

The God Who Delivers from Death

The Hidden Hand of God: A Study of Esther #5 - Speaker Mike Laramie - May 24, 2026 - Esther 8:1-9:19

INTRO: Good morning church! We're continuing our 6-week sermon series entitled: THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD: A Study of Esther. I am happy to be here, filling in for Pastor Gary, who is visiting and encouraging one of the churches we have been supporting through the Mercy Hill collective, Living Stone Church.

In previous chapters, we saw that even when God is not mentioned, He is not missing. God positioned Esther as queen for a purpose she did not yet understand. We saw the crisis unfold as Haman's hatred toward Mordecai turned into a genocidal decree against the Jewish people. Faced with fear and uncertainty, Esther chose courage, calling for prayer and stepping forward in faith. Then God turned the tables on Haman's wicked plans and Haman himself was destroyed by his own gallows.

Now as we come to Esther 8–9, the enemy Haman is dead, but the danger is not. The decree still stands. Across the Persian empire, the people of God are living with the shadow of an appointed day of death hanging over them.

And providentially, we gather on Memorial Day weekend. A time when our nation remembers those who paid the ultimate price so others could live in freedom. As we look upon this **image of Normandy Cemetery**, we are reminded that death is not an abstract idea. It is costly. It is painful. It leaves empty seats and grieving hearts. Yet we also recognize that sacrifice and deliverance often stand side by side.



That tension lives in this passage. Esther 8–9 forces us to look at both the threat of death against God's people and the judgment that falls on those who sought their ruin. And above it all stands a faithful God who refuses to abandon His covenant people.

Need: Every person in this room knows what it feels like to live under the shadow of something threatening us. Maybe not a royal decree, but something that hangs over your life and keeps whispering fear into your heart: an uncertain diagnosis, a broken relationship, financial pressure, anxiety about the future, guilt from the past, or even the reality that death itself is coming for all of us someday. Sometimes the enemy may be defeated, yet the effects of the battle still linger. Can God still be trusted when the threat is still on the calendar?

Trans: This text answers with a resounding yes. It shows us that our God is not only powerful enough to expose the enemy—He is faithful enough to carry His people all the way through the danger.

BODY: In Esther 8–9, the author described how God providentially delivered His people from death by positioning His servants to issue a new decree that enabled the Jews to overcome their enemies and survive Haman's irrevocable edict. We can see how God continues to deliver us from death by issuing a new decree and overcoming our enemies. How does God providentially deliver us from death? The text gives three ways that God providentially delivers His people from death.

Read text: Esther 8:1-9:19 (ESV) 8:1 On that day King Ahasuerus gave to Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told what he was to her. 2 And the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman. 3 Then Esther spoke again to the king. She fell at his feet and wept and pleaded with him to avert the evil plan of Haman the Agagite and the plot that he had devised against the Jews. 4 When the king held out the golden scepter to Esther, Esther rose and stood before the king. 5 And she said, "If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and if the thing seems right before the king, and I am pleasing in his eyes, let an order be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the provinces of the king. 6 For how can I bear to see the calamity that is coming to my people? Or how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred?" 7 Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "Behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows, because he intended to lay hands on the Jews. 8 But you may write as you please with regard to the Jews, in the name of the king, and seal it with the king's ring, for an edict written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's ring cannot be revoked." 9 The king's scribes were summoned at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day. And an edict was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded concerning the Jews, to the satraps and the governors and the officials of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, 127 provinces, to each province in its own script and to each people in its own language, and also to the Jews in their script and their language. 10 And he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed it with the king's signet ring. Then he sent the letters by mounted couriers riding on swift horses that were used in the king's service, bred from the royal stud, 11 saying that the king allowed the Jews who were in every city to gather and defend their lives, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, children and women included, and to plunder their goods, 12 on one day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. 13 A copy of what was written was to be issued as a decree in every province, being publicly displayed to all peoples, and the Jews were to be ready on that day to take vengeance on their enemies. 14 So the couriers, mounted on their swift horses that were used in the king's service, rode out hurriedly, urged by the king's command. And the decree was issued in Susa the citadel. 15 Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white, with a great golden crown and a robe of fine linen and purple, and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced. 16 The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor. 17 And in every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and his edict reached, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews, for fear of the Jews had fallen on them. 9:1 Now in the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the

