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"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."—Romans 1:16.

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The Jarvis Street Pulpit

MORE ABOUT GRACE

A Sermon by the Pastor, Dr. T. T. Shields

Preached in Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto, Sunday Evening, June 24th, 1934

(Stenographically Reported)

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Eastern Daylight Saving Time

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."—Ephesians 2:8.

Prayer before the Sermon

We thank Thee, O Lord, for this great truth. We bless Thee that we may put our trust under the shadow of Thy wings. We thank Thee for the disclosure of Thyself in the person of our Lord Jesus, that the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost. We pray that that great ministry may be exercised through the Holy Spirit this evening, and that some who up to this hour have been without an experience of Thy Saviourhood, who have been without the delightful consciousness of Thy perpetual care, may this evening be able to say, ere they leave this service, or ere this service shall close, The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. Vouchsafe to us the ministry of Thy Spirit as we open Thy Word. May blessing accompany the preaching of the gospel here and everywhere to-night, to the salvation of men, and the glory of God. For Christ's sake we ask it, Amen.

Occasionally when a text of Scripture faces me and demands exposition, I consult my records to discover whether I have ever preached from that text before. But in viewing a text like this, I do not even attempt that, for I have no doubt I have preached upon it scores of times. But there is always a new avenue of approach to such a vast estate as this. Moreover, grace should be the invariable theme of every gospel preacher. We have nothing else to talk about but grace. As often and as long as we may speak, our subject should ever be the grace of God.

I suppose there are few principles so generally neglected, so generally misunderstood, as that of grace. I hear occasionally at funeral and other services men who profess to believe the Book, who would be called evangelicals, who yet in their message display a strange admixture of grace and works. It seems in our day to be almost a rare thing to hear the proclamation of salvation wholly, exclusively—let me use the big word, a word

the Oxford Groupers use in a very little sense, not knowing what it means—"absolutely" by grace. "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."

This evening we shall approach it in this way: We shall perhaps be able to understand the necessity for grace, and get a glimpse into the heart of the matter, and understand something of the nature of grace, if first of all we enquire what sort of salvation we need. The measure of your requirement will often determine to what store you go. If you are troubled about your complexion, for instance, and are content with only a superficial complexion, a compact at a ten-cent store will do. But if you would have a complexion that is a manifestation of exuberant health, a beauty that is at least skin deep—and perhaps a little deeper—then you will subject yourself to some dietary regimen prescribed by your doctor or other expert. In other words, you will seek radical treatment, something that will go to the very root of the matter.

I.

Our first enquiry must be then, WHAT IS THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE SALVATION WE NEED? What is your idea of salvation? In a general sense, I suppose, we shall admit that we all need saving, since the Son of Man came "to seek and to save that which was lost". But how are we to be saved? What revolution, what radical change, if any, must be effected by the salvation of the soul? What is involved in it?

Certainly it must be something that will rightly relate us both to man and to God. Sometimes we need to be saved from our fellows, or saved to them. We need to learn how to deal justly, and then generously and un-

selfishly, one with the other. We need some power to enable us to live agreeably with other people. I have met a great many good people with whom I have no desire to live. There are some good people who would be rather uncomfortable companions. Yet the man who is thoroughly, soundly, biblically, saved, ought to be a fairly comfortable man with whom to keep company every day. We need a salvation that will enter into all the ramifications of human life, and enable us so to relate ourselves to our fellows domestically, in business, recreationally, politically, and in every other way, that the fret and friction of life shall be eliminated, and peace may come to all.

Occasionally you meet someone to whom you are attracted, and of whom you say in your heart, "What a delightful person he is! What a happy experience it would be if one had to work and live with one of such an amiable disposition!" But mere superficial amiability is not all that we need, although I have no objection to amiability on the surface, as well as inside. There is no reason why God's people should be ugly in disposition, and hard to get on with.

What are you? What sort of person are you to live with? What is your temper like? I say, the salvation that is in Christ—the salvation we need, then—is one that ought to relate us horizontally, to the people about us, happily; justly, generously, unselfishly.

Then, of course, there is the other relation: we must be related to God. We must not only love our neighbours: we must love God. That being so, it is a salvation that must go deeper than the mere surface of things. It is not enough that it should deal with the externals of life: it must go to the very heart of the matter. It must deal with all moral obstructions to divine intercourse. Everything that forms an obstacle between the soul and God must be taken account of. A salvation that will rightly relate us to God, in the nature of the case, must remove all obstacles to commerce with the Sky. And oh, how many there are! Again, not superficially. Of course it must deal with conduct and with character, with outward form; but if it is to relate us to God, to higher things, it will have to deal with our natures; not merely with that which is superficial, on the surface, but with that which is inherent, essential, that which enters into the very fibre of our being.

What a blessing it is that we cannot, as yet, put on a pair of glasses that have an X-ray quality! Suppose such an instrument were designed, and it were known that a man carried in his pocket a pair of glasses of such quality that all he had to do was to put them on to look right through you, read you through and through—not what you seem to be, not what you say and do, but what you are in your very nature and essence. I think that man would be very unpopular. I think he would be given the street to himself. I fancy, if he were walking down Yonge Street, and were to put his hands to his pocket for his glasses you would see all the people running for the side streets, saying to themselves, "I do not want that man to see me." I have no doubt, if such a thing were possible, and that man were habitually to wear the glasses, he would be given a wide berth. And sometimes he would be rather uncomfortable, for he would see too much.

