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Esther approaches King Ahasuerus and puts her plan in motion. Timothy, Paul's son in his ministry.

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Transcript

Esther Chapter 5. On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, in front of the king's quarters, while the king was sitting on his royal throne, inside the throne room, opposite the entrance to the palace. And when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won favour in his sight, and he held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.

And the king said to her, What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom. And Esther said, If it please the king, let the king and Haman come today to a feast that I have prepared for the king. Then the king said, Bring Haman quickly, so that we may do as Esther has asked.

So the king and Haman came to the feast that Esther had prepared. And as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king said to Esther, What is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom it shall be fulfilled.

Then Esther answered, My wish and my request is, If I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my wish and fulfil my request, let the king and Haman come to the feast that I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said. And Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai.

Nevertheless Haman restrained himself and went home. And he sent and brought his friends and his wife Zeresh. And Haman recounted to them the splendour of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honoured him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the servants of the king.

Then Haman said, Even Queen Esther let no one but me come with the king to the feast she prepared, and tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king. Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate. Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, Let a gallows fifty cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged upon it, and go joyfully with the king to the feast.

This idea pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made. Having been charged by Mordecai to speak to the king concerning the plan of Haman to destroy her people, in chapter 5 Esther faces a very difficult situation. She and her women, along with the Jews and Mordecai, had fasted for three days and nights in preparation for this.

We can presume that she also gave a lot of time to planning and to prayer. When reading familiar biblical narratives like that of Esther, our ability to interpret the text well is often compromised by the fact that we know how the story goes. As we know that everything worked out well in the end, we don't give enough thought to the cards that Esther held at this point in the story, and the way that she would have had to plan accordingly.

In our reading of the text, our focus is on the question of whether King Ahasuerus will accept her coming near. As a result, we probably don't give enough consideration to the question of what she will say when she is invited to approach. Esther's power is not directly a political power.

It is a power that lies largely in her beauty. While such a power could be used for political ends, it would take considerable skill to convert the power that she has into a political power. She has not been summoned by the king for over a month, and now she has to

go toe to toe against the king's most trusted advisor and right-hand man.

Yoram Hazoni speculates about the sort of deliberations Esther would have had. He writes, Why then did Esther invite the king to the feast? Hazoni writes, King Ahasuerus can presumably see that Esther is deeply distressed, and his favour towards her can be seen in his extravagant offer of up to half his kingdom at her request. Queen Esther, who is presumably showing the signs of having fasted for three days and three nights, and not slept very well, makes a strange request.

She invites the king and Haman to a feast that she has prepared for him. While this is not clear in every translation, as many of them have the king, Esther's question in verse 4 ends with, For him? Who is him? Is it Haman, or is it the king? One can imagine King Ahasuerus being puzzled at this point, and wondering what is going on. As Hazoni writes, Behind a superficial innocence, Esther's intention is to make a highly unusual, even disturbing, request.

For why should the queen, who has not had the benefit of seeing her husband for a month, wish to organise an intimate romantic dinner for three? And the ambiguity that she raises about the person for whom the feast is prepared makes matters even worse. Is Queen Esther, King Ahasuerus might wonder, preparing this great banquet for Haman? Why would she single him out for such attention? Likely puzzling in this way about what is going on, the king summons Haman to bring him to the feast. The king recognises that Esther's request is not just to have this banquet, there is something more bothering her, and she still hasn't told him.

During the celebration of this intimate banquet, he turns to Esther, and asks what her request is. Once again, however, he does not get the true answer. He is invited once more, again with Haman, to a feast the next day that Esther will prepare for them.

For them. For the king and Haman together. If the former invitation had raised the question of the person for whom the feast was prepared, a question which the king, presumably after a period of puzzling about it, settled in his own favour, in this invitation the king and Haman seem to be treated as guests of equal honour.

Besides, it's one thing to invite a person for an intimate banquet one night, this is a sign of great honour, but to do it two nights in a row raises all sorts of questions. Something strange is going on here. It is important to notice what Esther is doing.