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king's command and edict were about to be carried out, on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, the reverse occurred: the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them. ² The Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could stand against them, for the fear of them had fallen on all peoples. ³ All the officials of the provinces and the satraps and the governors and the royal agents also helped the Jews, for the fear of Mordecai had fallen on them. ⁴ For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces, for the man Mordecai grew more and more powerful. ⁵ The Jews struck all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and did as they pleased to those who hated them. ⁶ In Susa the citadel itself the Jews killed and destroyed 500 men, ⁷ and also killed Parshandatha and Dalphon and Aspatha ⁸ and Poratha and Adalia and Aridatha ⁹ and Parmashta and Arisai and Aridai and Vaizatha, ¹⁰ the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews, but they laid no hand on the plunder. ¹¹ That very day the number of those killed in Susa the citadel was reported to the king. ¹² And the king said to Queen Esther, "In Susa the citadel the Jews have killed and destroyed 500 men and also the ten sons of Haman. What then have they done in the rest of the king's provinces! Now what is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what further is your request? It shall be fulfilled." ¹³ And Esther said, "If it please the king, let the Jews who are in Susa be allowed tomorrow also to do according to this day's edict. And let the ten sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows." ¹⁴ So the king commanded this to be done. A decree was issued in Susa, and the ten sons of Haman were hanged. ¹⁵ The Jews who were in Susa gathered also on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and they killed 300 men in Susa, but they laid no hands on the plunder. ¹⁶ Now the rest of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also gathered to defend their lives, and got relief from their enemies and killed 75,000 of those who hated them, but they laid no hands on the plunder. ¹⁷ This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth day they rested and made that a day of feasting and gladness. ¹⁸ But the Jews who were in Susa gathered on the thirteenth day and on the fourteenth, and rested on the fifteenth day, making that a day of feasting and gladness. ¹⁹ Therefore the Jews of the villages, who live in the rural towns, hold the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a day for gladness and feasting, as a holiday, and as a day on which they send gifts of food to one another.

HOW GOD PROVIDENTIALLY DELIVERS HIS PEOPLE FROM DEATH:

1. God preserves His people from destruction.

EXP: (8:1-14) Chapter 8 opens with a reminder that although Haman is dead, the death decree he wrote remains. So God positioned and empowered Esther and Mordecai to write a new "life" decree.

"King Ahasuerus gave to Queen Esther the house of Haman" (1) - The king had Haman executed because of his plot against the queen (though Haman didn't know) and now gives the wealth of Haman to the house of Esther. Esther then sets Mordecai over this household (3).

"King took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai." (2) - Haman had been carrying the signet ring, so this 2nd in command is a really prominent role. Mordecai was promoted to a significant position.

"Esther spoke again to the king ... let an order be written to revoke the letters" (3-5) - Although Esther and Mordecai had been saved from the plot of Haman, the rest of the Jews in the provinces were still in danger. Esther now appeals for them in the same way before the king.

"King Ahasuerus said ... you may write as you please ... an edict cannot be revoked" (7-8) - So here is some insight into Persian law. When a decree goes out from the king sealed by his hand, it cannot be revoked. So the only way to deal with this calamity is to write another sealed decree.

"Third month" (9) - The new decree that Mordecai sent out is nearly 9 months in advance. As we studied previously: Herodotus explained that mounted couriers were stationed at intervals along the Royal Road, allowing messages to travel with extraordinary speed across the empire. Scholars often note that messages could move from Susa to Sardis (roughly 1,500–1,700 miles) in about a week or two by relay riders. There was plenty of time for preparation to defend themselves.

"Mordecai ... wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus ... the Jews ... defend their lives" (10-11) - So the new decree carries the same kingly weight and allows the Jews to fight back.

"To destroy, to kill, and to annihilate" (11) - This is the same language used in the decree that went out from Haman, no doubt to justly reverse that wicked decree.

ARG: First of all, if the Jews perish in Esther, the promises perish with them. But God always preserves His people because God always keeps His promises.

Genesis 12:3 (ESV) I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

More importantly, this passage in Esther is pointing to a larger point. God has made a just decree against man's sin that cannot be undone, but He writes a new decree to save mankind:

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Romans 3:23 (ESV) For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 6:23 (ESV) For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ILL: Humanity stands under the irreversible sentence of sin. God does not simply pretend justice never existed. Instead, through Christ, He issues a greater word of salvation that satisfies justice while delivering His people. Picture this: God is judge and sits behind His great and holy bench. When you and I (the accused) stand before Him, He slams the gavel down with the word, “Guilty” and rightfully so. But then steps down from His seat and walks to our side and declares, “Paid in full.”

