

The God-given Solution - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **Esther 6:1-14** (#477)

Introduction: Sleeplessness. Insomnia. Whatever you may call it, articles that I'm reading in the news speak to how many of us are struggling with getting a good night's sleep – whether that's just something temporary, something that began with the stress and changes of Coronavirus; or – for some – it has been a constant battle even before the whole world was turned upside down.

If you're like me, it's hard to deal with sleeplessness. Your toss and turn. You do everything you can think of to try and relax so that you can fall back asleep. Yet, your mind seems to only want to speed up. You think through conversations you've had or need to have; your mind seems to gravitate towards problems you've tried to solve and failed – or need to solve and don't think you will. Then you remember **Psalm 127**, where we read that God “gives to his beloved sleep,” and you start to wonder if you've somehow sinned and need to repent. Frankly, sleeplessness nights seem wasted, haunting, and pointless.

How refresh it will be, then, for you and I to read of one sleepless night that isn't a waste! One night without rest that will actually result in good. Might it be that seeing the mighty work of the Lord through King Ahasuerus' sleepless night could remind us that God is just as sovereign over our own rest? And for those of you who have no trouble sleeping, who fall asleep and awaken refreshed and ready to jump out of bed after a solid 8 hours' rest just like Tigger the Tiger, perhaps today will be a reminder that the Lord is at work even through the simple, mundane, and un-noticed parts of our lives. Wherever you personally sit this morning, join me in **Esther 6** and let's look to the Word of the Lord...

6:1-3 A God-given insomnia. King Ahasuerus wasn't sleeping well. By all rights, he should be sleeping like a baby – after all, his problems are being solved left and right. His disobedient queen? Replaced by Esther, who is the model of respect. Those troublesome people in his kingdom? Why, his good servant Haman has come up with a plan to deal with them. His desire for good food and drink? Well, once again, Esther has risen to the task with her wonderful banquet. And there's a

second banquet yet to come! What could keep the king awake on a night like this? I think it would be hard to argue for anything less than the Lord's plan to use this sleepless night to bring about the very salvation of His people. But I'm getting ahead of the story...

Ahasuerus' decides that tossing and turning is getting him nowhere, so he orders that the Book of Memorable Deeds be brought in and read to him. Oh what a picture this is! I love the imagery of the king – like a small child – needing to be read to sleep. And, even better: the bedtime story is the Book of “Memorable” deeds! It must have been a dry book indeed if he thought it would put him to sleep. But, one more irony: apparently the deeds aren't so memorable after all, because the king only now finds out that Mordecai hasn't been honored for his work in protecting the king from a coup. Memorable indeed!

So the king asks his servants “whatever happened to Mordecai? Did we honor him appropriately?” And you know the reply: no, nothing was done for him. That sets up the tension of this entire chapter. Do you recall that one of our applications last week was to not insist on being noticed, being rewarded, when you have been overlooked? How we mentioned that not being remembered wasn't always a bad thing? Here, in just a moment, we will see why that is. But let me make one point before moving on: the ironies of the king forgetting who saved his life, the apparently very boring – and unmemorable – Book of Memorable Deeds: these funny events may apply to one king, an earthly king who is sinful and forgetful like us, but they don't apply to our True King. The God whom we serve, **Psalm 121** describes, “will neither slumber nor sleep.” He hasn't forgotten. Nothing happens that goes unnoticed by Him. Our God does not forget His own people. Quite the contrary: Paul writes to Timothy in **2 Timothy 2** that “The Lord knows those who are his.” And He also well knows who His enemies are! Similarly, as we recently read in **John 10**, Jesus taught: “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me...” The Lord doesn't forget. He doesn't overlook. While Mordecai or Esther would have been forgiven for thinking so, I want you to notice that nowhere in this story do they act as if their troubled circumstances lead to a lack of faith. That is good and strong medicine for you and I also: God knows you. He

knows where you stand and what you need. Clues in this book tell us that it has been close to four years since Mordecai warned the king about the plot against him. Four years in which Mordecai has been unrewarded and, in fact, he and his people are now in peril. But God is not absent. He is at work, even if His timeline is different from yours or mine.

Now, let's see Him at work in the next verses...

6:4-11 God-given honor. At this point we have a little detective work to do. At the end of **chapter 5**, we read how Haman planned to go to the king in the morning with his plan to hang Mordecai. I should also point out that the king doesn't know which people Haman has been planning to persecute all this time – he never identified them as the Jews back in **chapter 3** (and apparently, the king didn't care to read the proclamation that Haman made), which explains why the king has no issue with looking to honor “Mordecai the Jew.” As we continue our story, what follows seems to happen early in the morning. The king providentially can't sleep. Haman is so eager to deal with Mordecai that he shows up at the palace early...

