

Fragmentary Thoughts and Reflections – (Vol. 1 – Nos. 6-7)

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P.B (04/23)

The Book of Esther is a book that discloses the ways of God's providence in connection with the protection of Israel, when the nation was estranged from the covenantal relationship with God. This relationship will be restored under the New Covenant that shall be made applicable to the nation in the prophetic future, on the foundation of Christ's work on the cross. Meanwhile, the nation is under the providential eye and protection of God. This, as much can be said about the Book of Esther, but when considered diligently – it opens up with a vast treasure of prophetic imagery, that showcases the wonderful ways of God's economy with His people (the Jewish remnant and the Jews as a nation) through the grace that becomes available to them in Christ. For this, I shall briefly touch on four major themes pertaining to this Book:

Firstly, this Book pictures the Jews destined for trouble because of Mordecai, although Haman was the source of this evil designs. Haman conspired against the entire race because of his hatred against one single Jew – Mordecai. Esther 3:6: 'but he scorned to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were in all the kingdom..' The Jews themselves are not aware of the reason behind this plan to exterminate them – they simply know that the Persian king had passed a decree aiming at their destruction. They were not aware of the reason behind such a decree, or that it had been sketched as a plot to avenge the disrespect of Haman in the hands of Mordecai. In short, the Jews did not know that they were destined to die because of Haman's indignation against Mordecai. Mordecai, of course is the figure of Christ, as belonging to the nation, as having been born under the law. The nation of Israel – shall pass through a chasm of great tribulation in this world, but the reason is because Jesus, the Lord was one of them as being born to them, although they have not acknowledged Him. In St John's apocalypse – Chapter 12:13: 'and when the dragon saw that he had been cast out into the earth, he persecuted the woman which bore the male child'. So, this Book illustrates a unique setting – the nation blindly gets tormented by the worldly powers, but the reason for this persecution is because satanic prejudice sees the connection of Christ with the nation - the divine purposes, relating to the prophetic association of Christ, the Lord with the hopes of that nation.

Secondly, Mordecai identifies himself with the rest of the Jews once the persecuting decree had been published. Esther 4:1 'And when Mordecai knew all that was done, Mordecai rent his garments, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and bitter cry'.

The Persian decree and law in the Book of Esther requires a special attention. It illustrates the legal economy of Moses, that once issued can never be changed – the sternness and inviolability of law. But this law had become the power of sin (1 Cor 15:56) – there is nothing so sad, as the power of

Satan making full assault on man, who is discovered a transgressor under the holy law of God. So was the sad situation of Israel – as a corporate entity under the law, being discovered in transgression, and judgment following them into captivity and at this juncture – the forces of evil seek the complete annihilation of the people of God. Once the decree has been passed for the destruction of the Jews, Mordecai visibly donned the sackcloth – illustrating Christ's love in identifying Himself with the nation under the spell of curse by the law of God. The Psalms are full of this love on part of the Messiah – who identifies Himself with the sufferings of the nation, under the curse of the law. Psalms 129 for instance – verses 1 to 3: 'many a time have they afflicted me from my youth – oh let Israel say - many a time have they afflicted me from my youth... the ploughers ploughed upon my back'. Christ identified Himself with the persecuted nation – the nation echoes back in unison, as clearly reflected in this Messianic Psalm.

We know – that Christ has not only identified Himself with the nation under the curse of the law, but that there is that deeper and more astonishing love displayed, when He became identified with that curse itself on the tree (Galatians). But here – in this Book, we stand on the preliminary stages itself, where we find the figures and images of Christ's love assuming the identity of His brethren (the Jews) in their suffering, as they come face to face with the judgment of the law according to the righteous vindication of God's claims (though Satan had cunningly mastered this purge of judgment, to gain control over the hapless transgressors). The origin of the Persian decree was animated by the casting of lots before Haman – Esther 3:7: 'In the first month, that is, the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman for each day and for each month, to the twelfth [month], that is, the month Adar'. But it is written – 'the lot is cast in the lap, but its every decision is from Jehovah' (Proverbs 16:33). The lots are cast before Haman – but Jehovah allows it. The transgressing Jew is faced with judgment by the law of Jehovah, and Haman – the instrument of Satan becomes a scourge. Haman is ready to pay the king's treasuries, ten thousand talents of silver in order for this annihilation to happen (Esther 3:9). This is symbolic of Satan's advantage over men under the law. But Christ appears – firstly, taking His place of identification with the Jew under the curse. This was Mordecai in the immediate scenes before us, but these are shadows – and Christ is the antitype.

