

Esther Chapter 8 – John Karmelich

1. My lesson title is "watching the results of prayer occur". Consider this question: When we pray, how often do we really expect God to answer that prayer, quickly? Yes we expect Him to work on His timing, but do we really expect Him to answer in a visible way when we pray?
 - a) I remember some months back a friend asked a group of us to pray that he have a closer relationship with his father. Soon after that, his father had a heart attack. His father lived through that incident, but the point is the son got to spend a lot of time with his father as his father recovered in the hospital. Their relationship grew based on that time together. My point is simply, when we pray, God is listening and if it is His will, He does respond in ways that glorifies Him through our prayers.
 - b) OK, good for your friend. How does that affect my prayer life? If we are going to take the trouble to pray for things, we should expect answers. Too often in my prayer life, I find myself just saying things to God to get them off of my chest and I don't really expect Him to work in great ways based on what I just prayed. Stories like this chapter in Esther, as well as my friend's relationship grow with his father remind me that God is more than willing to answer our prayers if it is His will for the moment.
2. OK John, I sort of know all of that. What does any of this have to do with Esther Chapter 8? The answer is, this chapter is an answer to group prayer. If you recall from the last lesson, all of the Jewish people living in the city of Susa were praying for Esther that she have the boldness to say something to the king about the order that was given for all of the Jews to be killed.
 - a) Remember that all of those Jewish people were not at the palace and they didn't know that Esther spoke up to the king about the wicked plot to kill all the Jewish people.
 - b) The question is essentially, how do we know when their or our prayers were answered? This chapter gives the results of their prayers as Mordecai is going to be the new number two man in the kingdom and a new law is being written to overcome the first "bad one".
 - c) Therefore, the citizens of Susa knew that their three days of fasting paid off in dividends because one of their own became the top man under the king and a new law was sent all through the vast Persian Empire to overcome the bad law that threatened all of their lives.
3. All right, good for them. How do I get God to answer my prayers that way? The first thing we need to ponder is the issue of are we praying for our will to be done, or His? Since we usually don't know what is His will, it is acceptable to pray for our own will. The point when we pray we should be asking God for His will to be done. Therefore, the secret of an effective prayer life is about trying to get His will done for our life. When we work toward that goal, our prayers can be answered in a great and dramatic fashion just like those of Esther and her people here.
 - a) OK John, one more time, I sort of know all of that. How do I discern His will? That is what bible study, prayer and even spending time with other believers helps us discover. Through those things we can actually learn what He wants for our lives. We should then pray based on what we discern is His will for us.
 - b) The point is by diligently studying what His word teaches, it helps us to pray in ways of learning what is His will for our lives this day. What about fasting and group prayer?
 - i) The quick answer is that it shows God how serious we are about His answering our prayers. Those acts do not guarantee He has to respond. It just shows that we are truly committed to desiring those prayer requests for our lives.
 - ii) My key point of this lesson is that if we are willing to take the trouble for God to work in our life by studying His word in order to understand what it is He desires of us, spending time with other believers to see how He can work in the lives of other believers and commit our lives to seeking Him, He will respond and usually in ways that are far greater than we can comprehend. This chapter of Ester is an example of God working that way. Speaking of this chapter, let's get started.

4. Chapter 8, Verse 1: That same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came into the presence of the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her.
- a) As I read this verse, the first thing I pondered is "That same day" as what event? This refers to the same day the king ordered the execution of Haman. Let me review a bit:
 - i) In the last chapter Esther revealed the key plot point that Haman gave the order to execute all of the Jewish people in the Persian Empire including Esther herself. Part of this revelation is that Esther herself was Jewish.
 - ii) Esther was in effect telling the king, do you want to choose me or Haman to live?
 - iii) When Esther made the revelation, the king left the room for a moment. After the king left, Haman got on his knees before Esther and begged her for his life.
 - iv) Then the king walked back in the room, presumably with his mind already made up that Haman should die. The king now needed an excuse to execute this plan. The king saw Haman kneeling in front of Esther and claimed he was attacking her. Then the king gave the order to his guards to have Haman executed. Since he was the second most powerful man in the empire, the formal charge of trying to molest the queen would be necessary for public acceptance of this order.