But let us remember that we are dealing with One Who is a Spirit, and Who discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart; Who knows all the record of the past, all our present propensities, and all the record of the

future—everything is naked and open to Him. What sort of salvation must we have that will fit us to dwell happily and at peace in the presence of the Holy One? Surely you will see at once that it must be a salvation that will deal with the nature of things, that will go to the very roots of life, and make men new creatures of some sort. It must be so or we never could be happy where God is.

The defectiveness of our religious views may often be attributed to the fact that salvation is conceived in terms of mere human standards of life and conduct. Because a man is reasonably respectable, because he endeavours to pay his debts, and to deal honestly with his fellows, because he does not make himself a general nuisance, even if he is not particularly serviceable, he passes muster among the crowd as at least an average man. Sometimes at funeral services we hear men say, of the departed, that he was a good man. He did much good in the world. He was good to his wife, and to his children. But what a meagre standard of things. Salvation means something more than that. It must relate us, not only to our fellows, but to God. And if it is to do so, then its nature and scope will be vastly other than it would be were it measured only by standards of human requirements.

Once more: This *salvation must somehow reach beyond the grave*. It is not enough that it should deal with temporalities, it cannot be an adequate salvation if it is of a temporary nature. I do not say character: I mean, if, in the nature of the case, it be a temporary thing, which with the passage of time must cease, it can be of no avail. We are related to the eternal. Our salvation must be like God Himself, a timeless, everlasting, power, that will hold us in unbroken communication with the Infinite.

II.

If all this be so, DOES IT NOT FOLLOW INEVITABLY THAT SALVATION CANNOT POSSIBLY BE OF HUMAN ORIGIN OR CONTINUANCE? The very requirements of the case place it beyond human power to produce it, to supply it, to maintain it. And yet how often we hear salvation described as though it were a coat, something to be put on; as though it were a habit, something to be developed from inherent powers; as though it were something that could be effected by submission to a ceremony, be it baptism, or the Lord's Supper, or Confirmation, or something else; as though a man, by laying on his hands—laying his hands on anybody—could change a nature to the very foundation! What folly to sprinkle a few drops of water on the face of an unconscious child, and, having done so, to say, "Seeing now, dearly beloved brethren, that this child is regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ's church, let us give thanks," etc. That is a form in certain branches of the church, but it is not scriptural. Salvation is not thus communicated ceremonially, sacramentally. The very nature of salvation excludes all possibility of salvation by such means.

If salvation were of human origination, if it were devised by the human mind, and wrought out by—what shall I call it, the ethical resources of human nature, if there are any—if it were of that sort, then perhaps by much effort we could do our part, make our contribution, toward the total of it. But I am sure if God the Spirit shows us the nature of salvation, it will immediately appear that it is beyond the bounds of human power to effect.

If salvation is not human, it must be divine. Salvation must be, not something I may do for God, but some-

thing God will do for me. There is all the difference between those positions that obtains between that which is human and that which is divine; that which is finite and has distinct limitations, and that which is infinite as God Himself.

Very well, then, if salvation necessitates a change of nature, a new creation, a harmonization of this sinful human nature with the holy nature of God, and the ultimate eradication from these natures of everything that is alien to God, if that is what salvation is, may I reverently say, that is God's work. It is not yours: it is not mine. And if it is the work of God, what can you do to help it? Can you help the sun to rise to-morrow? Can you help the rain to fall? Can you shorten or lengthen the seasons? We began our worship this evening by what we are pleased to call Daylight-Saving Time. It is just a little mental delusion, a trick of the mind. We call it seven o'clock, and Old Sol looks down and says, "It is still only six o'clock." If you doubt it, go and ask the cows; they will tell you. In spite of all our legislation, nature says we must abide by her courses, for she is above all our endeavours to circumvent her.

What can you do if salvation is of God? What can you minister to God? What can you give Him that He has not got? What service can you render that He really needs? Will you offer your little candle-light to help the sun to shine? I forget who it was told me, somebody here, of going to the lake with the children in the summertime. One morning the youngest of the family, a little fellow, went down to the lake in his bathing-suit. He put his little toes in the water, and drew them back. He came running to his mother, saying: he could not go in. "But what is the matter?" "The water is too cold, Mummy; give me a kettle of water." "What for?" "I want to warm the lake"! I have seen many theological gentlemen with their little tin kettles, trying to warm the lake. What nonsense! What can we do if salvation be of God, but let God attend to His own business?

III.

If it be of God, then, there is nothing you can do. You remember what He says in one of the Psalms?—"If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof." I know that to engage her in conversation, and to find His way to the secret recesses of her heart, the God-man said to the Samaritan woman, "Give me to drink"—not because He needed it, but because she needed Him. I say, IF IT BE OF GOD, IT MUST BE, IN THE NATURE OF THE CASE, OF GRACE. That is, God must do it all, every bit of it. Let me show you how it must be so.