Thirdly, this Book engages us with God's mind on the role of the Jewish remnant – the remnant Jews who are connected with the testimony of Christ as they pass through the tribulation encompassing the nation of Israel in general. They are embodied under the figure of Esther. After Esther is informed by Mordecai of the Persian decree passed against the Jews – she becomes instantly aware of another Persian law that forbids anybody entering the king's presence without permission on the cost of risking death (Esther 4:11). Esther could speak to the king about the dangers engulfing her kindred – but this meant she had to go in unto the king uninvited at the risk of death. This illustrates to us the singularity of the remnant in their most crucial discovery of the economy of the law – they find the law against them in two ways: firstly, the law marshalled judgments on account of disobedience against the nation, but secondly, even more saddening – the law did not allow for judicial access to God's presence.

The Jewish remnant would want to plead to God – about delivering the nation that is crumbling under the persecuting forces of Satan, that had only become more exacerbated under the vindictive hand of righteous indignation because of the curse of the law but – access to God's presence is not available under the works of the law. On what ground will the remnant make their petition before the judicial majesty of God on behalf of their brethren (the nation)?

Esther sends back Hatach to Mordecai with the message that her access to the king is not warranted by freedom and initiative. Mordecai gets back with the message for Esther: 'For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there arise relief and deliverance to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall perish. And who knows whether thou art [not] come to

the kingdom for such a time as this? (Esther 4:14). Mordecai has three things for Esther to be reminded about: first, the promises to the Jews are inviolable, for deliverance shall arise in some other way, second, that she would perish along with the rest of the Jews and third, that she may be divinely appointed to do her part in this critical moment. The remnant Jews view these three elements through the lens of prophecy, for prophecy is nothing but the testimony of Christ through the Spirit unto men – promises made to the nation, their (remnant) identification with the nation and the nature of their calling according to the sovereign counsels of God. Mordecai reminds Esther – that promises predate the Persian decree – deliverance to the Jews will come and shall come, no matter what the Persian decree says or does, and these promises to the Jews were given by God on the ground of grace and not of works.

The remnant for the first time, get to have a glimpse of grace pre-existing before the law because of Christ– there are counsels in God’s heart that are founded on grace, and which have nothing to do with men’s efforts to keep the law – Galatians 3:17: ‘A covenant confirmed beforehand by God, the law, which took place four hundred and thirty years after, does not annul, so as to make the promise of no effect’. Esther having been reminded by Mordecai, that there are inviolable promises for the Jew made by God – she musters faith in God, and decides to go to the king – not because the Persian law admitted such an uninvited entry, but because – she now hopes in the free expression of grace – the ‘golden sceptre’. This illustrates one of the profoundest discoveries on part of the Jewish remnant – they see their access to God’s judicial presence met out on the ground of sovereign grace through Christ, and not on the ground of the law – a profound discovery.

Fourthly, this Book showcases the manner in which Mordecai helps to safeguard and protect his people by becoming the principal agent in decreeing a new law that allowed for the Jews to shield themselves from their enemies – Mordecai

penned it, and it was sealed with the King’s ring (Esther 8:8-10). This is a new development – an astonishing one. The earlier Persian decree mandating the destruction of the Jews could not be replaced or changed – for the Persian law was irreversible. The law of God in judgment can not be changed – it showcased the majesty of God in His judicial power and claims against the lost sinner. But the cross was the answer – at the cross, the debt of law was not replaced but instead, it was remitted. Christ did not come to destroy the law – for that could not be, for God gave the law, but Christ came to fulfill the law (Matt 5:17).

This Book does not showcase the cross in its self – but what it does is, it shows the effects of the victory of the cross – that the debt of law has been paid, and that by grace – the sinner being converted and now being endowed by the power of the Spirit is given the strength to walk by faith in a power that not only fulfills the law, but lives by grace beyond and above it. Romans 3:31 - ‘Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law’.

The Persian law that mandated the destruction of the Jews is not removed – but there is another law that allows for the Jews to arm themselves and fight against their persecutors. This is the power of the cross – the Spirit empowers those who are rescued by the blood of Jesus with grace, that enables them to walk by faith against the lusts and the wiles of Satan. In a corporate sense -with respect to the nation of Israel – on the future day, they shall see themselves availing of the grace in Christ, to be not just shielded against the judgment of the law, but by the enabling power and the abiding presence of the Spirit of God through the new covenant – they shall be established on the ground of grace before God.

When Haman writes the decree – it is judgment on the Jews. It is the curse of the law – Satan has his advantage over the nation. But when Mordecai steps in and writes the decree – it prefigures Christ in grace: He takes up the curse of the law on Himself, answers to the responsibility of man before God, and having been raised for our justification- by Him, there is a new law – the ‘law of

the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death' (Romans 8:2).

These are broad principles – the principles of grace affected by the cross, but the scope of this Book is much seen in its application with the Jews as a whole. The church is not disclosed here, but yes, undoubtedly – the principles shine for our profit too.