 - v) The point of explaining that story is so that we know what the "same day" means.
 - b) Next, we need to know a bit more about Persian law. When a person is to be executed for a crime against the Persian government, that government got to keep their possessions. Since the king now controlled Haman's possessions, he decided to give Esther whatever possessions Haman owned at that time. That order effectively said that the house and property where Haman's family now lived now belongs to Esther the queen.
 - c) All of this leads to the scene of three of the main characters in the room together. In this scene we have Mordecai, the cousin of Esther who raised her, and the king himself.
 - i) The second sentence of this verse states at this point that Esther told the king that Mordecai is the person who raised Esther.
 - ii) Remember that just one day earlier, the king ordered Mordecai be paraded around town because five years earlier he saved the king's life. It was a reward for good service. Therefore, at that moment, the king thought highly of Mordecai. Also remember that Mordecai was already a city official in the ruling city of the empire.
 - iii) Another thing to remember was that Mordecai wasn't present in the big revelation scene of the previous chapter. All that Mordecai new up to this point was that:
 - a) An order was given recently to kill all the Jewish people.
 - b) Mordecai along with all the Jewish people living in this city were fasting for three days and presumably praying to God for this order to be changed.
 - c) Mordecai knew that on this day, the queen had her big moment to confront the king and reveal she was Jewish. He knew this based on the fact he was just paraded around town by his enemy Haman for his good deed.
 - d) I'm sure the curiosity of what really happened got to Mordecai. Therefore, he probably hung around the king's palace to get more information. Given the fact he was a city official and because of the parade, the king allowed him to be back in his presence.
 - d) With all of that background out of my system, the point here is that Esther, the king and Mordecai all in the room together. At this moment, Esther revealed to the king how she was related to Mordecai.
 - i) I personally suspect that Esther had already told the king how she already knew Mordecai. I talked about that in previous lessons. What the king did not know up until this moment was that Mordecai raised Esther. Either that, or if the king was a typical man, if she did tell him earlier, it didn't sink in until now. ☺

- e) OK John, this is a nice story all based on Verse 1. Tell me why I should care?
- i) To answer that, let's come back to my lesson title. When it is our desire to have God's will done for our lives, we first need to let go of worrying about the results. We must be willing to give Him all the credit for whatever happens that is good in our lives. That way our focus and gratitude is on how He works in our lives.
 - ii) For us, we rarely get to see things on this grand of a scale as trying to save God's chosen people. Even in our day and age, we can see Him work in our lives if we are simply willing to trust Him and let Him work through us.
 - iii) Remember that the purpose of living the Christian life is to bring glory to God. One reason we should study our bibles is to learn what it is He desires of our lives. We also should pray about what it is He specifically desires of us. We then should be willing take risks and act boldly with the goal of glorifying Him through our lives. When we are willing to let go in impossible situations like this, is usually when God does His best work through our lives.
 - iv) Does this mean I can have lots of stuff if I pray hard enough and act in ways that bless God? The answer is it depends on what is His will for our lives. Some of the characters in the bible were blessed with wealth and others were not. The point is stuff is just tools to be used. We should live out our lives to glorify Him, not our selves. If God wants to bless us with stuff that is in effect His business.
 - a) What I have found through practice is that God does give us what we need if we are willing to let go and trust Him through our particular situation.
 - b) Meanwhile, I only got through Verse 1 so far.
5. Verse 2: The king took off his signet ring, which he had reclaimed from Haman, and presented it to Mordecai. And Esther appointed him over Haman's estate.
- a) It's time for another recollection from the previous lesson: The king gave his official ring to Haman and said in effect, "You do what you think is best for the empire". That ring is like an official king's signature. A modern equivalent might be a machine that stamps out the signature of the president of a big company on lots of paychecks.
 - i) The point is the "official signature of the king" ring now belongs to Mordecai.
 - ii) This does not mean that Mordecai was free to do what he wanted as far as making decisions in the empire. It meant that Mordecai was now free to decide what was best to do to overcome the order to kill all of the Jewish people.
 - b) The second line then says that Esther put Mordecai in charge of Haman's estate.
