



JESUS IS A BETTER REVERSAL

Part 10 of Esther

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Esther 9:1–19 | November 18, 2012

INTRODUCTION

Men, we're leaders. The decisions we make, they implicate our wives, our children, our grandchildren. As you'll see today, sometimes for a thousand generations. In addition, if you lead a business, men, the decisions that you make may affect everyone who's associated with you. For those of you who are in political leadership, men, the decisions you make affect everyone who's associated with you.

And today, in Esther 9 where we look at "Jesus Is a Better Reversal," we're really focusing the story in on two men, powerful men, significant men, important men. One man's name is Haman. He's from a line called the Agagites. These are godless people. Not everybody is a godly person. Not everybody belongs to the Lord. Not everybody's going to heaven. Not everybody has a good heart. He's a bad man from a bad line, headed toward a bad eternity, and he's issued a decree. He has risen up in the Persian Empire to a position second only to the King Xerxes and he's issued a death sentence for the people of God, that on a particular day it will be legal to kill all of God's people.

And in a great reversal, the man who was high was taken low. The man who was alive was put to death. The man who wanted to kill Mordecai himself died. The man who built a seventy-five-foot-high gallows in his own yard to crucify his enemy was crucified in his own yard in front of his family.

The other man, Mordecai, he's one of God's men. He's not a perfect man, but he's one of God's men. He is a man who, in a great reversal, takes the position of Haman. He becomes the second most powerful. He gets the signet ring, the power of attorney, to act on behalf of King Xerxes. He has an opportunity, now that he has inherited the entire estate of Haman, to reverse this death sentence that is on God's people.

And so the first decree was given by Haman to kill all of God's people, and then the second decree is given by Mordecai that God's people can defend themselves on the day that their attackers come to destroy their families. And in this, we see that there really are two groups: those who are God's people under Mordecai, those who are God's enemies under Haman. Every one of you is in one of those categories. You're God's people or God's enemies. Some of you would say, "I'm not God's enemy, I'm indifferent." That's just another way to be an enemy.

And now we're going to see, in Esther 9, one of the most bloody, controversial, painful, difficult, complicated sections in all of Scripture. Pastors tend not to preach it, Bible study leaders tend not to focus on it. This is one of the reasons why, for the first seven centuries in the church's history, no commentaries were written on it. It's hard, it's painful, it's complicated.

REVERSAL #1: YOU DON'T HAVE TO DIE WITH YOUR FAMILY

But the first thing we see, three great reversals that happen, where it goes from death under the sentence of Haman to life under the liberation of Mordecai. And point number one is this —reversal number one is this: you don't have to die with your family. Read with me, Esther 9:1. "Now in the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar," ancient calendar, "on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's command and edict were about to be carried out, on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain mastery over them, the reverse occurred." Say this word: "Reverse." Reverse. That's what happens.

They're going to die, now they live. They're going to be attacked, now they're going to defend themselves. They're ruled by Haman, now they're ruled by Mordecai. They're going to be destroyed, now they're going to destroy their enemies. It's a reversal.

Our part, friends, is repentance. God's part is reversal. God can and does show up and change everything in an instant. This is not a promise that everything in your life will go better today, but it is a promise that with God there is always the possibility that he could show up and reverse everything in an instant.

The cancer could be cured, the marriage could be healed, the children could return, the unemployment could be rescinded, the suffering could be alleviated. You and I, we lose hope when we look at circumstance and we don't look up to God and how he might intervene and, in an instant, reverse everything and all of our suffering. It says that everything was reversed for the people of God. A great reversal occurred.

"The Jews gained mastery over those who hated them. The Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could stand against them, for the fear of them had fallen on all peoples."

This is war. These are the enemies of God's people attacking to murder them. Their plot, their plan is to kill men, women, children, and to plunder them. And God's people are given an opportunity under the reversal decree of Mordecai to defend themselves. This is like just war. This is not murder, this is justified killing. As we hit last week, this is like a soldier or a police officer returning fire. This is not malicious, this is self-defense.

"All the officials of the provinces," verse 3, "and the satraps and the governors and the royal agents," these are all the political leaders, "also helped the Jews, for the fear of Mordecai had fallen on them. For Mordecai was great in the king's house." That's one of the reversals. "And his fame spread throughout all the provinces," you know why? Because people need a leader and men follow men. And Mordecai, now, is the man of God, and he's leading the men of God on the mission of God. "For the man Mordecai grew more and more powerful."

Men, don't reject powerful positions and opportunities. Assume them humbly, out of love for those who are suffering, and hurting, and those who are without a voice and without a vote, particularly when it's women and children. That's what Mordecai does, and God honors that and he becomes more and more powerful. Someone has to hold the power. Might it be men who love God, obey the Bible, repent of sin, honor women, cherish children. That's what Mordecai's going to do.

"The Jews," these are the people of God, "struck all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them." Some of you say, "I thought our God was a God of peace." He is. After he kills his enemies, then comes peace. That's how it works at the end of the world. The Lord Jesus comes back with a sword to put to death his enemies and usher in a kingdom of peace.

"And they did as they pleased to those who hated them. In Susa the citadel itself," that's the capital city and one of the particular neighborhoods in the city, "the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men." This starts to give you some sense of how big this attack was.

The sentence was sent out by Haman: "You can kill all the Jews on this day." And then Mordecai gives a reverse decree designating that God's people can defend themselves. So, the warning was given: don't attack God's people, they will respond, you could die. Some did not relent or repent, and as a result, they attacked and were destroyed. Just in a particular neighborhood in the capital city, it was five hundred.

