ESTHER: Doing Good in a Hostile World:

Oct. 5: Covenant People in the City: Esther 2:19-3:2: **When the virgins were assembled a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate. 20 But Esther had kept secret her family background and nationality just as Mordecai had told her to do, for she continued to follow Mordecai’s instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up. 21 During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate, Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king’s officers who guarded the doorway, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. 22 But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai. 23 And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were impaled on poles. All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king.**

Intro: People of faith and love:

I. Sit at the King’s Gate: Esther 2:19:**Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate.**

A. Mordecai had accepted an important position in the governance of Susa.

1. He is in exile along with his people. He could refuse to participate in the society where he lives. Instead he not only participates, he takes a position of authority.

2. We are pilgrims here on this earth. In a very real sense, “This world is not my home, I’m just a-passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.”

3. Yet my status as a pilgrim should not include the refusal to engage the community either socially or politically.

B. Despite his exile and estrangement from his culture and heritage, Mordecai became engaged with his new home, the city of Susa, and the political powers. He was following the godly counsel of the prophet Jeremiah who wrote a letter to the Jews in exile in which he told them to “build houses, plant gardens” and plan weddings. In Jeremiah 29:7 he advised: *Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.*

A famous verse we often reference, Jeremiah 29:11: *For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future*.

C. Mordecai would not have learned of the assassination plot had he not accepted and faithfully executed his political office at the gate of the city. His engagement with his city led ultimately to his elevation to a post of great influence and the rescue of his people.

D. Our forefathers tried to change the world by withdrawing from it. Anabaptists refused to hold public office, to become judges or mayors. They would not participate as citizens in their cities. Instead, they tried to be a light to the larger culture by living as a community of committed followers of Jesus. I respect this approach as long as, in your withdrawal, you are committed to living the life of Christ in your own community, that your withdrawal from the larger culture includes a commitment to community life.

E. But Mordecai’s way is ultimately more productive for most people. We are citizens of two worlds, earth and heaven. We do well to seek the prosperity of the city where we now live for we will prosper as it prospers. We will have influence for good in this hostile world of which we are a part.

II. Stay Connected: Esther **“continued to follow Mordecai’s instructions” (2:20)**

A. Mordecai and Esther worked together. Esther was separated physically from her father. He was pacing back and forth, worried about what was happening to her. But they did what they could to stay on the same page as they faced the crisis.

1. Both had important and influential positions though Esther’s was at first the most important.

2. Both were serving the same purpose—advancing the cause of the covenant people in a strange and sometimes hostile city.

B. We do our best work when we work together.

1. Elijah was one of the most powerful and courageous prophets of God. He lived at a time of great wickedness when the political powers were turned against truth and justice.

2. He thought he was alone in his work, and this was very discouraging to him. He even asked God to take him because he felt so isolated and alone. I know you have been there. At times it feels that you are seeking to be faithful on your own. Even the Apostle Paul was depressed. God comforted him by bringing him Titus.

3. God told Elijah that he had 7,000 covenant people who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

4. We are connected formally to more than 100 congregations in our four-parish area. They are sister churches in that they join with us in starting new churches, helping churches that are struggling, and operating compassion ministries such as Friendship House and Baptist Community Health Services.

C. The covenant community, your church, is seeking to make a difference for Christ in our city. Our strategy is deep and consistent involvement and engagement in our community. We are not sitting on the sidelines. We are in it up to our elbows.

D. We stay strong and encouraged when we foster and develop the connections that we have with other people who follow Jesus. Our effectiveness is multiplied through these connections.

E. Practice loyalty. Mordecai demonstrates wisdom as he is loyal to the pagan king of Persia. These political alliances are always complex. They are difficult to navigate. But that is part of the requirement for those who wish to be involved. One of our members taught me this truth: politics is all about building coalitions and crafting compromises that promote the cause of justice and truth.

F. Credit where Credit is due. Part of the partnership in the good work we are doing is to elevate others in our work. We advance the kingdom when we highlight the contributions of people who are following Christ.

1. Esther gave credit to Mordecai for uncovering the assassination plot.

2. Mordecai will later be advanced to the highest position in the king’s cabinet because of this loyalty.

III. Refuse to Kneel: **Mordecai would not kneel (Esther 3:1-2)**

**After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. 2 All the royal officials at the king’s gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor**

A. Haman was an Agagite. The Amalekites, whose king was numerous significant battles in the history of Israel.

1. The first is that battle where Moses held up his hands. The Amalekites attacked Israel (Exodus 17:8) shortly after they crossed the Red Sea. Moses stood on a hill and help up his hands. When his hands fell, the Amalekites began to win. When his hands were held high, Israel won. Aaron, his brother, and Hur, the son of Caleb, sat Moses down on a stone, got on either side of him, and held up his hands until Israel won the battle.

2. Gideon’s 300 men fought an enormous army and won. That army included the Amalekites.

3. Another instance, King Saul was ordered to kill all the Amalekites (I Samuel 15:18). But he spared some. Saul insisted he just wanted to sacrifice some of the animals to the Lord. That’s when Samuel said, “To obey is better than sacrifice” (I Sam. 15:22).

4. The Amalekites and the Israelites go at it again, this time in the struggle between Haman and Mordecai/Esther.

B. Haman is elevated to the king’s right hand man. We are not told why. He is an evil person, and this is an evil choice. No king is well-advised to place arrogant, selfish, wicked people in authority.

Mordecai saved the king’s life, but his intervention brings no recognition. Haman seems to have done nothing to deserve it, but he is promoted. Sometimes that is how it happens in this world.

C. Mordecai will not kneel. Everyone else kneels when Haman walks out the city gate. Friends ask Mordecai about it because it is so obvious. Like the three Hebrew children who would not worship the golden idol and were thrown into the furnace, like Daniel who would not stop praying to his God and was thrown in the lion’s den, Mordecai will not kneel to Haman.

1. Christians have a distinguished history of refusing to kneel before anyone except the Lord Jesus. Many died for this conviction.

2. Mordecai will put no man on a pedestal. We are all sinners. The ground is level before the throne. We worship God alone.