 - i) Remember that since Esther now owned whatever belonged to Haman, (based on Verse 1), she could do with Haman's estate as she pleased. She put Mordecai in charge of that estate. In Persian law, the wife and children were part of that estate. The point is Mordecai was now given the role of what to do with the family of Haman as well as take possession of whatever physical wealth Haman had.
 - ii) So John, does this mean that if I pray for the stuff of my enemy, God will give it to me? Of course not. When we are willing to trust Him, He gives us what we need and blesses our lives for our willingness for that trust. How God specifically does bless us is up to Him, not us.
 - iii) The real point is that God wants the Jewish people to still exist as a nation. It was God's plan for the Messiah (eternal king) to come through them. Many centuries earlier, God promised David this king would be one of his descendants. At this time, all of David's descendants were part of this empire. In the Gospel stories in Luke and Matthew, genealogies were given. These included the names of Jesus' ancestors who lived through this captivity period. My point is the brave actions and prayers of Esther and Mordecai was the reason for God's plans to come true.
 - a) Getting to own Haman's property was in effect a bonus for trusting God and having the boldness to speak up.

6. Verse 3: Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet and weeping. She begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman the Agagite, which he had devised against the Jews. ⁴ Then the king extended the gold scepter to Esther and she arose and stood before him.
- a) It may help to understand what has been done and what still needs to be done here:
 - i) What has been done is that Haman has been defeated and is no longer a threat to the Jewish people living at that time. What was still a threat is Haman's order to kill all the Jews. His death didn't change that order.
 - ii) With that understood, the queen is now begging the king to end that order.
 - b) Give Esther a little credit here. A short time earlier she was too scared to even mention that Haman was a threat. It took a three-day fast by Esther and a large group of Jewish people and two separate banquets before she even got up the nerve to reveal this plot. Now that she has started speaking boldly, she is on a roll. That is the way it works in life. Once we get up the nerve to start acting boldly, it gets easier as our confidence grows.
 - c) With that stated, notice how Esther approaches the king. She doesn't say, I demand you resend that order. She doesn't tell the king, "While you are granting me my desires here is what else I demand of you." She doesn't even say anything about the hundreds of other women that the king has at his disposal.
 - i) Instead, she approaches the king humbly. She falls at his feet and weeps.
 - ii) Being a typical man, I suspect that the king couldn't stand to see his wife cry, and was willing to give her whatever she wanted just to get her to stop. I picture the king saying, you want me to end this plan? Sure, just stop crying. ☺
 - iii) There is a great lesson here for women to consider: Not about her crying, but just about approaching one's husband in a submissive manner. I remember stating in my first lesson on Esther, a line from the movie, "My Big Fat Greek Wedding". The dialogue was about how a woman should be submissive to her husband. The line was in effect, "The man is the head of the household, but the woman is like the neck that can turn the head".
 - a) In effect, Esther was the "neck" here and she leaned and understood well how to approach the king, and it involved submissiveness.
 - iv) The main point is that being submissive is about to pay off in dividends for Esther. The king extended the gold scepter (a stick) to Esther. The king is effectively saying, "Thank you for acknowledging that I am in charge. Now tell me what it is you want." That act should remind us how we should approach God in prayer.
7. Verse 5: "If it pleases the king," she said, "and if he regards me with favor and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, devised and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces. ⁶ For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?"
- a) Before I say anything else, notice how much Esther cares about her fellow Jewish people. Remember that she has been living as the queen for roughly five years now. Remember how she kept her mouth quiet until now about her Jewish heritage. Also remember that she had no bible to study in those five years nor has been to any type of religious service. Yet despite all of that recent background, she did not forget her Jewish heritage.
 - i) So is that type of national heritage something we are born with or something that we are raised to be? Good question. I suspect it is mostly something we learn. If we learn to care about our identity, it sticks with it.
 - ii) The issue is not so much our national identity, but who we choose to identify with. For Esther, being Jewish is not about national pride. It is about the God that she worships. As one grows in one's faith as a Christian, one starts to care more about believers around the world than one does one's national heritage. That's the point.

- b) All of that background leads back to the scene at the castle. Esther not only has a heart for God and a heart for the man who raised her (Mordecai), but cared about other believers.