Now, we're looking at a nation of some 3 million square miles, roughly, geographically the size of the United States of America. You can get the assumption and inference that the body count is very, very, very high. There are a lot of wives who are weeping; there are a lot of grandmas who are weeping. The funeral home is packed. They're trying to dig holes as quick as they can to get rid of all the bodies. They're stacked high.

Chapter 9, verse 7: "And also killed—" Now we're going to get a list of ten names. These are the sons of Haman, the unrepentant Agagite, the enemy of God, not one of the children of God. Like I always say, if you get an opportunity to teach, just read the names in the Bible fast and confidently. No one knows how to say them, and since you're up front, they'll assume you nailed it. So, to illustrate that, I will now read these ten names. "Parshandatha and Dalphon and Aspatha and Poratha and Adalia and Aridatha and Parmashta and Arisai and Aridai and Vaizatha." I went to public school. That's as good as it gets. That's all I got.

"The ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews." And there it is. Some of you say, "That's sort of harsh, Mark. You're talking about them as enemies." I was just reading this Book, they called them enemies. You have enemies, I have enemies, we have enemies, God has enemies. We want people to repent and meet Jesus, but if they don't, they remain as enemies.

"But they laid no hand on the plunder." Men, it's you and me. We make decisions. We're the head, we're the leader. We bear additional responsibility. Some of you women, you will try and assume that responsibility because you do not trust your men. It's an old demonic trick all the way back to Genesis 3. The man's a coward so the woman steps up. The Bible honors women, it honors children, and it does so by putting particular responsibility on the men.

Here there are two men, they are making decisions that implicate their families and their communities. Haman and Mordecai, they are the spiritual heads. They are leading people. Fathers, the decisions we make, they implicate our wives, our children, our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren. Business leaders, the decisions you make, they implicate everyone who's connected with you. Political leaders, so it is the same.

And of course, God does call women into leadership positions. He does here with Esther, and she is a godly leader. Not perfect, but godly. But today, we're focusing, as the Bible does, on two men: Haman and Mordecai.

What happens is they make decisions and those connected to them are implicated by them. Haman is governed by something called the Law of the Medes and the Persians. The Law of the Medes and the Persians was this: once a decision is rendered, a verdict is given, it cannot be altered. Another way of saying it theologically is this: "We will not repent, we will not change our mind, we will not change our decision, we will not change our direction. We will not change. There will be no repentance from us. We've picked a course of action and we're going to proceed forward, even if it is to our own death."

Now, conversely, Mordecai is not governed by the Law of the Medes and the Persians. He's governed by the law of repentance and grace. We have seen that he is not a particularly godly man or a great leader. When the story begins, he's a bit of a coward, he's passive, he avoids conflict. He's like so many sons of Adam. He abdicates his responsibility, he lets others take over, he puts his own adoptive daughter, Esther, in danger. He's a bit of a coward. He's not a man who is strong; he's weak. He's not vocal; he's silent. He doesn't take initiative; he responds.

But over the course of the book, he's a man who is growing in repentance. He's changing. He's learning to become more courageous, more verbal, more vocal, more responsible, and the result is that the Bible says, quote, "He grows in power." He becomes more powerful, and other men are motivated by him. They are astonished that God could take a man as weak and as cowardly as Mordecai and do such a great transformation in his life. And so the other men, then, are encouraged by him, they're motivated by him.

You men want to be great leaders? You want men to follow in your way? You want to make a difference in the world, politically, or spiritually, or financially? It's repentance. You're a sinner, the other men are sinners too, as am I. And one of the great things that leaders do is repent, and then God is welcomed to show up and to do a reversal to change things.

Let me ask this: how many of you, men and women, are governed by the Law of the Medes and the Persians? You say, "I don't repent. When I'm wrong, I don't say I'm sorry. When I've chosen a life course, I continue in it even if it is disobedient, leading toward death."

How many of you, your business, your life, your family, your spirituality, your marriage, you say, "You know what, we picked the wrong direction, but it's too late now." It's like we've run the intersection, you can't hit the brakes and back up, just proceed forward. That's a demonic lie. There's always an opportunity to repent and to trust God to make a reversal. It's never too late as long as there is breath in your lungs, and then it is.

How many of you are governed by the Law of the Medes and the Persians? You won't say, "I was wrong. I'm sorry. I need to change. Things need to change." That's Haman, the guy who built a seventy-five-foot-high gallows for his enemy and ended up being crucified in his own yard. It's a precursor. It's a portrait of death, and hell, and the wrath of God being poured out on those who remain stubbornly unrepentant. You can blame others, you can look at your genetics, you can talk about your family of origins, you could even look at your biochemical makeup. At the end of the day, it's just varying ways to have an excuse rather than a repentant heart.

And here's what kills me: Haman does not repent. He dies publicly, shamefully, and he is impaled, and his sons proceed forward with the plan of their father. You ever heard the old adage, "Like father, like son"? The Bible talks about the sins of the fathers. The boys are just like their dad. Ten of them.

Haman thought, "I will put to death all the people of God so that they will not have a legacy and a lineage," and in a great reversal, he is put to death and his ten sons follow in his fateful example, and they are all impaled. They're crucified. They're put to death.

He thought that he would have a great family line. How many of you men—just conceive of it in that day, when your strength, your dignity, your honor, your glory, your security is in your sons. They will protect you when you grow old. There is no social security, welfare safety net to grab you if you fall. That's your sons.

If you die, they're going to look after their mom, they're going to protect their sisters. If you grow elderly and infirm, they're going to tend to you and provide for you. They're going to carry your name forward and they're going to have sons and grandsons, and your name is going to be great. Even though you die, there will be a part of you that lives into the future. Sometimes it's idolatry of family. And all ten sons die just like their father.