Only His wisdom, His perfect knowledge, His omnivident gaze, His power to see into the heart of things—only He can possibly know the requirements of our fallen natures. You have seen a doctor with his stethoscope assisting his auditory powers, listening to what is going on inside. Then, after a while he says, "I am not satisfied. I shall have to take an X-ray." So the patient is put through one operation after another—all that the doctor may find out first of all what is wrong with the man, and then to determine the treatment. What do you need? You do not know: I do not know. The extent of the ravages of sin is seen only by God. What sin has done to interrupt our correspondence with Heaven, God only knows. - And what is necessary to the removal of all these things, and to the restoration of the balance, and

of communication between earth and Heaven, can be known to God only.

Then *only His resources can supply it*. Do you not wish you could make yourself younger? Have you not tried? How you look in the glass, and try to smooth out the wrinkles—and when you could not smooth them out, you filled them up! How the young woman looked with apprehension the first time she saw a gray hair! She pulled it out. But after a while she found that the pulling out process would be too expensive: there were too many of them. She left them in, and changed their colour! And I have known men—not necessarily vain men—do the same thing. They did not want people to know they were growing old, because this ungrateful world often has a poor place for old men. But men and women do grow old; they do become frail. And I have known men who went to work almost staggering. "How are you this morning, John?" "Quite well, sir"—biting his lips to conceal the pain. He did not want his employer to know he was sick. He was afraid. How frail we are!

But if we are to have bodies that cannot grow tired, and that will never be stricken with pain, "fashioned like unto His glorious body", the tabernacle of a spirit pure as God is pure, holy as He is holy, to stand at last without fault before the throne of God, who but God do you suppose can give us such bodies? or provide power to effect such spiritual purification? I know of no one. The resources necessary to effect such a salvation must be of God. For in the interim, how shall the soul be washed, and purified, and made fit for the divine presence? Only by the powers that come from God.

And *the disposition to exercise them in our behalf can come from Him only*. Well did we sing just now of the Friend above all others, again and again repeating, "Oh, how He loves!"

"One there is above all others,

Oh, how He loves!

His is love beyond a brother's,

Oh, how He loves!

Earthly friends may fail or leave us,

One day soothe, the next day grieve us;

But this Friend will ne'er deceive us,

Oh, how He loves!"

We have wealthy people in this country, a few. And I doubt not that some of them have acquired their wealth quite legitimately, though there may be some who have not done so. But do you know of anybody worth millions, every cent of whose fortune is dedicated to others' interests? Only God would use His infinite fortune, if I may so speak in order to our easier understanding, for the benefit of a bankrupt world. "By grace are ye saved"; "He gave his only begotten Son." He emptied Heaven's exchequer in order that He might pay the price of our redemption, and make it possible for Him to remove all obstacles to our soul's commerce with Him. He did it at the cross of which Mrs. Strathearn sang a few moments ago.

What else shall we talk about but saving grace? What else is worth speaking about, or singing about, but the precious blood, and that grand scheme of God's, so like Himself, originating in His own mind, without help of human counsellors, and executed by His own power? What else is there worth discoursing about?

As I came along the street to-day, I saw everywhere on the telegraph poles and elsewhere, "Vote for So-and-

So." A few were elected—some others were not. I have often wondered what the men who were so sure they were going to be elected a week ago, think about it? And I wonder how they feel when they see the rejected invitation, "Vote for me"? They know the people did not vote for them. Such matters are not worth talking about. The election made a little stir in this locality we call Ontario. Now it is over, and soon we shall settle down to humdrum things again. But unto the ages of the ages, men and angels will celebrate the glories of the Cross.

IV.

That is the story, my dear friends. "By grace are ye saved THROUGH FAITH"—It is bound to be through faith—"and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Do you remember our reasoning of a year or so ago on this text, "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed." "Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds . . . Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together." There are some things that cannot mix. Salvation had to be of faith that it might be by grace; and it had to be of grace in order that salvation might be sure to all the seed.

"Faith owes its birth to sovereign grace,
And lives beneath the throne
Where grace maintains her dwelling-place,
And reigns supreme alone.

"Faith yields to grace the glory due,
Nor dares assume her place;
But owns all doctrines must be true,
That spring from sovereign grace."

I said just now that our only task is to let God mind His own business, to let God do His own work. It is to that faith consents. Faith is the response of an enlightened soul to God's revelation of Himself. The moment I see the kind of salvation I need, I say, "I am lost unless God shall save me." And when, from His Word, I see that that is exactly what He intends to do, and that He has made complete provision for so doing, all I can say is, Hallelujah! Amen! That is faith. Leave it all to God. No other salvation has any value. No other revelation of God is adequate but that of the Cross where Jesus Christ died. Faith is the gift of God because it is inspired by God's disclosure of Himself.

"Faith owns the sceptre through the cross
And yields obedience true;
Counts all things else but earth and dross,
To keep the Lamb in view."

Nature is full of the testimony that God loves us, but the measure of that infinite love is revealed only at the Cross. The Cross is the measure of it, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." To apprehend that, to receive that truth with gladness, to give one's self entirely to it, and depend exclusively upon it is faith,—that is what it is to believe, and all who so believe have everlasting life.