As he often does, Ahasuerus asks for advice – a trend that we've seen from him all throughout this book. “What should be done for the man that the king delights to honor?” I love where Haman takes this – we had a bit of foreshadowing in the last chapter, didn't we? Haman can only think of himself, and so he believes that the king must be looking for a not-so-subtle way to honor him. Brothers and sisters: be warned! We know from the **Proverbs** that this attitude of Haman's, this self-centeredness, this complete lack of humility – which also equates to a complete lack of faith in the Lord – will not prevail. It will not go unnoticed! Haman sets a trap for himself... he authors his own downfall.

Yet, in Haman's mind, this is the opportunity to go big! So he counsels that the one honored by the king should wear the king's own royal robes, and ride around on his own horse. What's more, one of the king's officials is to go and personally dress this favored person, who will then be led through the city, accompanied by the proclamation to everyone who hears and sees how much this person is

favored by the king! Truly, they will be in the limelight! Yes, what a wonderful daydream this is. You can sense Haman already placing himself right in the center of everything that matters...

...and then reality hits. The king is delighted with this idea, and so tells Haman to go and make it all true... for Mordecai! What a reversal! Not only is Mordecai to be honored far beyond anything that Haman has experienced, but the way that he will get such glory is through Haman's ideas – and from Haman's own hand!

Friends, we live in a world where pride is often rewarded. Those who yell the loudest, who throw their weight around, who put themselves first – they are the ones who get the raise, the job, the date, the reward. But it hasn't always been that way. And, the Scriptures tell us, it won't always be, either. It may seem as if pride and "looking out for #1" is the only way to get through this life, but Jesus did the exact opposite. He came not to be served, but to serve. Though Jesus deserves for everyone to hold Him up and look at how wonderful and amazing He is, instead we find Him teaching small groups of people, in places that were often far from the important big cities, and building disciples who all too often weren't the rich, the powerful, the influencers, or the beautiful. Take care: pride will lead to your downfall. It is a deadly poison, utterly un-Christ-like, and whatever victories it offers in this life are only temporary, small, and unsatisfying.

How, then, can we combat pride in a world filled with selfies, a world that prizes building your own "personal brand," one which measures everybody by their looks and their success? By keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus, not the "likes" you receive in your Facebook feed. By crying out to Him to make you humble, so that you would fear God more than man – more than you fear not being thought well of in this world. Eternal joy awaits – aim at that rather than at what won't last.

6:12-14 We've seen God-given insomnia, then – ironically – God-given honor. Let's close with God-given shame. Much like we saw back in **Esther 5**, Haman returns home. His attitude was mixed then, it's terrible now. Whereas before, at least he saw some sort of honor and respect coming his way, now all he has to

report to his wife and so-called friends is how low he has been brought – and in such a short amount of time, too!

Mordecai returns to the gate – perhaps he once more wears the clothes of mourning, keep up his spiritual vigil for the people of God. Haman joins Mordecai in mourning, but from the opposite angle. He returns to his wife and friends and relates everything that has happened. I'm not sure if his "wise men" are meant to be read the same as his friends, but whether it is or not, we find them joining his wife with more bad news: they believe – even seem to prophesy – that Haman will fall before Mordecai. Talk about a change: these same folks were encouraging Haman to plot against Mordecai only the day before. Now even they have turned against Haman. Perhaps they speak more wisely than they know, because – in fact – Haman will fall and Mordecai will rise as the book continues. Then again, perhaps they are like windsocks – simply blowing whichever way is convenient and popular depending upon the winds. In either case, notice something important: the wicked are abandoned and consumed by their sin.

I find it strange that wickedness is always portrayed as fun in our culture. Think of movies, which seem to show how cool it is to be unfaithful to your spouse. Or of social media, which will pile on the "likes" if you call yourself homosexual, but couldn't care less about you otherwise. Or what about books, which make dishonesty seem wise – even a savvy way to get what you want. Our culture truly loves – even relishes – breaking God's laws. The reality promised is that you, too, will be cool, with it, and an influencer. The truth is, instead, what we will see of Haman's life from this point forward: you will have no real friends, no loyal ones who will suffer with you. Your closest relationships will be empty and unfulfilling. Your joy will be gone and your happiness fleeting. The wages of sin truly is death.

So, if that is your path, then turn – repent today! Find life, not death. Look to Christ, not the grave. This is true for all of us: we are daily called to look to Him, to get our significance, our happiness, our joy, from Jesus. For when we do, then we can take comfort that we are noticed, and cared for – now and forever – by our Lord.