

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 13 September 2026. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Doing Right When It Hurts

Esther 2:21-23

In 1991, a researcher named **James Patterson** published a book entitled *The Day America Told the Truth*; and this book revealed some startling facts about the integrity (or rather, the *lack* of integrity) of many Americans at that time. According to Patterson's survey, only 13% of participants regarded the Ten Commandments as binding for today. (Don't forget—that includes the command, "Thou shalt not kill"!) Ninety-one percent of the participants admitted to lying regularly. Eighty-six percent said that they lied regularly to their parents; and 75% said that they lied regularly to friends. Most employees admitted to goofing off on their jobs for as much as 7 hours per week. About 50% admitted that they regularly called in sick to their workplace, when they *weren't* sick. When asked, "What would you be willing to do for ten million dollars?" a whopping 25% said that they would abandon their families; 23% said that they would become a prostitute for one week; and 7% even said that they would kill a stranger. Let that sink in! According to this survey, 70 out of 1,000 people would be willing to kill *you*, if the price were right!

This study revealed other serious character crises, as well. At that time, the *New York Times Book Review* and *Rolling Stone* were openly carrying ads which offered "ready-made" research papers for college students, complete with footnotes and bibliography pages. Fast-forward 30 years, and in 2020, the International Centre for Academic Integrity showed that among 70,000 high school students, **64%** freely admitted to **cheating on a test**; **58%** admitted to **plagiarism**; and **95%** admitted to some form of **cheating**!¹ (If you're having a hard time believing that such a staggering number of people are that dishonest, just ask any security worker in a local shop how many people shoplift every single day!) But professing Christians don't cheat, right? Sadly, they do. According to a poll by Sherman & Hedricks in the early 90's, professing Christians were *almost* as likely as non-Christians to falsify income tax returns; to commit plagiarism; to ignore construction specs; to copy a computer program illegally; to steal time; to "enhance" a product by exaggerating; to tell people what they want to hear; and to obey laws selectively.

What is the reason for this serious integrity crisis? The **moral relativism** of our day is one big reason. Since the Bible has been thrown out of the schools, judicial system, and society at large, a chilling number of people don't even believe that there *is* such a thing as "right" or "wrong." Our society has become downright satanic! However, the real reason for the integrity crisis goes much deeper than current trends in the schools or the courts. The reality is that *man has always been fundamentally dishonest*, because man has a sin nature, which does whatever pleases "*me*."

However, for the born-again believer, this should not be so. The Bible says, "**Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour.**" The Bible also says, "**Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people; but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.**"

Doing the right thing usually *costs*, and *hurts*; but for those who belong to God, there can be no alternative. This morning, we will be focusing on the integrity of Mordecai, the father-by-adoption of

Esther. Mordecai was faced with an opportunity to get “sweet revenge”; and he didn’t even have to risk anything to get it. All he had to do was say nothing—and thereby tell the biggest lie in his life! Yet, he chose to speak the truth. The title of this message is ***Doing Right When It Hurts***.

Read Esther 2:21-23.

I. The faithfulness of Mordecai (vv. 21-22)

In last week’s message, we saw that King Darius had just chosen Esther to be the queen of Persia. At that time, Esther had already been in the palace for one year. Fast-forward another five years from her coronation, and we come to the events recorded here in **verses 21-23**.

Now, at this point, Mordecai was still faithfully working away in the gate of the king’s palace. Yet, in all that time, he hadn’t been able to see or visit Esther. Back in **verse 11**, we were told that Mordecai had to send messengers into the palace to seek for information as to how Esther was doing; and in **chapter 4**, we are told that Mordecai *still* had to communicate with Esther through palace chamberlains—even after she had been queen for five years. Now, at first, when Esther was chosen to be queen, Mordecai was probably both shocked and relieved to see that God had placed Esther in such a high position. It was clear that God had given Esther special favour with Ahasuerus, because Ahasuerus was madly in love with Esther. According to the ancient Greek historian Herodotus, King Darius loved one of his wives, whom he called **Artystone** (meaning “the virgin”), more than all his other wives: and from his description of Artystone, it appears that she was none other than Esther. By the way, one of Darius’s other wives, who was the mother of King Xerxes (and supposedly Artystone’s sister) was *said* to be named **Atossa**—which sounds almost identical to Esther’s Hebrew name, Hadassah! Some believe that when the Persians gave Herodotus all this information about their national history many years later, they purposely concealed Esther’s Jewish identity by attributing *her* name, Atossa (or Hadassah) to the Persian queen mother, and simply calling Esther “the virgin,” and claiming that she was Atossa’s sister (thus making her look like a Persian)!² If it be true that Esther was this woman called “Artystone,” then according to Herodotus, King Darius made a solid gold statue of Esther, because he was so mad about her!³