She is sowing seeds of distrust and doubt in the mind of the king concerning Haman. She is also tempting Haman to overplay his hand of ambition, to reveal what is really driving him. By puffing him up with such favours and honours, and giving him lots of wine, Esther is getting Haman to drop his defences, tempting him into some sort of unguarded action.

She recognises that Haman is a shrewd political operator. Indeed, if he is the same person as Mimucan in chapter 1, an identification that several Jewish commentators have made, then he has already proved successful in dismissing one queen before her. However, she also knows, likely from Mordecai, that Haman is a proud and vain man.

He is easily flattered, and he also has ambitions far above his present station, even as the second most powerful man in the land. If Rabbi David Forman is correct in his speculations concerning the reasons for which Mordecai did not bow to Haman, then Mordecai knows that Haman is not in fact a faithful servant of the king, but someone who has ambitions on the throne. He has removed obstacles, potentially including Queen Bashti, and he has also advanced himself over others, so that rather than the king relying upon a number of different officials, he relies upon Haman alone.

Esther has to be very shrewd in the way that she plays her cards. Giving enough time for the seeds of doubt and distrust to germinate in the mind of the king is important, and she likely also hopes that Haman will make a misstep very soon. Indeed, she doesn't have to wait for long.

Haman, puffed up by the great favour that he has been shown by the queen, leaves the feast, and as he goes out, at the king's gate, he sees Mordecai, and yet Mordecai shows him no honour. Haman's pride having been puffed up and then wounded, he goes home to his wife and his family, and puts on a pitiful display. Late in the evening, after the banquet is over, he gathers his friends and his wife and family together, and tells them of all the splendour of his riches, the number of his sons, all the ways that the king has honoured him, how he has been advanced before everyone else, and how Queen Esther herself has shown great honour to him in inviting him to an intimate banquet with the king.

His pride is reducing him to a self-caricature, when he has to boast about the number of his sons to his wife. His friends, his wife and his family know of all his riches and all of his advancement, yet Haman's exalted ego would make a fool of him. Haman reveals a sort of pathology of desire here.

He has everything that he wants, he has been granted all of these favours, and yet the one thing that he can't have, so rankles that, as long as he can't have it, nothing else is worth anything to him. Rabbi Foreman has noted a connection between Haman and Adam in this respect. Haman's relationship with the one thing that he cannot have is like Adam's relationship with the forbidden fruit.

It should not surprise us that it is the wife of Haman that gives the advice that Mordecai's body should be hung upon a tree. Mordecai is like the forbidden fruit upon the tree being offered by the woman to her husband. Within the story, we should also notice the way that the character of Zeresh plays off against Esther.

Zeresh merely affirms and gives in to her husband's desire, whereas Esther has to win her husband's heart away from the evil plan of Haman and win it over to that which is good and true. She will have to play the part of a faithful Eve, while Zeresh plays the part of a wicked one. Most translations render the word for tree here as gallows, as this is clearly what is being prepared.

Zeresh's suggestion, however, is surprisingly specific. The gallows is to be 50 cubits high. Why that specific height? Such a gallows would tower over almost every building.

50 cubits is around 75 feet high. It is also unclear whether Mordecai was intended to be hanged upon the tree or whether he would have been impaled. Perhaps this is a specific tree of that height that is being prepared for the purpose.

It is also important to notice the way in which Haman at this point is starting to reveal his cards, cards that he had tried to hide earlier. Lest we forget, the purpose of the decree was so as not to disclose that he had a particular quarrel with Mordecai himself. However, at this point he can't tolerate waiting for even 11 further months.

Haman feels that he must act against Mordecai now, without waiting. Perhaps he's concerned that if he does not deal with Mordecai's insubordination at this point, Mordecai might embolden others to act against him. He wants to make a public spectacle of Mordecai to warn all who would stand against him and to do so as soon as possible.

Zeresh and his friends advise that he goes immediately in the morning to the king to speak to him concerning this matter. He should not wait before taking his action. A question to consider, at this point in the story, what do you think is going through the minds of King Ahasuerus, of Haman and of Esther? How can we see the effect in this of Esther's plan as it has been outworking so far? 1st Timothy chapter 1 verses 1 to 17 2nd Timothy chapter 1 verses 1 to 18 2nd Timothy chapter 1 verses 1 to 19 I thank Him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because He judged me faithful, appointing me to His service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent.