CAN WE DISPENSE WITH THE CHURCH?

In a day when landmarks are being removed, and standards of all sorts rejected and destroyed, there are many who have recognized the necessity for abiding by the teaching of Scripture respecting the way of salvation. Sometimes such believers are called Fundamental-

ists. We prefer, ourselves, the old term, Evangelicals. But by whichever name they may be known, they are people who derive their theology from the Bible, and are biblically sound.

But the various denominations have come into being as the result of disputes respecting church order rather than as the result of strictly theological differences. There have been, and are, theological differences among those who equally profess submission to scriptural authority; but denominations have been founded more generally on ecclesiological rather than on theological differences. For example, Professor P. Carnegie Simpson, writing in *The Baptist Times*, of London, on "The Doctrine of Baptism as held by Presbyterians", says:

"Of course, Presbytery is a system of polity and not of doctrine, and Presbyterians do not either claim or desire to have any 'distinctive' position here. They share in and support what they would call the Evangelical Catholic view of this Sacrament—as of the other too."

We quote this merely in support of our contention that primarily questions of polity rather than of theology are generally involved in denominational distinctions.

It will be generally recognized, we believe—and into the reason for that we need not now enter—that the theological institutions of denominational name and affiliation have, for the most part, been captured by Modernism. This has brought into being many worthy institutions that have set before them the aim of absolute loyalty to the Bible as the supremely authoritative source of true theology.

For the existence and ministry of these institutions of various names, which have come into being for the express purpose of teaching the Bible as the word of God, all evangelicals will be profoundly grateful. Without their testimony, in many quarters, it would appear there would be no rising generation of gospel preachers. But these institutions are characterized by certain defects which inevitably grow out of the situation which has called them into being. They were established to minister to lovers of the Bible of all denominations, and students from all denominations have crowded their halls. But because nearly every school of ecclesiological thought and prejudice was represented in the student body, the distinctive ecclesiological positions of the various bodies have been fenced about and decorated with signs to the effect, "Trespassers will be prosecuted". In the interest of unity, great principles upon which great believers have historically divided, are taboo.

In strictly denominational schools, principles, whether of theology or ecclesiology, held distinctively by that body, are freely discussed. But in such schools as we have alluded to, these matters are usually studiously avoided. The result has been the graduation from these schools of great numbers of young men who have had no ecclesiological teaching at all; that is, they have no doctrine of the church and its ordinances, or of its ministry.

In many instances these young ministers go out to establish preaching centres. They rent or erect a building, which they frequently call a tabernacle; and, with commendable zeal, and in perhaps the majority of cases, great fidelity to the gospel message, they prosecute their work of evangelization. If they are true to the gospel message of salvation, inevitably conversions will follow. But what then? Let us state the matter plainly, if

bluntly. Many of these institutions become—shall we say the daring thing—religious obstetrical institutions. There the babes are born. But what then? There is no home for them, no place where they may be nurtured, being given the sincere milk of the Word, and later strong meat. There is no religious home where they will be subject to discipline and training, where burdens will be laid upon them, and where they may be taught to fulfil their duty as growing Christians.

Because of this, we are finding there are great companies of religious waifs. They are without a spiritual home. They know nothing of the obligations which inhere in a religious family relationship. They know nothing of the ordinances of the New Testament. Or if, indeed, they submit to them at all, they do so without New Testament order or regularity.

Such enterprises as we have described often make a fair show in the flesh. It is not at all unusual for children to prefer the free and undisciplined life of a boarding-house, to the ordered and disciplined life of a well regulated home. Similarly, there are religious zealots, full of enthusiasm, and often undirected by a biblical intelligence, who are attracted by the appeal of these nondescript and irresponsible religious quick-lunch counters. They like to shout, Hallelujah, to have their emotions stirred; but, having no responsibility, they are like children permitted to grow up in ignorance, and to form habits of idleness, and thus they become a burden to themselves, and a menace to the peace and progress of any religious society with which they may later become affiliated.

We write this article to suggest the necessity for proper and proportionate emphasis upon the New Testament doctrine of the church and its ordinances. We believe profoundly that marriage and the family are a divine institution. The family is the social unit of society. Similarly, the local church was instituted for the propagation and nurture of a holy nation, a new race, born "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." And just as the family is the divinely ordained social unit of organized society, so the local church is the social unit of the kingdom of God.

We would not have people one whit less zealous in the work of evangelization, but we do plead for a proper recognition of the biblical, the old-fashioned, doctrine of the church. The devil is just as much opposed to New Testament ecclesiology as he is to biblical theology. He would, if he could, put an end to the propagation of a spiritual race, but, being thwarted in that, he endeavours so to condition the new-born that they will grow up in ignorance, and without that skill in biblical Christian service which is the rightful heritage of those who do really "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ".

Pharaoh was content to leave the Israelites to the tender mercies of task-masters with their whips so long as they were content to labour in the brickyards of Egypt. But when, under their great leader, Moses, they secured their emancipation, and, leaving Egypt, were about to be born from the sea as a nation in a day, he set all his horses and chariots of war in hot pursuit of them. That place between Migdol and the sea—out of Egypt, and yet not trained and disciplined for the pilgrim journey—is ever a dangerous spot.