Now, as I say, Mordecai was probably relieved, at first, to hear that Esther had been made queen. It appeared that God *had* chosen her for some purpose. However, as the years wore on, and it *seemed* that no wonderful, divine plan was unfolding, Mordecai had plenty of time to re-think things—and possibly to grow bitter. He couldn’t even see his adopted daughter face-to-face, for a short visit. The Bible doesn’t say what was going on in his mind; but he surely must have struggled with his attitude toward Ahasuerus.

And then, in the midst of his struggles, what happened? Somehow or other, Mordecai became aware of a plot to kill the king! Let’s read those verses again. (**Read verses 21-22a.**) Folks, I

would remind you, once again, that what we are reading is backed by secular history. Of course, we don't *need* outside confirmations of Scripture; but loads of confirmations *are* available. The names of many of the chamberlains and princes that we read about in the book of **Esther** have been found very prominently in the Persian inscriptions from the time of Darius's reign. As of ten years ago, the names **Carcas, Mehuman, Hatach, Meres, Marsena,** and **Memucan** had all been found.⁴ The name **Hammedatha** (the father of Haman) had also been found; and so had **Aridatha** and **Aridai** (two of Haman's sons).⁵ But guess what other name has been found? **Bigthan**—one of the two conspirators that we just read about! Persian records reveal that Bigthan was not only a chamberlain (a guardian of the royal bedchambers), but also a high-ranking administrator over the feeding of the king's horses and mules.⁶

Now, how did Mordecai react when he heard about this plot? Did he keep it secret? After all, he *could* have had reason to be bitter at the king. If Mordecai wanted revenge, all he had to do was to keep his mouth shut, and let Bigthan and Teresh kill the king. However, that is *not* what Mordecai did. He quickly found a messenger, and sent him into the palace to tell Esther about Bigthan and Teresh's plot. Esther informed the king; and the king immediately launched an investigation, found Bigthan and Teresh to be guilty, and hanged them for treason.

Now, it's easy enough for us to say, "Well, it was easy for Mordecai to do the right thing. First of all, it's just the right thing to do. Also, the king was his employer; thus, it was actually in his own best interest to expose this plot." However, it might not have been that simple. What if there were *other* conspirators besides Bigthan and Teresh? What if these were not just two disgruntled "lone wolves"? What if this conspiracy was much larger and broader than just two men? It probably was! Surely these two men wouldn't have dared to do this foolish thing if there weren't many other powerful people involved in the conspiracy. Perhaps Mordecai had reason to believe that *many others* deep in the government were involved, and that if he didn't join the prevailing side, there might be deadly consequences for *him*.

Given the possible dangers for himself (in addition to any personal grudge that he might have had against Ahasuerus), one can see why Mordecai might have had *several* motivations to keep his mouth shut. After all, if the king were assassinated, and a usurper king were to come to the throne, the new king surely wouldn't execute *everyone* in the old government. Administrators would still be needed; and lower-level government posts such as his would be in relatively little danger. All he had to do was say nothing—and thereby tell a lie. However, as a believer in the God of Abraham, he couldn't do that: and there were several reasons why.

First, Mordecai knew that *all* kings and governors (even evil ones) have been placed there by God. God doesn't *approve* of the evil doings of rulers; but He does *allow* them to be in their position, for His own purposes. This means that God's people are to submit themselves to all who are in civil authority. Mordecai knew he had no right to rebel against this pagan king—

not even by passively doing nothing. Centuries earlier, God had commanded Israel to drive out the Canaanites (including their kings) from their land; and He had occasionally commanded Israel to make war against neighbouring nations that had attacked *them*. However, ever since the Babylonian captivity, God has never given His people (neither Israel, nor believers in this church age) any mandate to overthrow kings or nations. The Jews were under Persian rule because God had *allowed* it, as punishment for their sins; and Mordecai knew this very well. So did the prophet Daniel. Let's see what Daniel said about kings.

Read Daniel 2:20-23.

