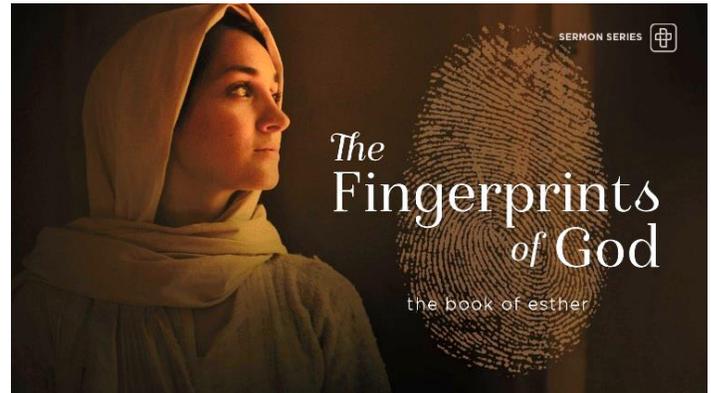


## **Christian, Your Enemies Are Angry**

**Joe Jones**

**October 13, 2019**



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Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You and praise You and rejoice in You this morning as our God. We are Your people, and You've called us to Yourself sovereignly. You've chosen us before the foundation of the world in Your great love, and You've called us to Yourself in Christ. We have so much to be thankful for this morning. So fill us with Your Spirit. Fill us with Your joy and help us as we look at some challenging topics in the book of Esther. Be our Guide and Teacher. Make us aware of things we often forget and help us, as we leave here this morning, to live fully for Your Son Jesus. We pray this in His name. Amen.

We're continuing our series in the book of Esther, picking up in Esther 2:19 and walking through the end of chapter three. Sometimes we need to be made aware of things we've either forgotten or we're unaware of in the first place. It's like a cancer diagnosis. Before that doctor's appointment, you're unaware of this deadly thing that's in your body. Then the doctor confirms it and your sheer awareness changes everything for you. It changes the way you think about your life and the way you live your life.

Some sermons can serve a similar function. We need to be made aware of some realities we've either forgotten or didn't know were there in the first place. The sheer awareness of those things changes the way we think and changes the way we live. I hope this message will be like that. I want to help us become aware of some things that are going on around us—that are going on around you in your life right now. They are things we don't often think about or consider in the course of our everyday lives.

Let's first turn to Esther 2, starting in verse 19. I see three major section in these verses that we'll walk through together. In the first section, Esther 2:19-23, we see a heroic action that goes unnoticed.

*<sup>19</sup> Now when the virgins were gathered together the second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. <sup>20</sup> Esther had not made known her kindred or her people, as Mordecai had commanded her, for Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him. <sup>21</sup> In those days, as Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who*

*guarded the threshold, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. <sup>22</sup> And this came to the knowledge of Mordecai, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told the king in the name of Mordecai. <sup>23</sup> When the affair was investigated and found to be so, the men were both hanged on the gallows. And it was recorded in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.*

We learned last week that Esther was part of this harem and then became queen. We also learned that not much is said about the moral rightness or wrongness of that. There's no real comment made in the first two chapters about whether or not she should have agreed to this and whether or not she should have withheld her Jewish identity.

Yet this Jewish woman is now queen in this massive kingdom of Persia. Here we see the first hint that it's not an accident. There's divine purpose in Esther being queen at this time and in this place. We'll see that a lot more in the coming weeks, but here we get a hint of it. Because she's queen and close to the king, because she's connected to Mordecai who hears of this plot to kill the king, the king's life is saved and Mordecai's actions are recorded in a book in the presence of the king. But Mordecai's actions are quickly, although maybe not intentionally, forgotten by the king.

This leads to our second section, Esther 3:1-6, where we find the primary thing that happens in this narrative. We're introduced to a man named Haman, who we're told is an enemy of the Jews. In verse six we read that "*Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.*" How did we get here? A lot has happened, so let's rewind to Esther 3:1.