IF THE BIBLE WERE NOT TRUE

We measure the day by the sun, and determine direction by the stars. We have established arbitrary standards for weight and measurement. But these, in organized societies, are, governmentally regulated, and therefore, become legally authoritative. So also in respect to all human relationships. Standards of conduct and of character-value are set up. These various standards form life's criteria, and preserve some semblance of order in human society. They are not, of course, perfect; but they constitute an expression of the collective will regulating the mutual relations of humankind.

But when the sun shall set, and the stars go out, and all standards relating to things material and temporal lose their authority over the human soul by virtue of the fact that the earthly house of its tabernacle is dissolved, in what vessel shall the departing spirit travel? To what port shall it sail? At what country shall it arrive? And what passport can assure its hospitable reception there?

So soon, oh so soon, do the days come when the human spirit confesses it has no pleasure in life! How soon the sun and the moon and the stars are darkened, and the keepers of the house tremble; the strong men bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few! How soon those that look out of the windows are darkened, and the doors are shut in the street, when the sound of the grinding is low; so that one shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music are brought low; and the spirit becomes afraid of that which is high, and fears are in the way! How soon the almond tree flourishes, and the grasshopper becomes a burden; desire fails, and man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets. Then the silver cord is loosed, and the golden bowl is broken. The pitcher is broken at the cistern. When the dust shall then return to the earth as it was, who shall tell us whither the spirit has gone? If the Bible be not true, then is there no voice, nor any to answer.

But one may say, "Still we shall have Christ." No; not if the Bible be not true. If the Bible be not true, there is no Christ worthy of any man's affection or credence. The only Jesus we know is the Jesus of the Bible, the Jesus Who said the Old Testament was true, and Who promised that the New Testament should be given. He is the Theme of both Testaments, the Subject of the whole Book, the Personality that pervades all its pages, and binds all its units into a complete whole. Without the Bible we could have no Christ.

But one may say, "If the Christ of the Bible be true, then He must live independently of the Bible." True. But how can we know Him? Then we shall have as many Christs as we have human imaginations. Each must imagine Him for himself. Without the Bible we are without a settled and established objective authority. Hence we should still be in the dark, and know nothing of the life beyond, nor of the moral and spiritual qualities requisite to a happy entrance upon it. Nor could we know anything of any power by which those qualities could be wrought into our defective human spirits.

But why ask these questions? Truth inheres in the Bible as light in the sun, as salt in the sea. It were folly to dream of dispensing with it, or of improving upon it: it is the only lamp for our feet, or light for our path.

Whole Bible Course Lesson Leaf

Vol. 9

No. 3

REV. ALEX. THOMSON, EDITOR

Lesson 30

THIRD QUARTER

July 29, 1934

VASHTI AND ESTHER

Lesson Text: Esther, chapters 1 and 2.

Golden Text: "And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter."—Esther 2:7.

Bible School Readings: Esther 2:1-23.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS:

Monday—Psalm 91:1-16; Tuesday—Habakkuk 2:15-20;
Wednesday—Amos 2:1-8; Thursday—Daniel 5:1-12; Friday—Matthew 14:1-12; Saturday—Galatians 5:16-26.

I. INTRODUCTION.

The book of Esther takes its name from the Jewish maiden who became the queen of Ahasuerus, king of Persia. Its content relates a marvellous deliverance of the Jewish people through the instrumentality of this young woman. The reason for her exaltation is explained, the danger affecting her countrymen is made clear, and the manner of the deliverance, with its consequent rejoicing, is recorded. The name of God is not found in the book, yet His providential care over His people is quite evident throughout. The historicity of the record cannot be doubted; the events contained therein taking place in or near the time of Ezra. The book has been accepted as canonical by both Jew and Christian, being read by the former at the feast of Purim, the inception of which it relates. We cannot be certain concerning the identity of its author, but orthodox opinion inclines to Mordecai, one of the principal individuals in the book.

II. DEPOSAL OF VASHTI (1:1-22).

The book opens with an account of a great feast which king Ahasuerus made for his people (vs. 3, 5), during which were manifest the riches of his kingdom (v. 4), and at which there was much drinking (v. 7). In the course of the proceedings, Vashti the queen, who was celebrating in another part of the palace with the women, in accordance with eastern custom, was sent for by the king, that he might display her beauty before his drunken revellers. She dares to disobey his command, and declines to come at his invitation (v. 12), which greatly angers him, and alarms the whole company (v. 17), leading to hasty consultation, and the promulgation of the drastic decree banishing Vashti from the royal presence.

Several things are worthy of note respecting this incident. First, the pleasure-living spirit manifest in the nature and duration of the festive celebrations. These continued evidently for the space of half a year, and were given over entirely to pleasure. This is not to be wondered at. It was in accordance with eastern custom, and was but a manifestation of the spirit of the world observed in those days, as well as in the past. Not that there is anything wrong in being happy, but a great deal depends on the reason for and nature of that happiness. The world finds its pleasure in ways disapproved of by God; the Christian finds his in company with God. Note the characteristics of this age (II Tim. 3:1-5). The great expense attached to the banquet may also be noted, together with the riches and power of the king.