In Daniel's prayer of thanks to God for revealing Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he began by blessing God's name "*for ever*"; and he attributed "*wisdom and might*" to God. He then attributed the changing of times and seasons to the Lord. Then, building on that thought, Daniel also attributed the *removing of kings* and the *setting up* of kings to the LORD. While it is true that Satan holds great sway in our fallen world, we must never forget that God is fully in control. No king or ruler, no matter how wicked or incompetent he may be, can come to power without God's permitting him to be placed there.

Furthermore, God has set the *exact amount of time* that every ruler will be in power, and the exact time that every kingdom will stand. The prophecies in the book of **Daniel** powerfully illustrate this! God gave Daniel tremendous detail about the major world empires that would succeed Babylon, all the way to the Second Coming of Christ. He revealed that it would be exactly 483 years from the time of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem to the time of Christ's death on the cross. He gave details about the kings that would come to the throne of Persia, up until its fall. Then, He prophesied of Alexander the Great, and about the splintering of the Greek empire into four parts. He then gave details about every king that would reign in the Grecian kingdom of Seleucia, and of many of the Greek kings of Egypt, all the way to the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes. (Even Queen Cleopatra is prophesied of in this list!) All these events cover about 370 years; and every one of these rulers is well-known in secular history. God truly knows the "times," and sets up kings as He will.

Brethren, as we look at the evil doings of our civil leaders, it might seem that the wicked can do whatever they want. However, they are *not* in control. God allows wicked people to hold civil offices for His own purposes; and He allows them to be there for precisely the amount of time that He chooses. Though we are surrounded by wickedness, God continues to use His people to accomplish His agenda; and He gives us wisdom and understanding, so that we can serve Him *and* submit to our rulers. This includes paying taxes, and praying for our leaders (even when we *don't want* to pray for them, or pay our taxes).

Read Romans 13:1-8.

Read 1 Timothy 2:1-4.

It's easy to complain about the wickedness of our rulers; but how often do we pray for them, and even *thank* God for them? We need to pray that our leaders will be convicted by God's Word to enact righteous laws, and that they will personally hear the Gospel message, and be saved. If Paul could pray for the wicked emperor Nero, surely we can pray for our leaders. Nero was never saved; but there *were* members of Nero's household who were saved. The Christians' prayers for Nero may have even resulted in the *restraining* of persecution for a time. In fact, we *know* that their prayers prevailed in this way, because Nero, for some unknown reason, *released* Paul from prison for a while.

Brethren, we are the "***salt of the earth***"; and our presence in society has more of a restraining effect on evil than we realise. With this thought in mind, let's look again at the last part of **verse 2. (Read 1 Timothy 2:2 again.)** What is the desired *result* of our prayers for kings, rulers, and all men? It is that "***We may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.***" In other words, we are to use the times of rest from persecution *not* to relax, "live it up" in this world, and enjoy ourselves, but to live godly lives; to evangelise the lost; and to advance God's Kingdom. In times of relative peace *and* in times of great distress, Mordecai and Esther served the Lord faithfully, *and* obeyed the king. And so should we.

Now, there was a second reason why Mordecai couldn't keep silent about the plot against the king: and that is that God commands us to "***ble***s" our enemies. This is a command in both the Old *and* New Testament. **Leviticus 19:18** says, "***Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.***" **Romans 12:14** says, "***Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not***"; and **Romans 12:17** says, "***Recompense to no man evil for evil.***" Christian, you are *never* permitted to hate others, or to seek revenge. In **Matthew 5**, Jesus said that God sees anger "***without a cause***" in the same light as murder—because murder *always* starts with "doing away" with the person you hate *in your heart*. (Just this past week, I heard someone say that she was so angry at an employee, that she would "shoot" her when she saw her next. It all starts in the heart, folks!) By the way, if you think that you have a good "***cause***" to be angry, study out that phrase "***without a cause,***" and you will find that God considers *all* fleshly anger to be "***without cause.***" We literally do not have the right to hate anyone in our hearts.

The third reason why Mordecai knew that he must reveal this plot is that **God commands us not to keep silent when we know of a crime**. If you keep your mouth shut when a crime has been committed, God considers you to be a partaker with that person's sin.

Read Leviticus 5:1.

