

Resentment, the poison of the soul

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A few years ago, I decided that I wanted to buy a small accordion that I could play at the prison. I bid on a beautiful Italian accordion online and within a few days, it arrived. As I prepared to play it, I realized that something terrible was wrong. The music would not come as I fingered the keyboard and pulled on the billows. The instrument looked perfect but the notes barely made a sound. The repairman told me that the instrument apparently had been stored in a damp area for rust had corroded the inward parts of it. It is in my basement and is worthless to me. It was made to bring joy and happiness to listeners with beautiful melodies. Yet someone abused it and didn't place value on it so it became tainted and though it retains the outside beauty, the inside has destroyed its song. I have seen the results of bitterness in lives of people and it also destroys the song within the hearts of those who let it fester in their memories and thoughts.

A man I knew was full of rage and bitterness and when I tried to talk to him about God, anger would cross his face and he would let me know in no uncertain terms that he was not interested. I asked him one day what his goal in life was. He replied, "My only wish is that I can outlive my mother-in-law." That was it! I was taken back and answered him, "That is all you want in life, really?" He looked right at me and said, "That is the truth!" The sad ending of the story is that he outlived the woman by one year, but he was in such poor health that he was mostly bed ridden, was in constant pain and had to have dialysis 3 times a week until he died.

I'm sure that we all have known people who are hard to please, difficult to get along with and who surround themselves with a "Woe is me" attitude. They look behind them and dwell on the negative aspects of their lives and refuse to move forward into the light of love. They are angry at the world and resent those who are smiling and are surrounded with laughter and joy and have many friends. They dwell in the mullygrubs of life and shut off the music, the singing, and the joy of hearing children at play. Every day is the same to them and they refuse to accept help to rise above the darkness of their existence. Throughout the Bible, there are many examples of people who allowed the emotions of bitterness, anger and hate to control their lives and the destructive elements caused great harm to not only themselves but others around them.

I would like to take you through a man's life named Haman in the Book of Esther.

The story takes place in a capital city named Susa, located east of Babylon where the Persian King Xerxes had his winter home. King Xerxes ruled over 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia. He had ruled for 3 years when he gave a big dinner for all his officials and officers. Governors and leaders of the provinces were invited and even the commanders of the Persian and Median armies came. The celebration lasted for 180 days while the king showed off his wealth and spent lots of money in order to impress everyone with the greatness of his kingdom. Following this, the king sent an invitation out for

everyone in the City of Susa to come to a dinner that he had prepared and that lasted for 7 days. While the king entertained the men in the courtyard, Queen Vashti entertained the women inside the royal palace. A problem arose on the 7th day when the king was full of wine and felt happy. He ordered the queen, through servants, to put on her crown with her beautiful dress and come outside so he could show off her beauty. However, the queen refused to comply with the request and because of that, she was stripped of her title and a new queen was selected. A Jewish girl, named Esther was chosen to replace Queen Vashti. Esther had been orphaned at a young age and her Uncle Mordecai raised her as his daughter. He had told her not to tell anyone that she was a Jew, for there were people who hated the Jews within the kingdom of Xerxes. Mordecai was a palace official and he uncovered a scheme where two men planned on killing the king. Mordecai relayed their plans to Queen Esther and the king found out that the report was true and the two men were hanged. The king recorded the event in his book of records.

Later the king promoted Haman to the highest position in his kingdom. He was a descendent of Agag, a ruler who many years before hated the Jews. 1 Samuel 15:1-33. King Xerxes honored Haman by commanding that all officials in his kingdom should kneel before Haman when he was in their presence. Everyone obeyed except for Mordecai who refused because he was a Jew. Others made Haman aware of it and were curious of the outcome. Haman was furious that Mordecai would not kneel before him. When he learned that Mordecai was a Jew, he felt that killing just Mordecai was not enough; he wanted to kill all the Jews. The king had now been on the throne for 12 years when this took place. Haman cast lots to find out when the best time would be to approach the king of his plan. The time chosen was between mid-February to mid-March. Then Haman went to the king reporting people within his kingdom that would not obey his laws and had customs different from everyone else. They lived separate from others and the king would be better off if they were killed and he would get lots of silver for the treasury. The king handed his official ring to Haman, who hated the Jews, and said "Do what you want with those people! You can keep the money."

Haman had secretaries write letters in the name of the king and sealed by using the king's own ring. The letters were taken by messengers to every part of the kingdom and distributed. The letters said that on the given day all Jewish men, women and children were to be killed and their property seized. The same letter was posted throughout the city and then Haman and the king sat down to enjoy a drink together.