The evils of indulgence in liquor may be observed. Had it not been that the mind of the king was muddled with drink he would not have sent such a command to his queen. She acted in a dignified manner in refusing to appear, and saved his honour, as well as her own, but he did not realize it at the time. In these days when it is becoming easier to procure liquor, the evils which follow in the train of the drinking habit require to be placed before the rising generation. Liquor, even in a supposed moderate quantity, affects a person adversely. Self-control is not as complete, nor is the judgment as keen; and with the weakening of these, the way is open for the entrance of many evils, affecting not

only the person immediately concerned, but others with whom he is related. Total abstinence from all intoxicating liquor as a beverage is the only safe policy to pursue. We are enjoined to abstain from all appearance of evil (I Thess. 5:22), and inasmuch as countless thousands have been, and are still, being ruined through this nefarious drink business, it becomes all respectable people to have nothing at all to do with it.

The subservient position of women in ancient Persia is worthy of observation, as well as the place which they occupy in non-Christian lands in this day. Only where the gospel's influence is felt do they have equality with men in a real manner. They have much for which to thank God in this respect. The general effect of the gospel in liberating from sinful habit, harmful social custom, might profitably be pointed out. The foolishness of the unchangeable nature of Persian law (v. 19) is evident in this incident. The king acted hastily, and later repented of his action, but in accordance with law his decree was irrevocable. To act in accordance with such a custom implies the person making the law is perfect, and that he never makes a mistake. God is the only one who never errs. Man, with his limited knowledge, is frequently in error, and therefore requires to exercise caution in the enacting of laws, either in church or state. In the matter of drawing up constitutions for religious bodies this should likewise be kept in mind. Note the injustice of the king toward his queen, and the fear of his companions respecting the effect of the incident upon the future attitude of their wives, together with the fact that the trouble was brought about through their own folly.

III. ELECTION OF ESTHER (21-23).

Vashti having been deposed, it became necessary to put someone in her place, and the plan was proposed to bring the most beautiful young women of the kingdom before the king, that he might make choice from among them (vs. 2-4). This being done, we are informed of the presentation and subsequent selection of Esther as queen (v. 17). Special circumstances are mentioned in relation to this young woman, such as her race, her orphaned condition, her relationship to Mordecai, her beauty, and her humility. The marriage feast is mentioned (v. 18), and the discovery of the plot against the king's life (vs. 21-23), which was to serve such a useful purpose later in the deliverance of the Jews (6:1-11). Observe further the loving relationship existing between Mordecai and Esther. Even after the latter entered the palace of the king "she did the commandment" of her uncle. She undoubtedly required advice in her delicate and dangerous situation, and she was fortunate in receiving it from a qualified person who had her interests at heart. A friend in need is a friend indeed, and the person is blessed who has one at hand (Prov. 17:17). The best friend to have, however, is Jesus Christ.

Note also may be made of the characteristics of Mordecai. He was a man of strong character, exhibiting wisdom, singleness of purpose, fearlessness, and sound judgment. He occupied a good position probably; while an exile, he did not forget his duty either to his own people or to the king in whose land he lived. For the good deed done the latter in the discovery and exposure of the plot against his life, he was not immediately rewarded, but a record was kept of the deed, and later the reward came. The good deeds performed now by saints of God are not adequately, and some not at all rewarded in this life; but the record is kept on high, and some day divine recognition will be given to the same in accordance with their merits.

It is of interest and significance to note the unconscious preparation for the deliverance of the Jews from the consequences of Haman's evil plot. In order to counteract that plot, which at the time of our lesson was not in existence, it was necessary that someone should be in a place of influence near the king, and in the record we see Esther coming into that position. She was ready when the crisis came. The significance of this event is realized when we remember that the deliverance of Israel meant their national preservation. In this God must have exercised an influence, and although his name is not mentioned in connection with it, we can see His providential care. God is never taken unawares with any event, and He has His human instruments ready. Note Noah (Gen. 6:8, 9); Joseph (Gen. 45:5); Moses (Ex. 3:10); Samuel (I Sam. 3:19-21); David (I Sam. 16:11-13); Elijah (I Kings 17:1); and Paul (Acts 9:11-16).

Whole Bible Course Lesson Leaf

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REV. ALEX. THOMSON, EDITOR

Lesson 31

THIRD QUARTER

August 5th, 1934

HAMAN AND MORDECAI

Lesson Text: Esther, chapters 3 and 4.

Golden Text: Esther 4:14: "For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Bible School Reading: Esther 3:1-17; 4:13-17.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS:

Monday—Psalm 15:1-5; Tuesday—Proverbs 12:12-21; Wednesday—Jer. 30:10-17; Thursday—Amos 9:1-12; Friday—Eph. 4:20-32; Saturday—Romans 5:12-21.