 - i) Remember that all of the other Jewish people were scattered throughout the empire and didn't choose to go back to Israel when the request was offered many years earlier. Think of it this way: God is always working on our level to try to draw us closer to Him. Therefore, He always desires people willing to not only care about their relationship with Him, but their relationship with other believers.
 - ii) In summary, Esther has a heart for other believers. That is why she wants to see them live so they can draw closer to God. Yes, she wants to save the Jewish people so the Messiah can come through that group, but I am also convinced that she wants to save them so they like us can work to draw others closer to God.
 - c) Next, notice that Esther refers to Haman by his "full name". Remember the king knew Haman well. By giving Haman's full name, Esther was effectively telling the king, "This man belongs to a group who have always been an enemy of the Jewish people. Haman wants to kill all of the Jewish people just like his ancestors have done for centuries."
 - i) Esther is saying to the king in effect, "I want you to take the side of my God in this multi-century long conflict." Remember that the Persians at that time believed in many gods. The king himself was not a believer in a single god. He must have seen this conflict as a battle between two long time warring factions. Esther is effectively begging the king, "If you care about me, then help out my people".
 - ii) That caring about my people is the type of attitude that God wants in us. Again, it is not about what nation we are from, but caring about other believers.
 - iii) With that said, it is time for the king's response:
8. Verse 7: King Xerxes replied to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "Because Haman attacked the Jews, I have given his estate to Esther, and they have hanged him on the gallows.⁸ Now write another decree in the king's name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the king's signet ring--for no document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring can be revoked."
- a) The king is now speaking to both Esther and Mordecai together. I suspect he thought about the whole situation for a moment and replied, "I have already given the order to kill Haman and he is dead. Next, I cannot repeal a law that is already "on the books", as it is against the Persian Law. However, I can write another law that can overcome an existing law." That act is what the king is asking Esther and Mordecai to do.
 - b) I have to wonder whether or not the king became saved at this point in his life. If one reads the history of this king, he was not known for his high moral standards. History records the man as being a drunk and a womanizer. Yet, "when push came to shove", he did the right thing for the Jewish people. I suppose we will find out one day whether or not the man was saved based on this act of faith in the God of the bible.
 - i) If I had to guess here, I would probably say no, in that he did not trust in the God of the bible despite all of the witness he received about His existence.
 - ii) Just because God "changed his heart" to do this good deed does not mean that he necessarily trusted in the existence of a single God, so, again, we'll wait and see.
 - iii) The good news is the king put Mordecai in charge of the situation. Next, we'll read how Mordecai responded to this request to overturn this law.
9. Verse 9: At once the royal secretaries were summoned--on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan.
- a) History preserves the exact date that Mordecai's new order was given. To translate this date into our calendar, this is the lunar month that occurs around May and June.
 - b) To explain it another way, it has been a few months since Haman gave the order to kill all of the Jewish people. It is still another 8-9 months (if my memory is correct) away until the actual day when the order to kill all of the Jewish people is to take place.

10. Verse 9 (Part 2): They wrote out all Mordecai's orders to the Jews, and to the satraps, governors and nobles of the 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush. These orders were written in the script of each province and the language of each people and also to the Jews in their own script and language. ¹⁰Mordecai wrote in the name of King Xerxes, sealed the dispatches with the king's signet ring, and sent them by mounted couriers, who rode fast horses especially bred for the king.
- a) These verses contemplate the logistical issues to carry out this order. The Persian Empire stretched from India to Cush (think Egypt and surrounding areas). It stretched north to Iraq and Iran as well as some of the countries that we associate today with the former Soviet Empire. My point is simply, this was a big territory.
 - i) The Persian Empire included lots of different languages. Therefore if a new order was given, it had to be delivered in lots of languages to lots of people.
 - ii) Also remember that not only the Jewish people needed to see this order, but all people. That way everyone would know what will happen on this future date.
 - iii) Think about the order of Haman and Mordecai's new order from the perspective of the common person living a thousand miles away in this empire. First a notice was posted that on a certain date, one can attack and kill all Jewish people. Now a new order is being posted that Jewish people can organize and defend themselves. If nothing else, one can see the hand of God saying that He exists and while his positive orders may not come first, they do come to protect His people.