The Bible says in **Proverbs 29:24**, “*Whoso is partner with a thief hateth his own soul: he heareth cursing, and bewrayeth it not.*” Paul says in **Ephesians 5:11**, “*And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*” Fraud or stealing must be reported—even if it cost you your job. (I know someone who lost a job several times, because he saw dishonest dealings going on his company, and brought it to light.) In a church, sexual immorality and other shameful sins must be reported, and not covered (whether they be crimes in the eyes of the law, or not). Integrity is absolutely necessary in order for a church to have God’s blessing. Truthfulness and love form the dividing line between a living, vibrant church and a dead, dying church. A church *must tell the truth in love*; and so must every individual believer.

The world is immersed in lies, deceit, treachery, and revenge. They live and breathe these qualities. Take the enormously popular T.V. series “**Traitors**,” for example. It glorifies treachery, and makes it seem that “faithfulness” and “treachery” aren’t matters of “right” or “wrong”: it’s just a matter of “Who wins?” Yet, many lost people, deep down inside, desire to escape the world’s lies and hypocrisy (just as Zachaeus did). Many lost people might embrace faith in Christ *if* they would see a Christian who *tells the truth all the time*. Many people long for something real and trustworthy; but if they can’t see absolute truthfulness in believers, how can we expect them to believe on Jesus? Christian, *always tell the truth!*

II. The forgetfulness of Ahasuerus (v. 23)

(**Read Esther 2:23 again.**) When Ahasuerus received the information about the plot to take his life, the right thing for him to do would have been to *reward* the man who had saved his life. Yet, somehow, in the alarm of the situation, Ahasuerus totally forgot to give Mordecai any reward. He never even said “thank you.” But had *God* forgotten? No, He had not! **Hebrews 6:10** says, “*For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name.*” God is keeping track of your service to Him, and to others (which is all *part and parcel* of your service to Him)!

Read Malachi 3:16.

What is Malachi saying in this verse? He is talking about the preciousness of **fellowship** between God’s people. Godly fellowship was precious in Old Testament times; and it is still precious today. That is why, when we come to church, we should “*tarry one for another*” (“stick around and chat”). Your fellowship with your brothers and sisters in Christ is so precious to God, that He has a “*book of remembrance*” in Heaven, in which He records these conversations! This “*book of remembrance*” will be one of the books that will be pulled out

at the Judgment seat of Christ, so that Christ may reward you for the things that they did for Him with a pure heart. Godly conversation with God's people is part of our very service to Him! However, our conversations aren't the only thing that God records. **God also records everything we do and say (or don't do or say)**; and whether it come to light in *this* world or not, all will be revealed when we stand before God—both the good and the bad. For believers, there will be forfeit of reward, and much shame, for the things we did in the flesh; but what we did for *Him* will redound to the glory of Christ for all eternity, and bring us eternal joy.

Read 1 Timothy 5:24-25.

The Bible doesn't specifically tell us whether Mordecai was content or embittered with the fact that he wasn't honoured or recognised. However, would Mordecai have been in any spiritual condition to work under King Ahasuerus later on, as the vizier of the whole empire, *if* he had allowed bitterness to rule his heart? Not on your life! Bitterness eats away at you, robs you of joy, and makes you unfit for God's service. Unforgiveness and bitterness *must* be repented of, if you would serve God effectively and powerfully.

Read Matthew 18:21-35.

In this parable, there was a servant who, somehow or other, had racked up a debt of 10,000 talents against his lord's treasury. Now, how much is 10,000 talents in today's money? Well, if it were 10,000 talents of silver, then he owed about €10,000,000 in modern money; but if it were 10,000 in *gold*, then he owed about €36,000,000,000 in modern money! Whether it were silver or gold that he owed, this was a debt that would have been utterly unpayable. As far as this servant was concerned, the debt was infinite. He was utterly bankrupt; and all that he had to look forward to was the confiscation of all that he had, and a lifetime of slavery for himself and his family. There was nothing that he could do, except to plead with his lord for mercy. And how did his lord react to his plea? Incredibly, he forgave his servant of the entire debt!

What, then, does this part of the parable teach us? It illustrates the fact that you and I have a sin debt that we cannot possibly pay. We can't pay God back for even *one* sin that we have ever committed, because even *one* sin is an infinite offence against a holy God. Because of Adam's sin, we were *all* plunged into the bondage of sin, and condemned to an eternity of separation from God in the Lake of Fire. **Romans 6:23** says, "***For the wages of sin is death.***" Yet, God, in His mercy, has made a way for the debt of *all* our sins to be washed away. How is this possible? Did God simply waive our debt and say, "It's no big deal"? No, He can't do that, because He is a righteous God, who must judge sin. However, what He *did* have the prerogative to do was to *pay our debt for us*. **Romans 5:8** says, "***But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.***" Jesus has paid our

fine in full; and in exchange, He offers us the complete forgiveness of all sins, and a judicial standing before God of “not guilty”! I don’t know about you, folks, but that makes me excited! If you’ve never received this gift of forgiveness of sins and eternal life, I urge you to do so this morning!