Let me say this, men: we are dominant. We're dominant for death like Haman or life like Mordecai, for folly like Haman or wisdom like Mordecai, for unrepentance like Haman or repentance like Mordecai. Men are dominant. When it says in the Bible that men are the head, it doesn't mean that they're better or superior. It doesn't mean that they're smarter, or more gifted, or more talented. What it does mean is that they are dominant for good or evil.

Some of you say, "I didn't even have a dad." Let me submit to you that the empty chair at your dinner table dominated your entire life. For the first time in our nation's history, the majority of children born to women under the age of thirty are born without a father. Today, if you have a father, even if he hates God and beats you, you're in a minority group, let alone a father who is repentant, and a father who knows the Heavenly Father, and a father who reads the Scriptures with you, and prays with you, and encourages you to be one of the sons of God. Haman is a horrific, terrifying example for all men.

So men, you're my men. You're my men. You're God's men, but you're my men. I stand before God and give an account for you whether or not you're single and pursuing a noble woman in a noble way for a noble purpose or you're another fool thinking of a good time instead of a good legacy; whether or not you stay faithful to that woman as a portrait of the gospel that Jesus is faithful to his bride, the church; whether or not you grow old with the wife of your youth and delight in her, or you get rid of her because pornography has so fooled you into trading your sixty-year-old wife in for three twenty-year-old girlfriends; whether or not your grandchildren will have a grandfather who loves Jesus, and loves his wife, and loves his kids, and loves his grandkids, and tells stories about the grace of God to encourage the future of your family that there might be people with your last name in the kingdom of God, and when you're there, on the Day of Resurrection, there would be a huge family reunion of people that aren't even born yet, but look back to the grace that was in your life and are part of the fruit of your family tree that ultimately has its roots in repentance. A sinful man turned to God, and God did an amazing thing for generations.

And so men, it is incumbent on you. No more excuses, no more blame-shifting, no more abdicating. It's repenting. When you're wrong, say you're wrong. When you're stupid, say you're stupid. When you've made it wrong, try and make it right by the grace of God. Our part is repentance, God's part is reversal.

And for some of you men, this means repenting not only of your sin, but the sins of your fathers. In 1 Peter, he says it this way, that God has delivered us from the, quote, "hollow and empty way of life handed to us by our fathers." We see, with his family, they're Agagites. You can go all the way back to Exodus, and 1 Samuel, and Deuteronomy, and they're mentioned. And what this has now been is one thousand years of godless, horrible, evil men, one thousand years of continual unrestrained unrepentance. One thousand years.

How long has it been in your family? One generation after the next, drunkenness, folly, adultery, fornication, selfishness, or religiosity. "We didn't do that, we're better than those people." When does it stop? My family, no different. I come from a long line of horrible men. Horrible men. God saved me, God saved my dad, God saved my brothers, God saved my sons. Great reversal. I want that for you. As long as you're breathing, that opportunity's available.

And for some of you, it means going back and not just repenting of your sin, but the sins of your fathers. This is what happens sometimes in the Old Testament. God's people repent of the sins of their fathers. It's not blaming your fathers. It's not excusing yourself and laying the burden entirely on their shoulder, but it is earnestly, humbly, repentantly, biblically looking and asking, "Where's the sin in my family and how am I like my father or my fathers, the grandfathers and great-grandfathers? In what way is this just folly, rebellion, selfishness, cowardice?"

Isaiah says it this way: "I'm a man of unclean lips and I come from a people of unclean lips." He acknowledges his community and his family. This is why Job, in Job 1, he is concerned that perhaps his children have sinned against the Lord. And so what does he do? He goes before the Lord and he repents on behalf of his children. He's taking responsibility for his whole family. He's thinking covenantally and not individually.

He's not thinking, "Well, it's my relationship with the Lord, my wife's relationship with the Lord, and my sons' relationship with the Lord, and my daughters' relationship with the Lord." He saying, "No, ultimately, I'm the head of the family and I can lead them in repentance. And yes, my wife, and my sons, and my daughters all need to repent, but I need to repent of my sin and I need to repent of our sin, and I need to lead the family in repentance." It's looking back on your family line to find the ways in which the enemy has gotten a foothold and how to break it through repentance.

Here's the good news: you don't have to die with your family. You don't have to die with your family. Haman's family line came to an end. Sons dead, family line over. It doesn't have to be like that. Yes, your family may criticize you, they may reject you, because that's what fools do marching off to hell. They encourage you to join the parade and criticize you if you don't march in step.

You don't have to be like your family. In the grace of God, through repentance, you could be adopted by a new Father into a new family to leave a new legacy. But it starts with humility and repentance. "Here's where we're wrong, here's where I'm wrong, here's where there needs to be a change."

We're talking about repentance that starts in the mind. The Bible says, "Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind," in Romans 12. It's a change of mind. You're thinking differently.

That leads to a change of heart. "I don't want to keep doing what we've been doing and what I've been doing. I want to be different. I want things to change." And it's not just saying "I want things to change"; I want to change.

And then it's a change of life. What I say is not what I say anymore, what I do is not what I do anymore. It's not just repenting of what I've done, it's repenting of who I've been.

Haman never experiences that. And let me say this, men: he should have repented. He should have gathered his sons around when he was facing his death and said, "Sons, I've rebelled against God. I've been proud and arrogant, and now everything is reversed on me toward death. I'm going to die. I'm going to be crucified in our yard. When you see the body of your hanging father, remember this is what happens to unrepentant men, and repent. Don't go march off to war. Don't put your lives in danger. Don't defend my honor because I'm a dishonorable man." He didn't. So the sons picked up the thinking, and the motives, and the behaviors of their father and they all got crucified.