But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I receive mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display His perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in Him for eternal life.

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. The book of 1st Timothy is the first of what have been called pastoral epistles, including 1st and 2nd Timothy and the book of Titus.

The status of these books has been considerably debated. Some have argued that they are 2nd century texts, what are called pseudepigraphical texts, presenting themselves as being written by the apostle, but actually written by other hands. Various arguments have been advanced for this position.

Some have argued that after the second coming failed to occur in the 1st century, there was a need for a more accommodated Christianity for the longer term, and the pastoral epistles answered to something of this concern. They address structures of church leadership, which are largely absent in the undisputed Pauline texts. Jew-Gentile issues are no longer looming in the same way in the background.

The style of the letters also seem to differ quite considerably from that of the undisputed Pauline texts. And besides this, there is the challenge of fitting them into the chronology that we know of Paul from the book of Acts and his other epistles. Many of the challenges to Pauline authorship rest upon questionable theological prejudices.

The assumption, for instance, that the apostolic church was a far less organised body, with more charismatic structures of leadership. Others imagine that some later figure lost the nerve that Paul had in his more radical teaching, retreating to the more patriarchal form of society that we see in chapter 2. Many of these sorts of challenges can be answered by showing the consistency between Paul's teaching in the books of Timothy and Titus, and the teaching that we find elsewhere in the Pauline epistles and in the book of Acts. The claim that it is a late text, and the fact that it is absent from Marcion's canon, can be addressed by recognising that Marcion may have had motivations for leaving it out of his canon, which had more to do with his heretical convictions than with strong arguments against the authenticity of the pastoral epistles.

Besides this, the pastoral epistles are recognised as genuine Pauline epistles from at least the beginning of the 2nd century. The fact that they are cited by various people and attributed to Paul leaves those disputing Pauline authorship with the challenge of explaining why they became so widely accepted from so very early on. Various responses have been given to the challenge of contrasting styles between the pastoral epistles and the disputed Pauline texts.

It is worth bearing in mind, for instance, the fact that various other hands were involved in the writing of the Pauline epistles. All scholars accept, for instance, the role of an amanuensis in the writing of many of Paul's epistles. Then there is the consideration of co-authors in a number of cases.

In reference to the pastoral epistles, I. Howard Marshall has raised the possibility of what he calls allonymity, another hand gathering together, organising and editing genuine Pauline material into these letters. If we accept, as I believe we should, that the Apostle Paul was the author of the pastoral epistles, we are left with a number of challenges, one of them being the question of where to fit these in within Paul's ministry as we can piece

it together from various other sources, particularly the book of Acts. Philip Towner suggests that one of the most promising junctures is that found in Acts chapter 20 verses 1 to 3. After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia.

When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews, as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. I think Towner is right to identify this brief window of time as the most likely period for the writing of 1 Timothy.

The epistle of 1 Timothy begins with a characteristically Pauline introduction. Paul introduces himself and declares his commission. He is an Apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope.

The letter is addressed to Timothy, Paul's true child in the faith. Paul first encountered Timothy at Lystra. He was held in high esteem by the Christians in the region.

He was the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father. This would likely have provoked some disapproval in some more observant Jewish quarters, although many of the Jews would have been more relaxed about it. The problem was not chiefly an ethnic one, but a religious one.

Intermarriage with people outside of the covenant was seen as a very serious matter in many parts of the Old Testament. In 2 Timothy 1.5 we learn that both Timothy's mother and grandmother were faithful persons and that he was taught the scriptures from a young age. So we should not suppose that Timothy's mother was indifferent towards her Jewish faith.

We can speculate over whether or not Timothy's father was a God-fearer associated with the synagogue. However, the fact that Timothy had not been circumcised raises the possibility that his mother's marriage was less than ideal. Perhaps it was arranged by an unbelieving father.