Mordecai, upon hearing the news put on mourning clothes of sackcloth and covered his head with ashes and went through the city crying and weeping. Sackcloth was not allowed in the palace so when the queen heard about the behavior of her uncle, she sent a servant to find out what was troubling Mordecai. He explained the situation to the servant and the fact that the king was going to have silver added to his treasury once the Jews were killed, and asked him to have Esther go to the king and beg for her people. When the

servant reported to Esther what Mordecai had requested, she replied that the law said that a queen couldn't go before the king without being summoned. Should she go before the king uninvited, she would be put to death unless he held out a golden scepter to her. She wasn't sure when she would be able to speak with the king. Mordecai sent word to her that she would not be spared because she lived in the palace. If she refused to do something to save the Jews, help would come from another source but she and her family would be killed. He told her that God may have placed her in the palace just for this purpose, to save his people from death. Esther answered that all Jews must support her by going without food for three days asking for God's intervention for them. After that she would go before the king. Mordecai did as Esther had asked and when the king saw her he was happy and he held out the gold scepter to her. As she touched the tip of the scepter the king asked her what brought her to the throne. She was told that she could have as much as half his kingdom should that be her desire. She only asked that he and Haman come to a dinner that she was going to prepare later that day. The king arranged for Haman to be at that dinner later that day. As they were eating dinner, the king asked again, "What can I do for you? I will give you up to half my kingdom if you just ask."

The queen once again asked that the king if he really cared for her and was willing to do what she desired, she requested that the king and Haman would again come to a dinner that she prepared and she would tell him her request at that time.

Haman was feeling great when he left the palace. But when he saw Mordecai at the palace gate, he noticed that Mordecai didn't show him any respect by standing or bowing to him. Haman was very angry but said nothing. When he got home he called together all his friends and his wife Zeresh and began to brag about being invited to dine with the king and queen and there was to be another dinner for him to attend the following day. He boasted about how all the officials had bowed before him and how much honor the king had bestowed upon him. Besides all that he had been the only one other than the king to be invited to the queen's dinner. He added, "None of this makes me happy as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the palace gate."

His wife and friends encouraged him to build a tower about 75 feet high and ask the king the following day if you can hang Mordecai on that. Then later he would enjoy the dinner with the king and queen. That seemed like a great idea to Haman and he immediately had the tower built.

That night the king couldn't sleep. He had a servant read to him from his book of records. When the servant read about Mordecai saving the king's life, he asked "What was done to reward Mordecai for this?" The answer was "Nothing". Just then Haman was seen entering for he was anxious to ask the king to hang Mordecai on the tower that he had built. The king saw him and asked, "Who is that man waiting in front of the throne room?" The king's servant answered, "It is Haman, your Majesty." The king asked him to

bring Haman in. Once in the room the king asked, "What should I do for a man I want to honor?"

Since Haman was so full of himself, he thought the king was talking about honoring him in bigger ways than what had already been done for him so he suggested that a high official should place one of the king's robe on the man, place him on the king's horse with a fancy headdress and then lead him through the streets shouting, "This is how the king honors a man." The king was pleased and commanded Haman to hurry and do all of that for Mordecai. He was to get the robe and the horse for Mordecai the Jew, who was on duty at the palace and he was not to forget a thing. Haman got the king's robe and put it on Mordecai. He led him through the city on the horse and shouted as he went, "This is how the king honors a man." Afterwards, Mordecai returned to his duties at the palace and Haman hid his face in shame as he headed home. He told his wife and friends what had taken place. His wife said, "If Mordecai is a Jew, this is just the beginning of your troubles. You will end up a ruined man." They were still discussing it when the king's servants came and quickly took Haman to the dinner that Esther had prepared.

During the meal with the queen, King Xerxes asked again, "Esther, what can I do for you? Just ask, and I will give you as much as half my kingdom."

The queen explained that her people were going to be killed and she asked the king to spare their lives. Haman wanted to kill all the Jews and had permission from the king to do so. The king was so angry that he left the table and went outside in the garden. Haman realized that his life was in danger, and he begged Esther for mercy. He got down on his knees to beg, and the king entered and accused him of trying to harm the queen. Servants came in and told the king that Haman had built a tower to hang Mordecai on and he had been the one to save the king's life. The king ordered Haman to be hung on that very tower that he had built for Mordecai. Esther was given all that Haman possessed and Mordecai was given the position of the highest official that Haman had held. He was given the royal ring that Haman had worn. Esther put Mordecai in charge of Haman's property. A letter was sent out stating that the Jews had a right to defend themselves against any enemy that would try to destroy them. The Jews were jubilant and held parties to celebrate. Many people converted to the Jewish religion because they realized that God was with them. On the assigned day, the Jews defended themselves against their enemies and because Haman was the worst enemy, his 10 sons were among those that were killed. The Jews were victorious over their enemies yet they didn't claim any of the goods that were obtained by the battles.

Mordecai used his position to help his people and was a wise and good leader of the Jews. The king listened to him on the behalf of his people and he remained the highest official next to the king. Those who wish harm on others will reap the rewards of ruin.

Bitterness clouds the soul from enjoying the blessings and success that come our way and it always has severe consequences. It passes down from one generation to another.