It doesn't have to be like that. You can repent and live. You can repent and see a reversal. You can repent and have your wife, children, grandchildren repent and see a reversal. You could be the first link in a new family chain that's a thousand years of obedience instead of a thousand years of disobedience.

Men, this is a very sober word, but surrounding us are women that are hoping that we're listening. This is why, you men, you do not date unbelieving women. You do not impregnate women who are not your wives. This is why we do not murder our unborn children. This is why we live the way we live.

And some of you men would say, "But I've already done that." Then repent and invite God to bring a reversal and to change things, because he loves you. He's a good father. He's not against his sons, but if his sons are against him, it places him in a position where to bless them would be to encourage their rebellion.

REVERSAL #2: YOU DON'T HAVE TO HAVE ALL YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Point number one, reversal number one, you don't have to die with your family. Reversal number two: you don't have to have all your questions answered. Esther 9:11–15. Let me just say this: the part of the Bible we're coming into right now, super controversial, massively debated. It's the Persian *Hunger Games*. It gets dark. I'm just going to tell you where we're going. It gets dark. Ready?

Chapter 9, verse 11: "That very day the number of those killed in Susa the citadel was reported to the king. And the king said to Queen Esther, 'In Susa the citadel the Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and also the ten sons of Haman.'" Just pause for a moment. Ten sons all killed.

"What then have they done in the rest of the king's provinces! Now what is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what further is your request? It shall be fulfilled.' And Esther said," she's very respectful, "'If it please the king, let the Jews who are in Susa be allowed tomorrow also to do according to this day's edict. And let the ten sons of Haman.'" they're already dead, "'be hanged on the gallows.'" So the king commanded this to be done. A decree was issued in Susa, and the ten sons of Haman were hanged. The Jews who were in Susa gathered also on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and they killed three hundred men in Susa, but they laid no hands on the plunder."

Esther is the adoptive daughter of Mordecai. Okay, for your personal study, your Community Group discussion, your family discussion, chapter 3, the godless man Haman makes an edict. "On this day, we can kill God's people, men, women, and children, plunder all their goods." Chapter 8, Mordecai replaces Haman, gets his entire estate, signet ring, he becomes the vice president equivalent of the country, and he issues a reverse decree that God's people, on that day, can defend themselves.

And the provision of his instruction was this: "They can only attack on a day," Haman's decree. Mordecai's was: "We can only defend ourselves on one day." And then steps forward Queen Esther, the adoptive daughter of Mordecai. She's probably in her twenties. She's young, she's been married about five years, so she's been queen about five years. She's an orphan girl, she's a Jewish girl, and she steps forward.

And all of a sudden, she asks for two things. One, "We killed a lot of people today, we'd like an additional day to kill more people." Okay? "Number two, Haman's ten sons are dead, but I would like to crucify them publicly to make a statement."

And the hanging here, when it says they're hanging on the gallows, we tend to think of the wild west where you go up on a platform, and there's a trap door and a noose around your neck. That's not the way it worked in Persia. The Persians invented crucifixion. It was then mastered by the Romans, who of course crucified Christ.

And it started with impaling, kind of like a shish kebab. You get a long pole and you run it through somebody, and then you lift it upright and drop it in a hole, and then the person is impaled either dead or alive, and it's a public statement. Don't believe what they believe. Don't behave how they behaved. It's state-sponsored terror. It's like when terrorists put a beheading on the Internet. It's supposed to scare everyone and be a warning sign. This led to crucifixion where they included the cross bar, and that's how they murdered Jesus.

So, here's Esther. What do you think? I mean, it's sort of dark, right? How many of you thus far in the book, you've been telling your little girls, like, "Hey, get dressed up, we'll have a princess party. You can grow up and be like Esther." Now you're rethinking that whole thing. You're like, "I don't know, man. Crucifying boys in the yard, I don't know if we want to go there." Right? I mean, they never put this on the flannelgraph at the Baptist Sunday school. They never—you know? She's there in a tiara, and ten dudes are impaled in the yard, and she's smiling. It's awkward, right?

So, is this a good thing or a bad thing? Is this a holy thing or an unholy thing? And the commentators, not a shock, a little divided on this point. So, let me give you two perspectives and then you can go to Community Group and fight about it, okay?

So, perspective number one: what she did was a godly thing and a holy thing. They would say all the way back in the Old Testament, the Agagites are always the enemy of God's people. Deuteronomy talks about them being an enemy. In fact, here's what God says in Deuteronomy 25:19, "You shall blot out the memory of the Amalekites from under heaven."

God said, "Not only do I want you to get rid of those people, I want you to get rid of their memory."

In the book of Exodus, when God's people are being liberated, the Agagites come to attack them, destroy them. About a thousand years later, Haman is an Agagite. The book of Esther has already taught us that. Mordecai is of the people of God, the Jews. So, the war between Mordecai and Haman is ultimately a thousand-year-old war where Satan empowers God's enemies to try and destroy God's people.

And this finds its culmination in 1 Samuel 15. There is a king named Saul, and God tells him two things: "Kill all the Agagites. They exist to destroy your people. You can't both live. You kill them or they're going to kill you." Number two: "Don't plunder their goods. "When you defeat them, don't take their possessions. Don't make it about the money."

What does King Saul do? He lets them live and he takes their money. He was supposed to not let them live and leave their money. He sinned against the Lord. That's why Haman actually should have never been born. The Agagites should not exist.

And those who say what Esther did was a godly thing, and a holy thing, and a righteous thing, they would say, "All she was doing was obeying a decree given to King Saul who disobeyed." So two political leaders, one disobeyed, the other obeyed. One let them live, the other took their life to spare God's people. All Esther was doing was obeying a very ancient command from the Lord. It was a good thing.