 - b) Speaking of logistics, that is what the rest of the text says. Remember that the city of Susa where this story takes place is the capital (technically one of the capitals) of this empire. The king orders through Mordecai, that the best horses be used to send out the notice as fast as possible throughout the empire so that word gets out as quickly as possible. The King James Bible says other animals were used, but a better translation is "horses only".
 - i) All of these logistical details are given so that the reader becomes aware that a serious effort was made to resend the previous kill order.
 - ii) As to the specifics of what this new order said, that is in the next few verses.
11. Verse 11: The king's edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and annihilate any armed force of any nationality or province that might attack them and their women and children; and to plunder the property of their enemies. ¹²The day appointed for the Jews to do this in all the provinces of King Xerxes was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar.
- a) Time for another translation issue. The King James Version of Verse 11, reads as if the king's order is for the Jewish people to kill women and children. The actual decree is in effect, "Protect us from anyone who attacks us, including our women and children." This decree is not about going on the offensive, but simply about the right to defend one's self.
 - b) But John, doesn't this violate the concept of "letting God fight our battles for us?" Hardly.
 - i) If anything, it is about how we defend ourselves. God never says to believers, just trust me, stand still and I'll kill your enemies for you. Instead He says to us in effect, "Trust Me and through you, I will have victory over those who want to harm you." The short version is evil exists in this world, and God does call on us to fight such evil and defend ourselves when we are attacked by evil people.
 - ii) OK, so how do we know when something is evil? The issue is whether or not it violates God's will for the world or our lives. I'm not saying we have to kill every political leader or person who we disagree with. I am saying that if someone wants to kill us just because we believe in the God the Bible, not only does He want us to defend ourselves, but He also wants us to stand up for what is right. What is right is the willingness to take a stand for the God of the bible.
 - iii) I read not too long ago about a pastor willing to take up guns to save a group of Christians being attacked by Muslims just for being Christians. That is as good an example as any of being wiling to defend God against those attacking our beliefs.

- c) Before I move on, I want you to notice the phrase, "to plunder the property of their enemies". Does this mean that God wants us to keep what we capture from enemies?
 - i) For starters, the text is not about going on the offensive. God never calls on us to go on the offensive to attack those who don't share our beliefs. What the text is saying is that we have a right (and should) defend what we believe and if our enemy is defeated then we get their stuff. (See 1st Peter 3:15 on that point.)
 - ii) Let me give an example: There are ministries that go on college campuses with the express purpose of sharing the Gospel message. I don't have a problem sharing one's faith with others as long as we don't force our beliefs on anyone.
 - a) If one is willing to share, one also has to be willing to listen to others. We can't expect other people to listen to our beliefs without giving them the right to express their views to us. That is why it doesn't bother me when people of other religions come to my door. To me, that an opportunity to share my faith with them after I gave them the same courtesy.
 - b) If someone is willing to consider our faith, in effect, "their property" is the fact that they too can share glories of Christ with us.
 - iii) OK, John, what about your gun carrying pastor example? This is a case where the lives of believers are literally being threatened. If God chooses to work through that use of force, He will. If He wants them to just trust in Him through that tough situation, He will make it possible. My point is I don't think God wants us to go on the offensive for the sake of "stuff", but simply to win souls for Him.
 - d) Meanwhile, the edict is still being written back in these verses. Verse 12 once again gives the specific date of that first order by Haman when the attack was to take place. The new order is effectively, on that same date, Jewish people can get organized and have the right to defend themselves.
 - i) Notice the new order is not to kill "Order #1", but it just lets the battle happen and sees who will win. Why? It is a chance for God to show Himself throughout the vast Persian Empire to show believers in other gods who is really in charge.
 - ii) To put it another way, Mordecai did not believe in the fighting ability of his fellow Jewish people, but in the strength of God to work through them.
 - a) By the way, if one wonders how the modern nation of Israel has survived for over 50 years as a nation today, it is strictly on God working through them. If one knows the military history of how the nations surrounding Israel attacked them after they become a country in 1948 and again in 1967, it is amazing to learn how this small nation successfully defeated enemies much larger than they were. Listening to Israelites who lived at that time will reveal just how much God worked out the details so they could win.
12. Verse 13: A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. ¹⁴ The couriers, riding the royal horses, raced out, spurred on by the king's command. And the edict was also issued in the citadel of Susa.