Timothy's religious status would have seemed rather ambiguous and perhaps a cause of scandal to some people. Timothy himself is a living example of a Jew-Gentile union. And considering the obstacle that Timothy's ambiguous status might provide for the mission, Paul had determined it was best to circumcise him.

This presumably was undertaken for the cause of the mission, so that Timothy would be more effective in Jewish contexts. In circumcising Timothy, Paul played the part of a father to him. Timothy would come to be immensely important in Paul's ministry.

He served as Paul's personal representative. Timothy is Paul's shaliach, the one who personally represents Paul where Paul himself could not be. As such, Timothy

participated in the exercise of Paul's apostolic ministry.

He was the co-author of a number of epistles, 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Philemon. He was Paul's personal emissary, as we see in Acts chapter 19 verse 22, and here in 1 Timothy. He also served Paul so that Paul could give himself to his primary task of preaching without any distraction, as we see in Acts chapter 18 verses 1 to 5. Paul and Timothy were a pair, bound together in a single apostolic mission.

On occasions, the distinction between them is made plain. Only Paul is the apostle proper, while on other occasions their alignment is stressed. Timothy is a co-worker, a helper, a sharer in Paul's calling.

Relative to the churches to which they were ministering, Timothy was to be treated as a bearer of Paul's own authority. However, relative to Paul, Timothy was a subordinate. He was without an independent commission of his own.

He rather shared in Paul's. The relationship between Paul and Timothy is exceptionally close, and Paul speaks of Timothy as his son, his child in the gospel. The language is not merely that of emotional closeness, but of representation.

The son represents the father, his authority, his presence, and his interests. Such father-son language also points to a relationship similar to that which pertained between Old Testament leaders and prophets and their shaliaks. In Numbers chapter 13 verse 16, we see that Joshua's name was given to him by Moses, who also laid his hands on Joshua in Deuteronomy chapter 34 verse 9. A similar relationship existed between Elijah and Elisha.

Elisha received a double portion of Elijah's spirit, the inheritance that was appropriate to the firstborn. And as Elijah was taken into heaven, Elisha addressed him as his father. Matthew Colvin observes that Timothy is a virtual copy of Paul, is underlined by 1 Corinthians chapter 4 verses 16 to 17.

I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church. The charge to imitate Paul is accompanied by the sending of Timothy toward the fulfilment of this end, as the son is the pre-eminent imitator and representation of the father.

As a participant in his father's ministry, and as Paul's right hand man, Timothy had immense authority to wield, even being given the commission to choose and appoint church officers as Paul's representative. As the apostolic ministry was temporary, upon Paul's death, Timothy would likely have ceased to be the apostle's apostle, and would presumably have become a bishop, or occupied some other similar position within the

early church. The greeting that Paul gives to Timothy here is grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Throughout the Pauline corpus we see that the terms grace, mercy and peace are theologically freighted terms. They bear the greatest weight of meaning. This is not just a throwaway greeting, but is a communication of the full wealth of the blessings that are given to us in the gospel.

This epistle is sent to Timothy to confirm him in an existing commission. While going on to Macedonia, Paul had commissioned Timothy to remain at Ephesus and deal with some issues in the church there. As I've suggested earlier, this was most likely at the beginning of Acts chapter 20.

Ephesus was a sizeable city, probably larger than Corinth, perhaps even the third or fourth largest city in the Roman Empire. Paul first visited there in Acts chapter 18. There were certain troublemakers in the church at Ephesus.

They seemed to have been teachers teaching false doctrine, a teaching based upon speculation and esoteric texts and beliefs, rather than upon the clarity of the gospel message and the faith that corresponds to that. Timothy and Paul had the task of stewardship in the household of God, and the proper behaviour of people within the household of faith was threatened by such speculative doctrines. The source of the speculative doctrines in question seemed to have been Jewish myths and fables.

The endless genealogies referred to suggest that some of the material might have arisen from speculative Jewish texts about people before the flood, for instance. Such material can be read with interest, but it mostly produces dubious lines of reasoning, rather than the certainty and the clarity of true faith. There are definitely interesting features to be pursued in the shadowy corners of the biblical text, and even in the penumbra of extra-canonical Jewish literature, there are many worthwhile things to be read.