*<sup>1</sup> After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, and advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who were with him. <sup>2</sup> And all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage. <sup>3</sup> Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?" <sup>4</sup> And when they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's words would stand, for he had told them that he was a Jew.*

So while the king actually owes honor to Mordecai for the heroic action that saved his life, Mordecai gets overlooked as the king promotes another man whose name is Haman. By a command of the king, everyone has to bow down to Haman and everyone obeys that command except one man—Mordecai. We might think Mordecai isn't bowing down to Haman because it would undermine his exclusive worship of God or something spiritual like that. We think of bowing down as an act of worship. But I don't think that's what's going on here.

Bowing here is simply a sign of respect for an appointed official. It's more like saluting a ranking officer than worshiping a false idol. So what's going on here? Why isn't Mordecai paying his respects to Haman? That question is central and we'll answer it a little later. Notice that the text keeps mentioning that Mordecai is a Jew, so that has to be significant to the story. Let's keep reading:

*<sup>5</sup> And when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury. <sup>6</sup> But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.*

## **The Anger of Haman**

I want you to see the connection in these verses between anger on the one hand and destruction on the other. In verse five, Haman becomes "*filled with fury.*" The NIV translates this as "*enraged*" and the NASB says, "*filled with rage.*" Presumably he's filled with pride and insecurity which is often why people get angry. When something comes up against their pride and insecurity, this thing inside we call anger or fury or wrath wells up in them. This was the case for Haman.

We can also see the cause-effect connection. The furious anger of Haman, which is the cause, results in his wild response to Mordecai's refusal to honor him. Haman could have gone to Mordecai and talked to him. That might seem reasonable. "Hey, you're not bowing down to me. What's going on here?" Or he could have recommended him to the king. But look at what he chooses to do. This is crazy. He's decided to kill not only Mordecai, but also he plans to wipe out the entire Jewish race. The anger that is inside Haman to cause him to do this must have been totally extreme. He's seeking to wipe out an entire ethnicity.

So let's zoom in on our ourselves for a minute. Don't think the anger inside you will not have an effect at some point and in some way on the people around you. That's why people of influence who govern, manage and lead out of anger are very, very dangerous. But think about your own heart. Is the anger inside you being channeled and expressed in healthy or destructive ways? The Bible says, "Be angry, but don't sin" (Ephesians 4:26).

The third section is Esther 3:7-15, where Haman carries out his plan to destroy all the Jews by the roll of the dice. Verse seven states, "*In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur.*" Now, note that word. If you're someone who highlights things in your Bible, that would be a word to note. It comes up again in the climax of the story in the book of Esther.

*<sup>7</sup> They cast Pur (that is, they cast lots) before Haman day after day; and they cast it month after month till the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.*

*<sup>8</sup> Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king's laws, so that it is not to the king's profit to tolerate them. <sup>9</sup> If it please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay 10,000 talents of silver into the hands of those who have charge of the king's business, that they may put it into the king's treasuries." <sup>10</sup> So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. <sup>11</sup> And the king said to Haman, "The money is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you."*

So Haman makes his pitch, portraying the Jews as a rebellious, anti-authority, unprofitable and intolerable people. He confidently tells the king, "They're like a rock in your shoe at best and a threat to your kingdom at worst, so let's just kill them all." We need to do the work of putting ourselves in the shoes of this story. This is insane. This guy is trying to wipe out an entire race. Hasn't that happened other times in history?

This is crazy. He says, "Let's get rid of them." The king says, "Okay." The king struggles with no little hubris and insecurity himself, right? It's so clear here again that the king is a coward. He doesn't even seem like he has his own mind. He can't make any decisions for himself; he can't say no to anything that will boost his reputation and influence. So he tells Haman, "Go for it. Run with your plan."

*<sup>12</sup> Then the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and an edict, according to all that Haman commanded, was written to the king's satraps and to the governors over all the provinces and to the officials of all the peoples, to every province in its own script and every people in its own language. It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring. <sup>13</sup> Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with instruction to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.*

*<sup>14</sup> A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province by proclamation to all the peoples to be ready for that day. <sup>15</sup> The couriers went out hurriedly by order of the king, and the decree was issued in Susa the citadel. And the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was thrown into confusion.*

Can you imagine being a Jewish person in that day, hearing this edict and knowing that in 11 months to the day, you're going to die? This is like us on the day we go to the doctor, get that cancer diagnosis and are told, "You have three months left to live." We know that in three months,

we're going to die. Broaden that to an entire nation—in 11 months, they're all going to die. Imagine this—you, your spouse, your children will die; all your stuff will be plundered. And all this has flowed from the anger of Haman. What fear, trembling, confusion, terror and depression gripped the Jewish people. Meanwhile, Haman and the king sit down for a nice drink. It's like their consciences are totally hardened to the fact they're planning to wipe out a whole ethnicity.