APP: Friend, you and I have come into this life as sinners and remain so. The death decree (like that of Haman) is upon us and in our case it is justly so. But dear friend, a new decree has gone out. The Son of God has died the death prescribed by the first decree and whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. Which decree do you sit under? Have you made your defense under the 2nd decree?

2. God encourages His people to stand.

EXP: (8:15-9:10) So now it comes to the dreaded day and the surprising happens. God protects His people by strengthening them for battle not the miraculous. They simply gained “mastery” the Bible says. So the victory comes not by parting seas, blowing trumpets, or divine pestilence, but simple courage. When God delivers His people He gives them courage to stand and fight.

“Mordecai...went out in royal robes...a crown...fine linen and purple” (15) - Mordecai is clothed with power granted from the king, much like the previous parade Haman was compelled to provide. When Mordecai appears in public so adorned, the entire city celebrates, not just the Jews. Perhaps the citizens celebrated, recognizing the evil Haman has been replaced by a righteous successor.

This seems a bit backward at first glance. Why is Mordecai essentially having another parade and celebration months ahead of their eventual deliverance? Wouldn't you normally schedule your victory parade after winning the battle? In this instance, Mordecai was so confident that the Jews would be delivered that he celebrated publicly before it even happened. This confidence was encouraging to the Jews in the Persian empire, and was convincing to other people groups in the empire.

“The Jews had light and gladness and honor”, “in every province”, “a feast and a holiday” (16,17) - the people not only celebrated, but they were held in honor, as compared to the contempt with which they had previously experienced. Contrast this to the response to the previous decree - weeping and sackcloth. The Jews in the provinces now had the courage that came from the support of the king - so much so that many people declared themselves Jews, to identify with a (soon to be) winning team.

Consider the gospel foreshadowing in play here - an evil plan is thwarted; Mordecai is destined to pay with his life, but he is given a new destiny by the king, given new garments. We too, were destined for death; all have sinned and deserve death (Rom 3:23, 6:23), but our punishment was given to another, and we were given garments of righteousness.

“In the twelfth month, ... on the thirteenth day” (9:1) - the appointed day arrives. The Jews have had months to prepare - presumably militarily, but also politically, and hopefully, spiritually. The text doesn't say. By some estimates, the Jewish population may have been as much as 20% of the Persian empire. Sizable, but still very much an outnumbered minority. But on that day, the Jews **“gained mastery”** over their adversaries - שָׁלַטַּת (*shalat*, shaw-lat') - to dominate, have mastery, be master, lord it over. The Jews completely dominated this fight. The text does not tell us how many Jews died in their own defense, but it does tell us that 75,000 of their enemies fell throughout Persia.

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This brings up a troubling question, brought up by atheists and new Christians alike: why does God condone violence in the OT? Is God genocidal? This is a difficult question, and one we could spend a long time discussing, but I'll offer a thoughtful response:

For me, reading the Old Testament through the lens of the cross reveals a God who is anti-violent, rather than non-violent. It is not in his nature to destroy, but to redeem. He is not bloodthirsty like the Canaanite gods, but nor will he sit passively while evil takes over his world. God does not delight in the death of the wicked, but he is not above getting his hands dirty to win back his world. When he uses force it is as a last resort, a measured response to restrain wickedness. He destroys only ever with tears in his eyes, and with a view to future salvation. - Andy Judd, *The Gospel Coalition*

Another point we need to make is this: while in this passage, God's people are delivered from a physical threat in their time, God does not always respond with a direct deliverance in this lifetime. Consider the Jews of Jesus' time, who were looking for a political/military messiah who would deliver them from the Romans. Instead, Jesus came to deliver them from the greater enemy: their own sin. The timeless principle is this: God has the eternal view. Our circumstances are of great importance to us, but God is more concerned with our eternal destiny than our present circumstances.

"But they did not lay their hands on the plunder" - shows up 3x (v.10, 15,16). Although the king expressly allowed the Jews to plunder their enemies in 8:11, the Jews did not. This was done primarily to prove their fight was for self-preservation, not greed. This also may have been correcting King Saul's mistake: the villain Haman was an Agagite, a descendant of the Amalekites. Centuries earlier, King Saul was punished for failing to completely destroy the Amalekites and for greedily taking their plunder (1 Samuel 15). The Jews in Esther intentionally avoided taking spoils to successfully finish what King Saul had failed to do.