I. HAMAN'S PLOT (3:1-15).

In this part of our lesson there is given an account of the danger which threatened the existence of the Jews owing to the wicked plot of Haman. This man, who was an Amalekite, and a member of the court of Ahasuerus, king of Persia, had been exalted by his royal master, above the other princes of the realm. This exaltation entitled him, by the king's command, to obeisance from all under-lords. This was duly rendered to him, except by Mordecai, who refused to bow before him. Haman was informed of his attitude, and being furiously angry, meditated a murderous and drastic revenge in the destruction of all the Jews throughout the kingdom (vs. 5, 6). He could not carry this out on his own authority, so sought the royal permission for it. This being granted, the necessary decree was promulgated, authorizing the fearful deed.

Two things require consideration in this record: first, the offence of Mordecai; and, second, the revenge of Haman. Respecting the first, it may be said that the offence was of a negative nature. Mordecai did not take anything from Haman, nor did he injure him physically or otherwise: he merely withheld that which this prince believed he ought to receive. Sometimes of course one may grievously injure another in a negative way, just as in a positive manner; as sin may be any want of conformity unto, as well as transgression of, the law of God. But in this case no harm was done. The offence was not against Haman's person or possessions, but against his pride. Judging from his subsequent behaviour we conclude that his exaltation increased his pride, until it overcame his judgment. Note the dangers incident to pride, the evil consequences arising therefrom, and the ultimate end of the one affected thereby (Prov. 16:18).

It may also be observed that Haman was told of the offence. Possibly he had not at first noticed the matter, but having his attention drawn to it, his anger was aroused, and he meditated revenge. There are times when offences should be reported to the proper authorities: there are other occasions when these are of such little consequence that they should be passed over. In both cases there are always some ready to disclose the faults of others. Care should be exercised in these matters not to descend to the level of a gossip, or useless trouble-maker. The reason for Mordecai's offence is not stated. At first sight, it seems to have been mere stubbornness, but in consideration of the possible significance of such reverencing of an individual, his attitude may have been dictated by religious scruples. An ordinary bow or courtesy given an individual in recognition of his position may be granted without sacrifice of principle, but when such bowing implies recognition of something religious connected with the one, as it might have been in this instance, then it becomes a true servant of God to refuse to comply. God is the only One Who should receive the bow of devotion (Ex. 20:4-6). The fearlessness of Mordecai is worthy of notice, together with his steadfastness of purpose. He was not swayed by the influence of those around him, nor would he consent to do wrong, merely to please others, or to save himself from trouble. May we learn to put God first at all times, and to be true to Him under all circumstances, even though it means standing alone, as it frequently does.

Respecting the revenge of Haman, it may be said that even if punishment was warranted in accordance with Persian law,

for the attitude of Mordecai, this was out of all proportion to the offence. Both in its severity and its scope it was beyond anything that might reasonably have been expected. But it was not meant to be reasonable or just. Hatred, not only of the individual, but of that individual's race, is manifest therein; and the desire to wipe them out is clearly evident. The Jewish nation has several times had to run the risk of annihilation—as in Egypt (Ex. 1:16), at the exile (II Chron. 36:18), at the Roman conquest at the beginning of this era; and on several occasions since then prosecution has thinned their ranks. They have been compelled to endure the wrath of Gentile nations at times because of their foolish actions, but at other times simply on account of their nationality. It is of real significance to note that when they were obedient unto God they prospered, and were victorious over their enemies; but when disobedient, they suffered at their hands. Respecting their sufferings during this Christian era, note the cry of the people at the trial of Christ (Matt. 27:25), and the consequences throughout this period.

It may further be observed that the revenge of Haman, if carried out, would have been detrimental to the whole kingdom. It would have meant the loss to the state of many industrious producers of its wealth. It would have resulted also in the loss of many consumers of its products. And it would have led to some disorganization of society, as well as have given encouragement to the lawless spirit among the populace. It was therefore not only a wicked thing in itself, but a fearfully bad thing for the country. We see by this how the spirit of hatred when allowed to manifest itself considers neither friend nor foe in its mad exhibition of temper. The Christian must refrain from such wickedness, and put off the sins of the flesh (Col. 3:9). Note the fact that Haman secured the royal consent to his scheme by a deceptive presentation of the case (v. 8), and that the proclamation which he circulated was of a subtle nature, appealing to the cupidity and self-interest of the people (v. 13). The plan was deliberate, diabolical, cunningly presented, and would have accomplished its purpose had it not been frustrated as herein depicted.

II. MORDECAI'S PLAN (4:1-17).

The result upon the Jews of the proclamation of the royal decree consigning them to destruction at the hands of their enemies, was overwhelming and sorrowful. Mordecai clothed himself with sackcloth and ashes, and many of his people did likewise. Evidently Esther was unacquainted with what was happening outside the harem in which she dwelt, and being informed of Mordecai's state, she sent out one of the officials to enquire as to the reason for the mourning. Mordecai gave the necessary information, and also requested her to appear before the king and make supplication for her people (vs. 6-9). She returned answer, pointing out the danger attached to acceding to such a request, but being persuaded by Mordecai, she consented to carry out the directions; and asked for spiritual co-operation from her countrymen on the outside (vs. 15-17).