How many of you think it was a good thing? How many of you think it's a bad thing? How many of you are like, "I didn't raise my hand because I don't know. I don't know, and this seems—I could go either way. What's the other position, Pastor Mark?"

Well, the other view is she did a bad thing, she did an ungodly thing. That to defend yourself on one day is—that's justice, but then to add another day to go find your enemies and actively kill them, that's actually not just self-defense and killing, that's murder. She went too far. She took the decree from Mordecai, which was holy, and then she added to it an additional day, and that was unholy. Furthermore, they would say, you know, taking the dead bodies of the ten sons of your enemies and impaling them publicly, that's going too far.

What do you think? What do you think? Now, it's hard to know exactly because, number one, it doesn't say. One of the difficulties in interpreting the book of Esther is this: there's no commentary in it. It doesn't say, "And the angels were rejoicing," or "God was weeping." It doesn't say.

Some of you say, "Well, Scripture interprets Scripture, that's what the Reformers taught us. What does the rest of the Bible say?" Nothing. Esther's not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible outside of Esther.

Some of you say, "Okay, well what about the theologians?" Well, in the first seven centuries of the church, zero commentaries were produced because the theologians were just, "I don't know. You want to touch it? I don't want to touch it. It's like a grenade with the pin pulled. I'm not going to touch it."

I'm reticent to draw strong conclusions when the Bible doesn't. Okay? When it says, "Thus saith the Lord," that's what I want to say. When the Lord doesn't say, I want to be careful what I say. I want you to think about it, I want you to study it, I want you to contemplate it, I want you to discuss it in Community Group.

SEVEN LESSONS FROM TOUGH BIBLE TEXTS

But let me pull back and say that this is a tough Bible text. Amen? Alright? Here's one of God's people killing all the other people and hanging people publicly. So, what do we do when we come to tough texts of the Bible like this?

And this is one of the reasons we preach through books of the Bible, as a general rule. We believe that all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable. That's what it says. We believe if God wrote a book and he put something in it, it's important enough for him to say it, it's important enough for us to hear it. Amen?

So Mars Hill, we love the Bible, we believe the Bible, we study the Bible, and sometimes we don't really know what to do with the Bible. Okay? You read certain points like, "I don't know." So what do we do when we hit those tough Bible texts like this? I'll give you seven lessons from tough Bible texts.

Number one: all Scripture is equally inspired. Right? Second Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is God-breathed." Just like God breathed life into Adam, God breathes life into his Word. God speaks perfectly through the authors of Scripture, but not equally clear. All Scripture is equally inspired, but not equally clear; because some parts are, quote, "hard to understand." That comes from 2 Peter 3:16.

You may remember Peter. He was discipled by a guy named Jesus, so he had a pretty good Bible education. Okay? And he was the leader of the disciples, always mentioned first in the list, and he also wrote two books of the Bible: 1 Peter and 2 Peter. And he is talking here, in context, about Paul. And he says, quote, "Some things that Paul says are hard to understand."

If they're hard for Peter, yes or no, they perhaps could be hard for you? Yeah. You're like, "I didn't write a book of the Bible. I didn't get three years with Jesus." Yeah. If Peter was sometimes going, "I believe that. I don't understand that." It's okay to sometimes come to the Bible, not on everything, but on some things, and say, "I believe it. I don't understand it." It's hard to understand.

Have you ever read Paul? Women should wear head coverings, and men should not have long hair, and you were predestined before the foundation of the world. You're like... Hard to understand? Perhaps. It doesn't mean it's not true. It means that some things are hard to understand.

Sometimes that is because, culturally, we're in a different culture, so it's hard to understand what was going on. Sometimes our hearts are hard. We're like, "I know what it says. I don't like it." And there, it's not an unconvinced mind, but it's an unwilling heart. There are all kinds of reasons it can be hard to understand. You're a new believer and you've got a lot of questions. Some of you need to know that you will never know. Some parts are hard to understand.

Number two: most of the Bible is clear, especially on matters of "first importance." In 1 Corinthians 15:3, Paul says, "What I've received, I've passed on to you of first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, and on the third day he rose again." What he says is, "Here's what's of first importance. Not everything in the

Bible is of equal importance. Everything in the Bible is important, but not everything is of first importance.”

How many Agagites died, it’s important, but here, it’s not as important as “Is Jesus dead or alive?” That’s of first importance. Did Jesus die for my sin and rise as my Savior? Yes or no? Do you speak in tongues? Do you homeschool? Do you private school? Do you public school? What is your view on worship styles? When do you think Jesus is coming back? How many Agagites died? Not as important. Not as important. Not unimportant, but not equally important. You get that?

Some things, those things around Jesus and what we’ll call the gospel: God became a man, lived without sin, went to the cross, substituted himself, died in my place for my sins, rose, conquering my enemies of Satan, sin, death, hell, and the wrath of God, that all is first importance. Other things, secondary importance. So, the Bible tends to be clearer on matters of first importance, and sometimes the things that are less clear are matters of second importance or tertiary importance.

Number three: the Bible tells us all we need to know, it doesn’t tell us all we want to know. Have you noticed that? It tells us everything we need to know. In fact, it says that God gives us everything we need for life and godliness. It doesn’t tell us everything we want to know.

How many of you have come to the Bible, you’re like, “I wish I knew. If I could just get fifteen minutes with Moses, I would ask why he hates pigs. You know, I have questions. I have questions.” It tells you everything you need to know, it doesn’t tell you everything you want to know. Okay?

Because we’re not God, we’re not all-knowing. And the truth is we don’t trust in what we know, we trust in the One who knows all. That’s why the Bible talks about faith. It’s trusting the One who knows all, it’s not having to know it all.