7. Reflections During The Worship and Remembrance on Lord's Day Morning

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- In Luke 24, the angels remind the women about the Lord's previous reference to death and resurrection. This was the Lord's testimony of His own death and resurrection. Later, the Lord having met His disciples, both on the way to Emmaus and Jerusalem, speaks about the testimony of the scriptures – the Law, Prophets and the Psalms regarding His death and resurrection. These are two distinct testimonies: the Lord's own testimony of His death and resurrection, and the testimony of the scriptures regarding His death and resurrection
- In Luke 24, the Lord on the way to Emmaus teaches them from the scriptures, and finally concluded it with the breaking of bread – the token of His death. But at Jerusalem, before He begins with teaching them from the scriptures – the law, prophets and psalms, He eats the broiled fish and honey, which disclose the proofs of His bodily resurrection. In one – He proceeds with the entire prophetic counsel and climaxes it with His death. In the other – He proceeds with signs and proofs of resurrection glory, and then retraces back the whole testimony of the scriptures. We may do the same in our contemplations of the Lord.
- Three times, wine was offered to the Lord as narrated by the Gospels. The first time is recorded for us in Matthew and Mark – where it was mixed with gall and myrrh. The Lord does not receive it since He is decided to experience the full extent of divine judgment without any of the stupefying effects of the wine mixed with gall.
- The second time when the wine was offered to the Lord, it is mentioned in Luke – it was offered by soldiers in jest and mockery. Here, we find the Lord enduring the contradiction of sinners.
- Matthew, Mark and John narrate the third time, when wine was offered to the Lord. This time it was just sour wine and it was not mixed with gall. Matthew and Mark narrate that this wine was decided to be offered for the third time in connection with the cry of separation: 'My God, my God...' (Matt 27:46-48, Mark 15:34-36). Whereas John narrates the actual administering of the wine, the third time in connection with the Lord's saying, 'I thirst' (John 19:28,29).
- In Matthew and Mark, the decision to offer wine for the third time, was precipitated because the onlookers felt that the Lord was crying out for protection, deliverance and help. In Matthew 27:48,49 – others forbid the person who was wanting to administer wine, out of curiosity and expectation to witness a spectacle of protective deliverance. In Mark 15:36 – the person who administers the wine, persists in giving the wine while expressing that he too would like to see how the Lord would be miraculously protected. This presents the profane curiosity of the world, that had looked to see how Christ would be protected from His anguish and pain – they paused to see what would happen. The answer to their pause, unbeknownst to them is narrated for us in John.
- In John, the person who persisted to administer the wine, the third time despite others having forbid him – actually administers the wine after the Lord had said, 'I thirst' (John 19:28,29). But he does it by making use of hyssop – the relic of the Passover night. The Lord accepts the drink – acknowledging the reality behind the hyssop, that He was indeed the Paschal Lamb, whose blood screens humanity from the judgment of God – but this was His answer to the profanity of men's curiosity.
- In Matthew and Mark – the world administers wine for the third time, to check on any spectacle of deliverance, as to how the Lord may be protected from His hour of pain. In John – it is revealed that He had no protection at all – He faced the judgment of God as it is – but by accepting the wine given in hyssop – the Lord acknowledges that He is the Paschal Lamb who had protected us from

God's judgment. The world that curiously enquired whether the Lord would be protected and helped, scarcely understood that He was there to protect us from the judgment of God. He was the Protector, although He himself was stripped out of all protective cover before God's judgment, as He hung there in judgment as to the question of our sin.

- The cry on the cross – “My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me” is taken from Psalm 22 – that illustrates the separation that Christ suffered from God, on account of being identified with out sin. But then John brings out the fulfillment of scripture as far as the Lord's sufferings were concerned – it was to be fulfilled only after the Lord uttered: ‘I thirst’ (John 19:28): ‘After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst’ – scriptures as far as His sufferings were concerned ends with ‘I thirst’ – bringing to us, Psalm 69. Unlike Psalm 22 – the theme in Psalm 69 is about Christ suffering persecution in the hands of men on account of His testimony for God. Psalm 22 is separation from God while Psalm 69 is rejection from men – and this concludes the testimony of scriptures as far as the Lord's sufferings are concerned – both the subjects are touched.

- The cry on the cross - ‘Eli, Eli’ that referred to the name of God, was misunderstood for ‘Elias’ by others near the cross. Men had so much to think about the possibilities of (messianic) deliverance although they had slipped down on comprehension from that of God's deliverance to a prophet's deliverance – but they had nothing to think about divine judgment – ‘why hast thou forsaken me?’. For if they had thought of God's judgment, then it is ridiculous to have waited for a prophet to deliver – for if God Himself has turned against, what can a prophet do? The world sees an opportunity for a spectacle of deliverance at the cross – but is blind to divine judgment that fell on Christ on account of humanity's sin. But the wine and the hyssop answers it all.