- a) As I read this chapter a few times, I was struck by all of the logistical details given. In other words, the text does not just say, "A new law was written to combat the first one, and the Jews won the battle." Instead we get lots of details of how the law was written and how it was delivered throughout the empire.
 - b) This supports the theory that Mordecai wrote this book. Maybe he was fascinated with all the details of how a law was enforced and wanted to include it in the story.
 - c) Whatever the reason, the story makes the point that the new law was written in every language in the empire (there were lots of them), it was delivered by the royal horses and it was even posted throughout the city of Susa. All of the Jewish people who were fasting in Susa for three days were now aware that God heard their prayers.

13. Verse 15: Mordecai left the king's presence wearing royal garments of blue and white, a large crown of gold and a purple robe of fine linen. And the city of Susa held a joyous celebration. ¹⁶For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor. ¹⁷ In every province and in every city, wherever the edict of the king went, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating.
- a) At this point in the story, the actual battle has not taken place yet. Even so, we read of a celebration throughout the empire just based on the fact the new decree was written.
 - b) Again we get some details and one wonders why they are here. After all, the text could have just said, "A new decree was written and all the Jews were happy." Why the details?
 - i) The answer is to show how we should react when we see God working in our lives. Remember that all the Jewish people through the empire were living in fear for the past few months based on Haman's decree have all of them killed.
 - ii) It is now obvious to all of the Jewish people that the God they trust in, or even the God they had doubts about has come through for them.
 - c) Meanwhile, back at the palace, we read of Mordecai leaving the king's presence wearing royal garments of blue and white. History records those colors were the official ones of the Persian Empire. The point is a few days earlier, Mordecai sat at the gate of the city wearing sackcloth and ashes waiting for God to work. Here we see the results of God working in a mighty way, and Mordecai is now properly dressed as a top official.
 - d) OK, what does that mean for us? Does that mean if we pray for power and riches God will grant that to us? Does this mean if we are suffering, we will be rewarded in this lifetime with great stuff by just praying hard enough? Of course not.
 - i) Let me say here that I can't stand preachers who make claims like, "You are not driving a Rolls Royce because you are not praying hard enough". I can't stand the "health and wealth doctrine" of some pastors. God does not call us on us to pray to make our lives better, but to make a difference for Him with our lives.
 - ii) Remember that the purpose of prayer is to get God's will done. That doesn't mean we can't pray to say, get healthy again if we are sick. It just means that if we say we belong to Him, then He is in charge of our lives and not us. In this story here in Esther, God's will is simply that He desires to preserve the Jewish nation and is willing to work through anyone willing to take a risk on His behalf for them.
 - iii) So what is His will for us today? It is the straightforward concept of serving Him. We do that by making a difference for Him throughout the world. For example, it can include doing good works to help those in need. It includes various mission activities at our local church. It could be as simple as trying to be a good witness to others around us. It has never ceased to amaze me when I pray about how I can be a good witness for Him, He makes it known to me through actions and events in my life exactly what it is He wants me to do.
 - a) One of my favorite descriptions of Christian service is, "It is what you can't stand not doing." It is a matter of using whatever gifts and talents one has and one desires to do, to make a difference for Him.
 - b) In summary, people should see Jesus in us. It is not how well we know our bible that counts. Living the Christian life should be about how much of a difference we make for Him. Again, our motivation should never be to earn "points" with God, but simply to serve Him out of gratitude for what He has already done for us and what He wants to do in our lives.
 - c) My point is if we can see God work in our life today, we have to be willing to take risks like Esther did in order to watch Him work. He won't work on our timing, but if we are willing to make a difference for Him, I can promise that He will work in our lives in order to bring Him glory.

- iv) What about rewards in heaven? To answer, let me share a cute joke here: There was an old Christian couple that ate in a very healthy manner in the latter years of their life. When they finally died and saw the glories of heaven, the husband said to his wife, "If you hadn't made me eat all of that healthy food for the past few decades, we could have been here many years ago."
 - a) I'm not saying we shouldn't eat healthy or even commit suicide. The point of this joke is just that I think we will be amazed at the rewards that await us just for being loyal to serving Jesus all through our lives.