After looking at this story, I want us to see now that the story of Haman and Mordecai is much bigger than just the two of them. We're going to do a little biblical history lesson here, but track with me, because there's a point to be made. In Esther 3:1, Haman is called an Agagite. Then in verse ten, he's called "*...the Agagite...the enemy of the Jews.*" Why is this repeated? Who was Agag?

If we know our Old Testament well, we remember that he was the king of the Amalekites. God commanded King Saul, the first king of Israel, to destroy Agag and all the Amalekites. We might ask, "Why would God command Saul to do that? Why was He insisting the Amalekites be destroyed?" In 1 Samuel 15:2 we read, "*Thus says the Lord of hosts, I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt.*" Saul was to kill King Agag and all the Amalekites because of what they did to the people of Israel a long time before, when Israel came out of Egypt.

Actually, to get the whole story, we need to rewind further to the story of when Israel came out of Egypt. In Exodus 17, the people of Israel have just left Egypt and are in the wilderness. They're at a point of weakness, so at that moment, Amalek came out to attack them. They were kicking them while they were down. They did that in a huge way. Exodus 17:14-16 talks states that God was not happy about this: "*Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.'... The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.*" This is like the Hatfields and the McCoys. This is generation upon generation upon generation of warring and battle and opposition.

## **The Anger of the World**

Here's the point I want to make from all of this: Haman, as a representative of the Amalekites, is a clear snapshot of the world's opposition to the people of God. Haman's attacks and anger toward Mordecai and the Jewish people is a snapshot of the whole world's opposition to you as a Christian. Think about how this theme comes up over and over again in Scripture. Right at the beginning, Cain was opposed to Abel, wanting him gone. Then all flesh was opposed to

Noah, wanting him gone. Then Pharaoh and the Egyptians, plus all the Amalekites, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians were opposed to the people of Israel, wanting them gone.

It's always been this way and it climaxes with Jesus, with the whole world wanting Him dead and gone. It is this Jesus Who said to His followers in John 15:18-19, *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."* Is Jesus exaggerating there? No, He's not. Listen. The world hates you. Do you believe that? He went on in verse 20, *"Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours."* Again I ask, is Jesus exaggerating or is it true that the world is really angry at us and really hates us?

I had to wrestle with this myself, because in the Bible we're also called to be salt and light, living peacefully (Matthew 5:13-16). Christians should be far and away the models in the world of what it means to live a sacrificial life. We should shine as a light in our communities and neighborhoods, and the world should be drawn to us because we're different in terms of our love for people. I fear we fall behind in that sometimes, but this is what we're called to as Christians.

Scripture says we're to be well thought of by unbelievers, especially for God's elect, whom He's going to save. They will be drawn toward Christians. They think, "Look at these Christians. They're different," then they're drawn to us as light. But at the same time and I think on an even deeper level, unbelievers are repelled by our allegiance to King Jesus. The fact that Jesus says, "You must come to Me and submit your life to Me," just rubs unbelievers the wrong way, because it strikes at a core conviction they hold, namely the kingdom of self that's deep in their hearts. They know we who are Christians make the profession that Jesus is Lord.

This results in opposition, so still in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the world is angry at us. Jesus' words are still true today. The type of anger the world has toward us is Hamanesque. They want to erase our influence and presence. Christopher Ash wrote a really wonderful commentary on the book of Esther and in it he says this:

You may or may not be facing physical or even life-threatening persecution, but even if it is simply the cold shoulder of exclusion from some "in group" at work or the curled lip of a sneer, at the heart of such reactions is the wish that you were not there, in your workplace, your neighborhood, your sports club, your music group, your family, and that life would be better and simpler if—to put it bluntly—you were dead.