The first half of this parable is a beautiful picture of salvation. However, the second half is painful to read. Here we find that the servant who had been forgiven of that huge debt cast a fellow servant into prison over a piddly debt of 100 *dinari*. That is about €4,200 euros! This is far less than what he had owed *his* lord! When the lord heard about his servant’s incredibly unforgiving act, he was very angry at him, and delivered to the “*tormentors*” (or “jailors”).

Now, that’s a creepy thought, is it not? What, exactly, do these “*tormentors*” represent? Was Jesus saying that the servant’s debt of 10,000 talents was revived? Is He saying that God can *cancel* His forgiveness—that a saved person can become lost again, and end up in the torment of Hell after all? No! The Bible teaches that a saved person *cannot* lose his salvation. Jesus said, “*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*” What, then, *did* Jesus mean by “*tormentors*”? Well, you’ll notice that the lord said nothing about *reviving* that old debt. In fact, the lord clearly implied that this man *was* capable of “paying” what was due him, and of being released from prison. What does this part of the parable mean, then? Simply this: Jesus is saying that the servant, because *he* had been forgiven of an infinite debt, now had a *new debt*. He now had a *moral* debt of *love and gratitude* to his master; and he also had a moral debt of showing *forgiveness* toward others who owed a debt to *him*. **Romans 13:8** says, “*Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.*” Christian, jails aren’t always made of concrete and iron bars: there are “jails” of wrong thoughts, too. When you are angry and bitter at someone, you are failing to pay what you owe him; and you *will* be incarcerated and “*tormented*” both by your guilty conscience, *and* by Satan (who will play with your mind), *until* you pay what you owe—which is love and forgiveness to everyone in your life.

Back in 1927, a Baptist missionary to China named **Charlie Culpepper** was up late one night praying; but he felt as though God was as silent as a stone. He prayed, “Lord, what is the matter?”⁷ He turned to **Romans 2:17**; and after reading it, the Lord convicted him of being a hypocrite, because he was filled with pride and unforgiveness. He awakened his wife, and prayed with her; and the next morning, in a prayer meeting with his missionary coworkers, he confessed his “pride and spiritual impotence.”⁸ Well, they were *all* pierced to the heart. “Their faces grew pale, and they began to cry...and fall prostrate on the floor.” Missionaries and Chinese pastors confessed their “envy, jealousy, and hatred” toward one another.⁹ One respected missionary named **Wiley Glass** was in so much agony, that he groaned and prayed for two days, and looked like death warmed over. But finally, he ran up to Charlie and said, “Charlie, it’s gone!” When Charlie asked him *what* was gone, Wiley said, “That old root of bitterness.”¹⁰ (For years he had hated a man who had insulted his wife. As soon as he could,

he found that man, and asked for forgiveness.) A mighty revival resulted from this prayer meeting; and many hundreds of people were saved in the coming years. *That* is what happens when believers humble themselves, die to self, and let Christ kill that “*root of bitterness.*”

Conclusion: Doing the right thing hurts; and there is always a cost that comes with it. However, *not* doing what Christ commands hurts far more in the long run. Bitterness is a like cancer that destroys you from the inside out—or like a crushing burden that you cannot bear. In contrast, loving and forgiving others because Jesus loved and forgave you *frees* your mind; gives you a clean conscience when you pillow your head at night; and gives you a light and joyful heart. Christian, follow Mordecai’s example, and put away all bitterness. **If you aren’t saved**, I urge you to receive God’s gift of eternal life today. Your sin has racked up an unpayable debt before God; and the penalty is Hell. However, Christ has already paid your debt in full, on the cross. Believe on Him, and receive His gift of salvation today!

¹ <https://academicintegrity.org/aws/ICAI/pt/sp/facts>

² James Ussher, *The Annals of the World* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, re-printed 2015), p. 128.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Bill Cooper, *The Authenticity of the Book of Esther* (United Kingdom: Institute for Creation Research, 1916, pp. 36-38.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 38.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 37.

⁷ Robert Morgan, *Preacher’s Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007), pp. 69-70.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*