Number four: God has “secrets” we simply don’t know. It says in Deuteronomy 29:29, quote, “The secret things belong to the Lord.” You know what a secret is? You don’t, because it’s a secret. Right? You don’t—you’re like, “I don’t know. It’s a secret.” What that means is God knows, you don’t.

And again, it’s not knowing everything, it’s trusting the One who knows all things. I don’t know. Some of you are going to have questions about predestination, election. You’re like, “I don’t know. I don’t know. I don’t know.” When it says in Romans 11, “Who has known the mind of the Lord?” it’s not expecting somebody in the back of class to go, “I do!” It’s a rhetorical question. You go, “He does. I don’t know. You know? He knows.”

Number five: God’s thoughts and ways are “higher” than ours. Isaiah 55:8–9, God says this. He says, “My thoughts are higher than your thoughts, and my ways are higher than your ways.” I love that concept of higher. Right? How many of you, you’ve had an opportunity to get to a different elevation and look at things, just geographically speaking. You’re like, “Oh! Now I see things differently because I have a different perspective.”

I can still remember growing up next to the airport. I never got to go on an airplane until I was a teenager playing a baseball tournament out of state. We were going to play for some national tournament. You know, sitting there watching the planes fly over, it’s a different perspective. I shouldn’t tell you this, but as a kid, we one time took the pitching machine in our backyard out and tried to shoot airplanes. We actually did it more than once. Right? Different perspective. Like, how high is that? I don’t know. Poof! Let’s see. You know? Just different perspective.

And then all of a sudden, one day I got to go on an airplane. And I remember I really wanted to look out the window. Like, “What does it look like from here? Oh, that’s our neighborhood. We’re flying over it. And that’s my city, and my state, and this is the mountains, and the lakes, and the rivers. And man, everything looks really different from up here.” It’s a different perspective. You know why? Because I was higher.

What God is saying is this: that he’s high and exalted, and when he looks at history and he looks at circumstances, he does so with a better perspective. He sees more than we see and he sees how it all works together in a way that we don’t. That God’s ways are higher. What this means is we need to be very careful that we don’t judge God, because we don’t see what God sees, so we don’t know what God knows.

Number six: We “know in part.” That’s what 1 Corinthians 13:12 says. It couldn’t be clearer. In 1 Corinthians 13:12, Paul says it this way: “We see in part and we know in part. Now, we see,” he says, “but it’s like looking through a dim glass.” Now, we’re at that time of year when you wake up in the morning and you go out to your car, especially if it’s parked outside, there’s a little frost or a little dew. You look out the windshield. You see, but you don’t see clearly. You don’t see perfectly. You don’t see fully, you see partly. You see truly, but you don’t see totally. What he’s saying is in a fallen world, as finite beings, with a fallen brain, a sinful nature, and sometimes a reluctant heart, we see dimly.

And then he says, “When Jesus comes back, we’ll see him,” how? “Face to face. And we’ll know as we’re fully known.” What it means is this life is by faith. It’s like, “I just want to see Jesus and I want to get to him. And when I get to him, he’s going to open my eyes, take away my sin, transform the whole world, and then I’ll see it all. I’ll see what he was doing, I’ll see what he was up to. I’m going to rejoice. I’m going to celebrate. Jesus, you did the right thing. I was wondering, but I only saw in part, and now I see what you see and I celebrate what you’ve done because I trusted who you are.”

And number seven: the Bible is the most honest book ever written. One of the ways I know that God wrote the book is how honest it is. How many of you, if you wrote the Bible and you were in it, you would write it differently, at least the parts about you? Right? How many of you, if they—let’s say you were Esther and they came to interview you. “Well, tell us about the time that you asked for like, a Groupon. A kill one day and get another free day. You know? Tell us about that day. When you hung ten guys, crucified them in their yard in front of their mom.” How many of you gals would be like, “Oh, no, no, no. That never happened. Trust me, I’m a queen?” “You know, it didn’t go down like that. No, no, no. It was Mordecai’s idea.” You’d find a way to retell the story.

The Bible’s honest, and when you read the Bible, everybody looks bad except for Jesus. There’s only one hero. So when we go to the book and we say, “I want a perfect hero. I want somebody who got it right. And when they make a mistake, I really struggle with that and I want to reinterpret the data.” Don’t.

Maybe Esther got it right, maybe Esther got it wrong. The truth is, either way, God does perfect work through imperfect people. God draws straight lines with crooked sticks.

Isn’t that hopeful for you and me? You say, “You know what? I’m not perfect.” Well, neither was Esther, neither was Mordecai, neither was David. At the height of his power, the man after God’s own heart who writes worship songs also commits adultery, impregnates a lady, and murders the innocent husband.

And it's in the book because it's the most honest book that's ever been written, and it encourages us to be honest. "Here's my sin, the sins of my family, the sins of my people. Let me be honest." And it means that sometimes—maybe this is the point. Maybe the point of not knowing whether or not Esther acted in a noble way, maybe the point is sometimes you don't know.

How many of you have had that in your life? You made a decision, and looking back, you're like, "I don't know if that was the right decision or the wrong decision. I don't know if that was godly or ungodly. I think my motives might have been mixed. I don't know. Some days I think, 'That honored the Lord.' Other days I think, 'I am pretty sure that didn't honor the Lord.'" Any of you have things in your past that haunt you like that?

Here's the good news: God works all things for the good of those who love him. You may not have gotten it right, but maybe God made it right, because God is a God of grace. So, when we're repentant, God works a reversal that leads to our rejoicing.