That hatred may be softened by God's common grace of human kindness or blunted by the restraints of good laws, but it is there by nature in every unbelieving human heart and we need to be realistic about it. When I live for myself, it is easier and more comfortable for me to be surrounded by

others who live for themselves too, and I will be particularly offended by those who used to live like me but do so no longer. It is these people, the converts, whom I will most want to abuse.

Maybe you've experienced that. You've known someone you've had a friendship with, then you were saved and that person just has an antagonism toward you now. For some people, these angry thoughts of opposition are buried deep down and they never come up. But for others, it's very evident that they think and feel this way. Think about our brothers and sisters around the world who experience the threat of imprisonment and even death for the sake of Jesus. Think about the anger and hatred that is coming out of those who are doing the persecuting. They kill people because of Jesus. That anger is very real.

But in our quickly changing culture, we should expect that we're going to feel this anger more and more. Are you ready for that? Let's not be surprised by that. We should be prepared to stand for Christ, even if it means we're not going to be liked and we're going to be thought of as weird or hateful. That's a reality, but I want to go one step deeper, one step below the anger of the world.

## **The Anger of Satan**

I want to talk about the fact that the Bible says our battle is not against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:10-20). We don't fight anger with anger, and we don't fight back. Our call is to stand firm on the truth of the Bible and not to be shy about it. Yet we must do this lovingly and peacefully and with gentleness.

But if you had been there with Haman when he was sitting down with King Ahasuerus when they had that conversation and Haman was making his pitch to kill all the Jews, there would definitely been a felt darkness and oppression in that room. Maybe you've experienced something like that, some spiritual warfare, some satanic attack, where you've that felt darkness and oppression. You would have definitely felt that in the room with Haman and King Ahasuerus.

Think about what was going on at that point. Satan was at work in and through Haman. You see, underneath and behind the anger of the world is another ancient and ongoing opposition. It's the hatred that comes from the unseen spiritual world and it's real. It's not fake. This is from principalities and powers that are not of this world, but from Satan and demons (Ephesians 6:12). This is real. As Halloween approaches and all the ghosts and goblins and skeletons start to emerge, it gives us the sense that our culture is fascinated with the dark side. But at the same time, there is an increasing unbelief about the spiritual world. It's all just fun and games, right?

The reality is we Christians have a real enemy who is seeking to destroy us (1 Peter 5:6-10). He's not a guy dressed up in a costume holding a pitchfork; he's our ancient, unseen, terrible enemy. He's angry at you. Satan is angry at you today. He hates you and wants to destroy you. That's real. This is not make believe. This is not mythology. This is reality. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Satan exists and wants you destroyed. He wants your life to be chaos. We need to become aware of this. We need to know this is a reality. If we flip all the way back to Genesis 3, it starts there. It talks about how the seed of the woman will be in enmity against the serpent.

So there's this ongoing battle throughout all of human history between those who are faithful to God and Satan. Sometimes Satan's tactic is to very overtly and forcefully destroy, literally killing believers as we see in Esther's day. We also see this pattern in the book of Revelation, where again and again Satan is almost delighting in shedding blood of people.

We see it throughout history and especially today, when our brothers and sisters around the world are being killed for the sake of Christ. So don't think that leaders, presidents, dictators and rulers around the world who are persecuting Christians are doing so purely on their own initiative. There is something more going on. Satan is behind every world leader who is spilling the blood of the martyrs.

But here in the United States I think Satan often uses a different, even opposite, tactic. Track with me here. I believe what Satan does in many of our lives is he actually tries to convince us that he doesn't exist and that this world is all there is. He lulls us into spiritual sleep, so we walk through life, not like we're in a battle, but rather sleepily. We slowly compromise more and more as we get older and older, until the sad day of our death, maybe leaving behind a life of mediocrity and secret sin. Satan is so involved in that. So let's be aware of Satan's tactics and schemes. Let's wake up, if we need to do that.

I think in our circles of Christian churches, we sometimes give too little credit to the activity of Satan in our lives; for the darkness and chaos and temptation in our lives. He is at work in that. Now, we don't attribute every bad thing that happens to Satan. We're culpable when we sin and even sometimes when we suffer, but Satan is real and at work, even in our lives.

