Haman and respond not only with protest, but with prayer. In the text, Mordecai and Esther provide an example of how to apply wisdom *from* God while depending *on* God.

**Godly wisdom requires humility (vv. 1-3).** When Mordecai heard of Haman's devilish scheme to annihilate the Jews, he demonstrated his shock and grief in the classic ancient Eastern way, by tearing his garments, putting on a cloak of coarse hair (sackcloth) and pouring ashes upon his head. These were well-known signs of the most pitiful misery and deepest grief. Bearing these signs, and accompanied by loud and bitter cries, Mordecai displayed his despair in the middle of the city. Yet in deference to the king (the only one who could put a stop to the scheme), he stopped himself from entering the palace grounds. Verse 3 explains that as word of Haman's plan got out, God's people "fasted, wept, and lamented, and many lay on sackcloth and ashes." While the word "prayer" is not in the text, the context clearly demonstrates utter humility and dependence upon God. Somehow, in the midst of the crisis, Mordecai was able to humble himself, express his grief, demonstrate his dependence on God, and honor the authority of the king...all at the same time.

**Godly wisdom responds to fear (vv. 10-14).** Verses 4-10 describe a series of messages passed from Mordecai to Queen Esther and back, informing her of the details of the plot against her countrymen, and seeking her intervention with the king (v. 8). In these verses, Esther is appalled at the plan hatched against her people, but clearly uncertain of what to do about it. The hint of fear is expressed in her reference to the "one law" that everyone knew about and obviously everyone obeyed: no one could approach the king without being invited (v. 11). Her fears were deepened by the fact that she—the king's favorite—had not been invited to see him for an entire month. Had his favor toward her suddenly waned? Now the queen suffered from both the external fear of the law, and the internal fear of personal failure. Mordecai's wisdom brings Esther back to reality. He reasoned with her on three levels. First, he reminded her that her position in the pagan palace would not save her from the same fate (v. 13). Second, he assured her that one way or another, God would deliver His people (v. 14a). Finally, he suggested that she herself might be God's solution to the crisis (v. 14b).

**Godly wisdom requires faith (vv. 15-16).** Mordecai's words made sense, and Esther was spurred into action. Now we see her wisdom applied. Rather than hastily approaching the throne of the king, she boldly approaches the throne of God (see Hebrews 4:16). Understanding the gravity of the situation, she calls for a city-wide fast on her own behalf. She then calls together her closest circle of confidants and joins them in praying and fasting, no doubt asking God to soften the heart of the king. After all, "The king's heart *is* in the hand of the Lord; *like* the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes" (Prov. 21:1). Thus prepared spiritually, Esther can approach the king with confidence. Her final statement, "If I perish, I perish" should not be taken as a sign of defeat, but rather a statement of her renewed faith.