But here's the truth: you don't need to have all your questions answered to walk with God. You don't need to have all your Bible questions answered to walk with God. You don't need to have all your life questions answered to walk with God. You don't even need to have all your decision and motive questions answered to walk with God. This side of eternity, we may not have a clear answer on Esther, but we do have a hope that God does a perfect work through imperfect people.

And when it comes to the Bible, we don't need to rewrite the stories so that all of God's people are heroes and all of the other people are villains, and they never make a mistake, and they're perfect, and they're good. Because that longing for a perfect, good leader and king, it's already fulfilled in Jesus, and there's only one. The rest of the Bible is all villains. Jesus is the only hero. Amen?

REVERSAL #3: YOU DON'T HAVE TO LIVE A GREEDY LIFE

Number three. Reversal number three: you don't have to live a greedy life. Esther 9:16–19. "Now the rest of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also gathered to defend their lives, and got relief from their enemies and killed 75,000 of those who hated them, but they laid—" Read it carefully. Careful reading of the Bible is so important. "They laid no hands on the plunder." It said it in the previous section of verses as well. "They laid no hands on the plunder."

It says in chapter 3, when the enemies of God attack them, they can plunder them. The decree given in chapter 8 by Mordecai, the reversal, was if they attack you, you have the legal right to plunder them. Chapter 9 tells us multiple times, God's people didn't plunder their enemies.

"This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth day they rested and made that a day of feasting and gladness." We'll deal with it next week. This is the beginning of the Feast of Purim, and it explains why they feast over two days. We'll hit that next week. "But the Jews who were in Susa gathered on the thirteenth day and on the fourteenth, and rested on the fifteenth day, making that a day of feasting and gladness. Therefore the Jews of the villages, who live in the rural towns, hold the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a day for gladness and feasting, as a holiday, and as a day on which they send gifts of food to one another."

Here's what had happened: the decree was given all the way back to King Saul. Again, 1 Samuel 15, "Don't plunder your enemies." You know what King Saul and the people of God did? Plundered their enemies. This had been a greedy people, generation, after generation, after generation. God's people taking what God forbid. It might be fruit on a tree, it might be money in an account. They took something that was not to be theirs. They disobeyed. They disobeyed.

And so, when it comes time to conquer their enemies, they have the legal right. I want you to see this. You will have ways of gaining wealth that are legal, but not ethical. They're legal, but not biblical. Do you get that? You can't say, "Well, it's legal." But if it's not ethical and it's not biblical, don't put it in your hand.

See, Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, your heart is." You know what that means? That means every single day, we worship. We worship our wealth, or we worship God with our wealth. It means every dollar we spend, every transaction that we participate in, every bill that we take out, every expense that we incur, every investment that we make, it's an act of worship and it's an indication of the heart.

Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, your heart is." Some of you say, "I don't want you to talk about money." What you're saying is, "I don't want you to talk about my god. Don't offend my god, don't dishonor my god, don't make an affront to my god."

Let me tell you why you love your god so much and why the Word of God is like a hammer that comes to absolutely smash your false god. Because your false god is a liar who makes promises that cannot deliver. Your false god says you are defined by the clothes you wear, the house you live in, the car you drive, the comfort you enjoy, the food you eat, where your kids go to school, what things you accomplish and achieve, and wealth becomes the means by which you have prestige, and power, and comfort, and luxury. And none of which is necessarily a bad thing, but when a good thing becomes a god thing, that's a bad thing.

And it's usually not the wealth; it's the status, it's the possessions, it's the comfort, it's the convenience that the wealth provides. So, we worship it. And the lie is this: you don't need to die and go to heaven, you can have heaven now. If you make enough, you can create a world that is not affected by the curse, and you live in glory, and comfort, and luxury. And you don't really need the God of the Bible, and you don't need to die and go to heaven, because the god of money will give you heaven now. No need to wait. And if you can't make it, just put it on a credit card and forget that the borrower is slave to the lender, and enjoy the shackles of what was supposed to be freedom.

When God tells us no, it's good, because God is what? Good. Is God against money? No. Is God against people having wealth and possessions? No. If you went to Jesus' house right now, it's very nice. Very nice. We're not against making money. Some of you should make a lot. We're against those who make money that the Lord forbids be taken. We're against money being spent in a way that the Lord forbids spending. It's all the Lord's. We're stewards. We worship our wealth or we worship with our wealth.

This family, for maybe a thousand years: greedy, greedy, greedy, greedy, greedy. Before we judge them, let's look at what they were passing up. It's like the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It's in the middle of the garden. You've got to walk by it. That's how temptation is. You've got to walk by it. This wealth was right there, literally right there.

Here's what it meant legally: they could defend themselves, and if they defeated their enemies, they could get their entire estate. Think about this. Let's say you've got five sons, and you're a poor family, and you could kill five Agagites. You know what you get? Five households. Five homes, five businesses, livestock, land, slaves, possessions, fully furnished, any

of their wealth, gold, all of it.

How many of you are broke and struggling, and this thought of, “I could get a million-dollar estate tomorrow and it’s debt-free, and tax-free, and mine? Who do I got to kill? Oh, and the law says I can kill them because it’s self-defense, and God’s law says self-defense is a good thing. And they’re Agagites, so what? Yeah. Wouldn’t it be much better if God’s people had it rather than God’s enemies? And after all, if we don’t touch it, you know what’s going to happen? Looters are going to come, and criminals are going to come. They’re going to move into their house, they’re going to take the livestock, they’re going to take the possessions, and evil people are going to get rich, and then they’re going to do horrible things. The people of God should definitely take this, and we might even tithe 2 percent. We’re going to give back to the Lord maybe, perhaps, if maybe.”