So think about your life. Where is Satan active in your life? Where is Satan trying to tempt you, deceive you, harass you? How do you need to resist the devil so he will flee from you (James 4:7)? See, this should motivate your life fully for Jesus. Satan came to steal, kill and destroy, but Jesus came that we would have life (John 10:10). There's this very real tug, isn't there?, between life and giving ourselves to Jesus versus opening ourselves up to the one who steals, kills and destroys. I just want to warn you today, do not open yourself up to Satan. He will ruin your life. If

you have gone down that road some, Jesus can save you and rescue. If you're in a downward spiral, He is a great Savior and He gives life. So follow Him and live fully for Him today.

## The Anger of God

The book of Esther helps us see the anger of Haman, the anger of the world and the anger of Satan. But if we read between the lines, there's Someone else Who's angry. As we think about the book of Esther, we might wonder what God has to do with all of this. If you're just kind of observing all these terrible things that are going on and are indifferent, uncaring, uninvolved or inactive, you need to ask what is God's role in all of this?

I think Esther 3:12 gives us a hint. Look again at verse 12: *"Then the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month."* When we hear that date, it might ring a bell. Think about the book of Exodus. It was actually the day before the Passover lamb was to be killed. One commentator notes, "That memorial celebration, the Passover, with its rehearsal of God's deliverance from Pharaoh, could scarcely fail to provoke the question among the Jews: can our God not save us in an equally decisive way from death under Ahasuerus?"

Imagine being a Jewish person in that day and you get the news that in 11 months you're going to be killed. And you get this news on the day before the Passover lamb is to be killed. "So tomorrow we're going to kill the Passover lamb." You're thinking, "God saved us from death in Egypt; maybe He will do it again." What happened in Egypt? God poured out His wrath, killing the firstborn of every Egyptian. This is God's anger on display. It's a difficult topic, but it's one that's in the Bible. God has anger which is actually good news for the Jewish people in the book of Esther.

Let's think about the anger of God. God's anger is patient in that He never flies off the handle like we sometimes do. We sometimes do things that are disproportionate to the wrong done. But God's anger is patient. It's His settled opposition to evil in all its forms and its effects take place at exactly the right time. Often God waits a long time for people to repent. Think about how patient He is and how His anger is always in exactly the right proportion to the offense.

We've sinned against God and that's a really big deal. The fact that eternity in hell is the consequence of that isn't a disproportionately angry response. No, it's exactly what our sin deserves. It's exactly how God should respond if He's a just God—and He is. His anger comes because He is truly offended by our sin. He's seriously opposed to evil and has a justly wrath-filled heart against wickedness and sin. This includes the great injustices of the world, to which we say, "Yes, God! In Your anger, bring all wrongs to right." But it also includes the sin, injustice and perversion in our own hearts. God is angry at these as well.

Humanity's wickedness, along with each individual's sin and rebellion against God, evokes the anger of God. As a result, the greatest threat to our lives is not the anger of the world or the anger of Satan—it is the anger of God. But guess what? That anger is gone for those of you who are Christians. On the cross, Jesus absorbed the full weight of God's anger that should have been directed against us. We don't have to earn God's love. We can't buy it from Him. We don't have to work hard to achieve it. God gives us the gift of eternal life by His grace (Romans 6:23).

So for you who are believers, there is no more condemnation (Romans 8:1). Isn't that good news? I mean, shouldn't we walk out of here thankful and joyful? The greatest threat to our lives—especially on the day of our death—is the anger of God. But it has been totally removed from us because of the sheer love and mercy and kindness of Jesus. Let's worship Him. He's so great! He is worthy of our thankfulness and worship. But we also need to resist the devil, knowing he will flee from us. Let's share these truths with a world in great need of King Jesus even this week.

Let's pray together.

Lord, we thank You that You have saved us from all of our greatest enemies, from the enemy of sin, from the enemy Satan. You even rescue us from the world that would seek to undermine and oppose us. You've saved us from the greatest threat to our lives, which is Your own wrath and anger. Instead, in Your great love for us, You sent Your Son Jesus to die in our place. We thank You and we rest in that. We want to leave here resting and rejoicing in all You've done for us. Help us in that, Lord, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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