Observe the desperate condition of the Jews under sentence of death. There was no hope for them unless in some way a deliverer should be raised up. In their previous history such a deliverer had been raised up at critical times, as in the period of the judges when such men as Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson, brought victory over their enemies (Judges 7, 11, 14); and in the time of the kings when David led Israel against the Philistines (I. Sam. 17). This type of deliverance, however, was of a different type. It was accomplished, not by fighting, but through a friend at court, who was allied to them in blood, and possessed by the highest purpose. Spiritually, the circumstances remind us of the condition of sinners under judgment (John 3:18), but delivered therefrom by One Who not only risked His life, as did Esther, but Who actually died to make possible deliverance (I Cor. 15:3), and Who is now an Advocate before the throne (Heb. 7:25, I John 2:1). The wisdom and boldness of Mordecai's plan may be explained. As far as can be ascertained it was the only possible plan. It placed Esther in a delicate and dangerous position, but there was no way of avoiding this if deliverance were to be attempted. Note the self-sacrificing spirit of this young woman, also her strategic and favourable position for the accomplishment of her purpose if the king should permit her to approach him. Observe also her request (vs. 16, 17). Elsewhere fasting and prayer are joined together. Would they be likely to be separated here?

The Union Baptist Witness

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RUNNYMEDE ROAD, TORONTO

A Reception and Welcome Home to our missionaries, Rev. and Mrs. Gordon D. Mellish, was given in the Runnymede Road Baptist Church, on Friday, June 8th. The Pastor, Rev. P. B. Loney, presided, and the large congregation present indicated in some measure the love and esteem in which our missionaries are held.

After the singing of suitable hymns, the whole company was led to the throne of grace in prayer by the Rev. A. Penman of Long Branch Baptist Church. Rev. Alex. Thomson read the Scripture lesson. A specially prepared welcome chorus was a feature of the evening's proceedings, as well as a selection by the choir.

Rev. P. B. Loney spoke on behalf of the church, and extended to the missionaries a most hearty welcome. Rev. David Alexander, Chairman of the Executive Board of the Union spoke on behalf of the Board and its relation to the whole work. The Secretary, Rev. W. E. Atkinson, was asked to introduce the missionaries, but before doing so read a letter from Dr. Shields who was unavoidably absent. Mr. Mellish brought not only a word of greeting from themselves, but from the Church at Geah-bar Zondo, which has already been published in these pages. Mrs. Mellish was then introduced, and as she spoke she soon captivated the hearers by her word pictures of life on the Mission Station, and in reaching the people in the villages. Medical work, school work, and evangelizing the people by every means possible, were each given a new meaning to the congregation assembled.

A reception at which refreshments were served was held at the close of Mrs. Mellish's address, and a large number of people remained to meet the workers on furlough. The meeting closed with the singing of the Doxology, and prayer by Rev. Arthur Lee of Mount Albert.

OTTERVILLE

The Otterville Baptist Church has experienced a time of real blessing in the past few weeks. Beginning with our Anniversary Sunday we had as our special preacher, Rev. W. W. Fleischer of Shenstone Memorial Baptist Church, Brantford, who brought some great messages from God's Word, and very splendidly prepared the way for the blessing that followed. The following Monday Rev. M. B. Gillion of Bobcaygeon, one of Mr. Fleischer's boys, began a two weeks' evangelistic campaign. The meetings aroused such interest that they were carried on an extra week. A good number were saved, and the church greatly revived. The Sunday following the meetings eight believers followed the Lord in baptism, and two others accepted Christ as Saviour

and Lord, and we expect soon to have another baptismal service when these, too, will be baptised. The Pastor, Rev. L. Roblin, and church, praise God for His blessings, and look forward to even greater times in the future.

FAMILY AND BASKET PICNIC

Of the Members, Adherents, and Friends of the Union of Regular Baptist Churches of Ontario and Quebec, at

Oaklands Park, Aldershot, Ontario,

Four miles east of Hamilton on No. 2 Highway, Lakeshore Route, between Toronto and Hamilton.

Labour Day, Monday, September 3, 1934.

Bring your own jugs, teapots, dishes, and cutlery.

Picnic Committee:

Rev. James McGinlay, London,
Rev. C. J. Loney, Hamilton,
Rev. W. N. Charlton, Hespeler,
Rev. W. E. Atkinson, Toronto.

WHEATLEY

It is with joy in our hearts that we the members of the Immanuel Baptist Church, Wheatley, report the new work begun in April at Campbell's Side Road through the instrumentality of a young Christian girl, aided by our pastor, Rev. W. Lempriere, and other members of our church. There has been an attendance of between forty and sixty, and deep interest is shown in spiritual things. Two young girls have professed conversion, and others are under conviction, showing that God is working in the community. The interest is growing, and children who have never been to Sunday-school are now attending regularly. Pray for us, and for this new work that it may become a permanent source of Christian training among a needy people.

SEVENTH ANNUAL CONVENTION

The Seventh Annual Convention of the Union of Regular Baptist Churches of Ontario and Quebec, will, God willing, be held in the Central Baptist Church, London, on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, October 23rd to 25th, 1934. We ask you to reserve these dates, and to begin to plan and pray for these meetings, that we may have the best Convention we have ever had.

Children Must Eat in the Summer

REMEMBER OUR THREE HUNGRY CHILDREN

The Gospel Witness Fund

The Radio Fund

The Seminary Fund

SEND THEM AT LEAST A BUN OR A SANDWICH