ARG: **We are a community of believers, our strength comes from Him.**

Philippians 4:1 (ESV) Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

God's power is not only seen in removing battles, but in strengthening weak people to stand in them.

2 Corinthians 12:9 (NKJV) And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

ILL: It's Christmas in 1944 and World War II rages on. A handful of soldiers of the 92nd Infantry (the Buffalo Soldiers) are being overrun by German forces in the small Italian village of Sommocolonia (soh-moh-koh-LOH-nyah). As the Germans close in, 1LT John Robert Fox directs artillery fire from inside a building near the center of the village. The enemy gets so close that the artillery commander questions Fox's coordinates. But Fox replies: "Fire it. There's more of them than there are of us."

The artillery barrage killed Fox, but it also stopped the German advance long enough for Allied forces to regroup and retake the village. Years later, the people of Sommocolonia still honored his sacrifice. Throughout history, some of the greatest moments of courage were not moments where the battle disappeared, but moments where ordinary people were strengthened to endure for the sake of others.

God may not spare you from entering the day of conflict. The battle may still come. But God strengthens His people to stand in the face of danger rather than collapse in fear.

APP: Where do you need courage? Are you facing a trial - bad news from the doctor, a financial setback, or a wayward child? Where do you need courage to stand firm for the Gospel ... in your workplace, among your family? Where is God calling you to step out in faith, to share your faith, to go on mission? God can and

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does intervene in human life, but more importantly, He empowers His people to live for Him. Take courage that the God who intervened on behalf of the Jews in Persia also cares deeply about you.

3. God **transforms** His people's sorrow into joy.

EXP: (9:11-19) The 13th day of the 12th month goes from being a dreaded day to a holiday that is celebrated for millennia. God turns tears to joy! This is one of the many clear themes of Scripture.

"The king said to Queen Esther ... Now what is your wish?" (11) - The king is trying to finish this whole debacle and checks with his queen to verify it's over. She has one more request.

"Let the Jews who are in Susa be allowed tomorrow ... let the ten sons of Haman be hanged" (13) - This seems a little surprising to me. Why another day? Why a spectacle of Haman's house? Perhaps it was an exclamation point for the defense of the Jews. Essentially the capital and the provinces now know that the King is for the Jews and those who oppose will be publicly displayed.

"The Jews ... killed 75,000 of those who hated them" (16) - There was clearly a large contingent of enemies in the Persian empire and God defended His people against them in one day.

"A day of feasting and gladness ... on which they send gifts of food to one another" (17-19) - This is the feast of Purim which we will study more next week. To this very day the Jews send one another goodie bags or baskets usually containing a mix of sweet and savory ready-to-eat items.

ARG: **God is our comfort, He turns our tears to joy:**

Jeremiah 31:13 (ESV) Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

Joel 2:21 (ESV) "Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has done great things!"

Jesus reminds us the disciples that He would return in resurrection, but it has a second meaning to us as He will return once more and restore all things:

John 16:22 (ESV) So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

ILL: I've seen a lot funerals and there is an obvious difference in Christian funerals. Though there is grief and mourning, the air is different. It's a simple thing summarized in one word: hope. There's a turning of sorrow even in that. Though it hurts, there is the present gift of hope and with it follow peace and comfort.

APP: Some of you in the room are experiencing sorrow. Perhaps someone very dear to you has passed. Some are mourning a divorce. Perhaps you have experienced some other form of loss - that of a job. God promises that He will turn our sorrow to joy, it may be partial in this life, but complete in eternity.

CONCLUSION: God delivers His people from death! He does so in ways that are often mysterious to the saints of old and now to us. 1) He preserves us from destruction, not by overlooking our sin but by paying for it. 2) He saves by empowering us to stand by Faith. And 3) He turns our sorrows to joy in part in this life and fully in the next.

We honor the sacrifice of our fallen soldiers who allow us to worship in the place today with freedom and without fear. Ultimately, every heroic Memorial Day story whispers toward the greater story of Christ. Jesus did not avoid the battlefield of the cross. (Image) The Father strengthened Him to endure it for our salvation. And because Christ stood for us, believers today can stand firm in whatever battle God has called them to face.



Do you know Him? Have you come under the 2nd decree ... salvation in Christ's name? Let's pray.