 - b) With that said, I don't think we should live with the motivation of wanting to be rewarded in heaven. We should live with the motivation of wanting to give God the glory through how we live our lives. If we learn to think that way, the "rewards of heaven" will take care of themselves.
 - v) To say it another way, remember what is the most valuable asset we have: Our time. If you can't recall anything else from this lesson, just think at the moment, "How am I using my time right now? Am I using it to bring God glory or am I just wasting my time? Yes there are times we need rest and it is interesting that last night I had a bad night's sleep. It never ceases to amaze me how I can feel more rested when I do what I know God calls me to do, which includes this writing.
 - vi) Meanwhile, I still have one sentence left in this chapter to talk about:
14. Verse 17, Part 2: And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them.
- a) The big question here is why did people become Jews and what did it mean practically? Jewish rabbis have debated this question for millennia.
 - b) All the text says before this last sentence is that the Jewish people living throughout the empire were celebrating the fact they had the right to defend themselves.
 - i) So does this mean that if I have a big party other people would want to become Christians? In a sense yes. I have watched too many Christians try to act holier than others to the point where nobody wants to be like them. I'm not saying we have to throw big parties every day. I am saying that people should see the joy in our lives. That is a better witness for Jesus than any scripture we can quote. If you want a positive thing to pray about today, pray that God give you a reason to have joy in our heart and we show that joy to someone around us.
 - ii) Think of it this way: Would you rather be around a person who complains all the time how horrible life is, or be around a happy person? I believe we have a duty in life to act happy in life. I'm not saying that if a loved one just dies, we have to fake being joyful. I am saying that people should see the joy in hearts through whatever it is we are going through at the present moment.
 - iii) Let me put it another way: The four gospels never mention the word "smile". Do I think Jesus smiled a lot? Yes I do, because no one wants to be around a sad person all the time. The gospels mention lots of children that came to Jesus. I suspect He had a big smile that attracted people to Him. The point is if we spend most of our time complaining about how bad things are, we will never experience the type of joy that makes one a good witness for Jesus.
 - c) Meanwhile, back to the issue of people becoming Jews in this text. Remember that the actual battle was still months away from happening. How non-Jews became Jews or how committed they were to staying Jewish is a classical debate. All we know from reading the text is that it says other people became Jews out of fear of them. These people of other nationalities feared the Jews when they were going to defend themselves many months from that time. A classical debate here, is how much does that count with God if one is converting to another religion based on fear? Fear will work up to a point, but the best way to grow and trust in God is based on love, not fear.

15. Before I wrap this up, one more thought that hit me. I wonder if the king now regretted asking Esther in the last chapter, "What do you want, honey, up to half the kingdom?"
- a) I'm guessing that when the king made that request, he thought it was some simple thing like rewarding her friend Mordecai for the good deed he did years ago.
 - b) Instead, when Esther spoke up, it cost the king the life of his most trusted advisor, it meant that the millions of dollars worth of silver that Haman would put in the king's treasury didn't happen. It meant that Mordecai who was a "town official" has now jumped in rank to being the number two man in the entire Empire over all of the other king's advisors.
 - c) My point here for guys is when we ask our wives "what is on your mind" we often have to be prepared to answers that are far greater than our expectations.
16. The main point of this lesson is simply that when God works, He really works. One of the biggest fears that most people have in life is the fear to speak up and say what needs to be said. People want to be liked. Further, no one wants to be killed. Being willing to take a risk for God often takes guts. That is why we should pray for boldness
- a) The secret to making a difference for God is once we get started it is easy to get on a roll. I'm sure once Esther made that initial effort to state how Haman was the one who organized the plot to kill the Jews, speaking up got a lot easier.
 - b) My point is boldness for God grows once we are willing to take to take that initial step in faith. That is why it is important to pray for boldness for ourselves and other believers. Speaking of praying, it is time for our closing prayer.
17. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, we would all like a prayer life where we can literally see You work so that we can see answers to our prayers. Help us to know what is Your will for our lives today. Help us to use the most valuable asset we have, our time, in order to make a difference for You. Give us the boldness to make that difference for You. Help us to go through our day realizing that You do desire to guide our life. Then, when we do see You work in our lives, help us to take the time to express our gratitude for the good You do in our world. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.