How many of you, in your mind, you can already start to do the small attorney who lives in your fallen nature, rises up with an airtight defense right now? Yeah. How many of you are newly married, struggling to buy a home? You’re like, “We could get a free, furnished home and a business with slaves? We don’t need to incur a mortgage? We don’t need—how do we do that? Oh, if our enemies attack us and we kill them, it’s self-defense. We just get to take all their stuff.”

How many of you, honestly—you don’t need to raise your hand because you’ll freak the rest of us out—but how many of you, that’s tempting. You say, “That would be pretty amazing.” God says, “Don’t. Don’t. Don’t fall for the trap.” You know, Thomas Brooks, he was an old Puritan. In his book, *Precious Remedies Against Satan’s Devices*, he talks about sin is like bait on a hook. I use this analogy a lot.

See, Satan’s going to bait your hook with anything you want. Sex, money, fame, power, glory, beauty, comfort, grade point average, achievement, seat in the company. He doesn’t care as long as you bite and he can reel you into death. Making money, securing a future for your family. Proverbs says, “A wise man leaves an inheritance for his children’s children.” That’s making a lot of money and stewarding it well, none of which is bad. But when Satan baits the hook, if you bite, you get reeled into death. It happened to Haman, and it had happened to God’s people for a thousand years. And God said, “Do not bite.”

Here’s my question to you: what business opportunity, what income stream do you need to let just go by? You say, “Well, I could grab that. It’s legal.” God is saying, “Let it go by.” Just let it go. Don’t grab it. “But, but, but.” No, just let it go.

How many of you, you’ve already taken what is not yours? You’re like, “I wasn’t supposed to have this. I wasn’t supposed to get it in the first place, or I was supposed to tithe it back to the Lord. I was supposed to give it to the poor. I was supposed to invest it in the kingdom of God and I’ve held onto things that are not mine.”

What I love here is it gives us the year, the month, and the day that the people of God repented. And so much of repentance is demonstrated in finances. It’s demonstrated in, “You know what? This god lied to me, and I’m going to empty my hands and just trust in the provision of the real God, and I’m going to be a good steward with what the real God gives.” And it tells us when they did that.

I pray that this would be the day for you, that you would circle this day on the calendar. “It was this year, and this month, and this day I repented maybe of a whole family legacy of greed and bad stewardship. And I let wealth go by me that wasn’t to be mine, and I took wealth that was entrusted to me and I gave it as the Lord intended, and I did it as an act of worship.”

And some of you would say, “Oh, so you want the money in my hand?” No, what I really want is the idol in your heart. And sometimes, God is not asking to get the money out of your hand. He’s testing to reveal the idol in your heart. God is good, and everything he asks is good.

And what see here is the people then rejoiced. They throw a party. Now, how many of you would throw a party because you got rich? How many of you would throw a party because you didn’t get rich? You’re like, “I didn’t win the lottery! Come on over! We’re going to celebrate!” What? Because God is my treasure and God is enough. And if he saved me and my family, that’s the greatest gift of all and I can’t get any richer than I already am.

And God’s people rejoice. They throw a huge party to celebrate the fact that they didn’t get rich. It’s a great reversal. It’s a great reversal, and that is, friends, how our God works. Let me give you the simple equation. Reversals, here’s how they work. Repentance from us plus reversals from God equals rejoicing. Okay? So, repentance from us: “God, I’m wrong, I’m sorry.” Reversals from God: “I’m going to show up and do something amazing.” Equals rejoicing among God’s people.

These people are not richer, they’re happier. They’re not more secure in their earthly possessions, but they’re more certain of their eternal security. They don’t have a lot of things to show this great victory, but they have a lot of joy knowing the love of God. And this is how God works. He works through reversals.

JESUS IS A BETTER REVERSAL

So, let me close with this. Jesus is a better reversal. This is how God works. Mordecai was powerless and Haman was powerful, but in a reversal, Mordecai became powerful and Haman became powerless. Haman wanted to kill Mordecai and be paraded like a king, but in a reversal, Haman got killed and Mordecai was paraded like a king.

Haman built a gallows for Mordecai, but in a reversal, got hung on his own gallows. God’s people were sentenced to death, but in a reversal, they put their enemies to death. God’s people went from mourning and fasting, in a great reversal, to rejoicing and feasting.

Let’s take it to another level. Mankind wanted to become like God, but in a reversal, God became a man. The Son of God lived in riches and glory, but in a reversal, came in poverty and humility. We were destined to die for our sins, but in a reversal, our God died in our place for our sins. We are without righteousness and with sin, but in a reversal, Jesus took our sins and gave us his righteousness.

Our sin brought us death, but in a reversal, Jesus’ death brought us life. Jesus died and was buried, but in a reversal, he rose to defeat death. And lastly, Jesus returned to heaven, but in a reversal, is coming again to reverse the curse.

Join me in prayer. For those of you who are the children of God, your reversal is guaranteed. The Lord Jesus will return and the world that rejected him, in a great reversal, will be ruled by him. On that day of ultimate, eternal, irrevocable reversal, the sick will be made well by Jesus, the lame will run to Jesus, the blind will see Jesus, the deaf will hear Jesus, the hungry

will dine with Jesus, the weeping will be embraced by Jesus, the poor will be rich with Jesus, the humble will be raised with Jesus, the victims will get justice through Jesus, and the dead will rise to be with Jesus. Lord God, we thank you that a reversal has occurred at the cross, and that reversals come in our life, and for all of your children, a great reversal awaits us at the end of this life in the second coming of the Lord Jesus. I pray for my friends, Lord God, that there would be repentance, starting with the men. And I pray that that repentance would ring for generations, that our sons and our grandsons, our daughters and our granddaughters, and our wives would see men who are repentant, that they would see Jesus do a reversal so that we might have rejoicing. In Jesus' good name, amen.

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.