ESTHER: Doing Good in a Hostile World:

Oct. 12: Different People Groups: Esther 3:5-11: **5 When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. 6 Yet having learned who Mordecai’s people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai’s people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.**

**7 In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month, the month of Nisan, the *pur* (that is, the lot) was cast in the presence of Haman to select a day and month. And the lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of Adar.**

**8 Then Haman said to King Xerxes, “There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king’s laws; it is not in the king’s best interest to tolerate them. 9 If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will give ten thousand talents of silver to the king’s administrators for the royal treasury.”**

**10 So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. 11 “Keep the money,” the king said to Haman, “and do with the people as you please.”**

You have heard me say before that not all cultures are equal. Some cultures get sick just like some human personalities get sick.

All cultures have good and bad. Just as we do not exterminate individuals based on qualities of personality, we do exterminate cultures based on the presence or absence of certain qualities.

But we are frequently tempted to do so.

I. We All Want to Be Seen as THE GREATEST: **When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged (v5)**

A. Haman’s self-worth is wrapped up in his money and power. He brags about his wealth and power, his influence and connections. These things are very important to him.

1. His bragging—telling others about how great he is—indicates a deep need to be recognized and praised.

B. Haman is full of fears and insecurities.

1. He is fearful of those who have more power than he does. 2. He is fearful of those who will not recognize his power. He is afraid that Mordecai may be right, that he is not worthy of honor.

C. Haman is not comfortable in himself. He is only comfortable when others see him in a certain way. People who are secure in themselves—like Mordecai—are a threat to him and his world.

D. We all care about what people think. We want people to think highly of us, not to despise us or disrespect us. That is good. Part of staying true and faithful is caring about our reputation.

E. But that concern about reputation gets twisted when we value ourselves only as others value us rather than as God values us. If our self-worth is tied up in the opinions of others, we are in trouble.

F. We derive our true sense of worth from the God who made us, the One we worship, the One we call “Father.” Here is the anchor for our own security and courage in the world.

II. People Who Are Different Make us Fearful: **There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king’s laws (v8)**

A. ONE people, one group. They are one group among many people groups in the Persian Empire.

1. They are dispersed throughout the kingdom. This is what their conquerors did to them. This dispersion, *Diaspora,* is the typical plight of the Jews everywhere in the world. They are a scattered people group. Like the Kurds in Afghanistan, Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, they have no homeland.

2. The two words used here to describe the Jewish people are *pazar* and *parad,* “scattered and dispersed.” NIV chooses to translate the word *parad* as “separate.” The word means to separate or divide, to keep separate. That is the sense here.

3. All the other groups ASSIMILATE, more or less, into the larger culture of the Persian Empire. But not the Jews. The Jews do not assimilate. They maintain their clothing, their language, and their strange customs. They set up their own houses of worship and instruction. They worship their own God and read their own holy book. They are a dispersed but separate people.

B. The DIFFERENCE may be fearful and threatening to others.

1. We do not understand the strange customs that are different from our own. Why do they wear such strange beards? Why is their hair in a knot on their heads? Why do they have little boxes hung on their bodies? Why always dressed in black? Why the strange language, the secret language, that only they can understand? Why do they use that language when I am present?

2. SUSPICIONS begins to form in my mind as I see the difference in this group. I take their different customs as a judgment on my own behavior and that of my group. We wear t-shirts and tennis shoes. They must think there is something wrong with that, morally wrong, intrinsically wrong. And maybe they do.

3. Instead of celebrating the rich variety and creativity of the human race, we fear the differences. \*\*\*We are surprised to see someone dressed in Eastern garb or a turbin, or a Hindu with the *tilak* or prayer mark on the forehead.

C. We think they should conform to our ways. They are among us, so they should be like us. Instead, they give their children these strange names that no one can pronounce. They practice customs that no one understands. It seems to us that they stubbornly maintain their separate way of life, their community and their customs, despite being part of a large society, a dominant society.

D. All over the world these tensions abound between groups. We insult each other. We scoff and deride each other, fear one another.

III. Sometimes We Contemplate The Final Solution: **Destroy All (Esther 3:6): Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai’s people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.**

A. Haman is furious at Mordecai, this stiff-necked Jew. He decides that killing Mordecai is not enough. He wants to eradicate all Jews from the empire.

B. Why would he do this? Verses 8: **it is not in the king’s best interest to tolerate them.**

1. Haman accuses these unnamed people of disobeying the king’s laws. That is decidedly untrue. They are loyal to the king. They follow the laws as Jeremiah instructed in 29:7.

2. Every culture sees itself as the norm. The Jews are living outside the norm in Persia. That is the real rub. These outward signs point to deeply held beliefs and ideals that may be different from our own. They also represent a culture that is foreign to us, brought into our community from somewhere else.

C. What is the FINAL SOLUTION? Destroy all. In June of 1941 in the Wansee Conference the Nazi regime determined that the only solution to the Jewish question was their complete extermination.

\*\*\*I have a photo of a letter written in January of 1942 which mentions the “Final Solution.” Like Haman, Himmler believed they all needed to die. Seven million Jews were slaughtered by the Nazis, two thirds of their population in Europe. Many other groups were also attacked and many millions were killed.

D. Humans generally prefer homogeneous groups, groups that look alike. This is why a CHURCH that embraces variety, a church composed of Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, black and white, where the walls between groups have truly come down, IS SUCH A POWERFUL influence for good in the world. Suspicion and fear between people groups produces violence and death in the world. But loving one another, reaching out to each other in our mutual need and pain, produces peace.

E. **Bewildered City (Esther 3:15): The couriers went out, spurred on by the king’s command, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered.**

Cities like Susa and New Orleans are often amalgams of people from all over the world. People get to know one another—the grocer, the dry-cleaner, the barber, the landscaper, the healthcare professional—and begin to adjust to and appreciate the heterogeneity, seeing people as individuals to be engaged rather than people groups to be feared. Susa had no warning or explanation for the edict of extermination. They were bewildered.

**Conclusion**: Love across the lines. The gospel has done well in the great cities. The Apostle Paul went to the cities and planted churches. The poor responded to the good news in great numbers.

\*\*\*Pastor Sam from India visited us last week. He credits the gospel of Christ with bringing dignity and self-respect to his people, the UNTOUCHABLES, the lowest class in Indian society.

New Orleans is ripe for the good news of God’s forgiveness. In the nursing homes, hospitals, prisons, and neighborhoods people respond to the gospel. People need the gospel in the worst way, and we are its carriers. Seize the moment to light up the darkness in your world. Boldly share the good news.