However, this is certainly not where our faith is founded. Our faith must rest upon the clear revealed things of God, and the more that we abandon that clarity for speculations and fables, the more we are in danger of undermining our own and other people's faith. The centre of gravity of Christian teaching is in clearly revealed things, things that any careful reader of scripture should be able to see.

These things encourage faith, which is based upon the surety and the clarity of truth. Myths and speculations cannot provide a sure foundation for such faith. Such true faith gives rise to a genuine love.

The conscience and the heart that have been purified by faith and the work of the Holy Spirit yield love towards God and his people that fulfils the law. Meanwhile, those who have abandoned the clarity of the word of God in the gospel, and implicitly the faith and

love that correspond to that, have given themselves to interminable vain discussion, empty speculations about the law. They fancy themselves to be teachers of the law, but they don't have a clue what they're talking about.

Paul here might be speaking not just as a Christian apostle, but also as someone who was advanced in the knowledge of the law more than any of his contemporaries. Paul was enough of an actual expert in the law to recognise dabblers when he saw them. The law is fulfilled in love that proceeds from a true faith that responds to the clarity of the gospel.

Paul writes in Romans chapter 13 verses 8 to 10, The law, Paul stresses here, is good, but it needs to be used in the right way. The law is primarily for the condemning and the exposure of sin, and as such it's not primarily for the just, but for rebels and sinners. Paul lists a number of figures for which the law is written in verses 9 to 10, and we can see he loosely follows the order of the ten commandments.

The lawless, disobedient, ungodly, sinners, unholy and profane refer to the first four commandments. Then there are those who strike their fathers and mothers, which relates to the fifth. Those who are murderers, the sixth.

The sexually immoral and men who practice homosexuality, the seventh. Enslavers, you shall not steal, the eighth. Liars and perjurers, the ninth.

There is no explicit allusion to the tenth. Elsewhere in Romans Paul talked about the tenth commandment as that which exposed sin to him. The tenth commandment, which reveals the problem of the heart, is also the negative commandment that most clearly corresponds to the positive injunction by which the law is fulfilled, loving your neighbour as yourself.

The law, for Paul, represents the sort of negative space around the positive space of the gospel message. The law is concerned with ruling out and identifying everything that is contrary to sound doctrine. However, the positive message of the sound doctrine is found in the gospel of the glory of the blessed God.

The gospel is that in which God's actual glory is revealed. In these verses Paul makes a lot of use of faith-related words. The word entrusted in verse 11, the word faithful in verse 12, the word faith in verse 14, the word trustworthy in verse 15, and the verb to believe in verse 16.

All of these are related in the Greek. Paul has been commissioned as one faithful to bear the gospel. The faithfulness of Paul here should be considered as the effectiveness of Christ through him.

And the contrast between the former Paul, Saul of Tarsus, prior to his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus, and Paul the apostle is a stark one. It presents Paul

himself as a worked example of Christ's grace in the gospel. Paul both bears the message and represents the message in himself.

As a recipient of such extreme mercy, he is well placed to declare that mercy to others and also to provide an image of what that mercy is like in practice. He presents himself as the foremost of sinners. But as the foremost of the sinners, he is being made an example of the extent of Christ's salvation.

If the foremost of the sinners, a violent man who persecuted the church, can be saved, then there is no reason why anyone else can't be. Paul's personal testimony is thoroughly bound up with his broader message of the gospel. Paul concludes this section with a doxology, proclaiming God's reign, the fact that he is the immortal creator beyond human vision, the only God who dwells in unapproachable light, and one who will receive honor and glory throughout all generations.

From a declaration of what God has done in history, and most particularly in his own life, the apostle moves quite seamlessly to a proclamation of God's eternal glory. A question to consider, Paul's personal testimony here is very naturally connected to his proclamation of the gospel more generally. How can we tell our testimonies in a way that connects them more fully with the great story of God's work in Christ and history?