The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 8 November 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.

Malice in the Palace

Esther 6:1-12

In the late 1800's in England, America, Canada, and other English-speaking countries, the Lord raised up mighty pastors and evangelists, whose preaching shook the world. Hundreds of thousands of people were saved through the preaching and publications of men such as the English pastor Charles Spurgeon, the evangelist Henry Varley, the American evangelist Dwight Moody, and many others. Henry Varley was once known to have said in a conversation with Moody, "The world has yet to see what God will do with a man who is fully committed to him."[1] Moody took that thought to heart, and asked the Lord to make him that kind of man; and God honoured that request by granting him much fruit for his labours.

Yet, godly though these men were, they still had an old, sinful nature, just like everyone else; and pride and envy were dangers that they had to guard against. Henry Varley himself was a man who had such struggles. Now, before I give you too dark an impression of Varley, let me give you a little portrait of him. In 1887, Varley was asked to be the Sunday School superintendent in a Baptist church in Westbourne Grove; and as he visited people's homes and shared the Gospel with them, people began to get saved daily. He had a particular burden for the residents of the Notting Hill district of London, which was notorious for its "filth, violence, profanity, drunkenness, and immorality"; and as he selflessly reached out to them, many hearts were won to Christ.[2] Soon large crowds were gathering in the church hall for his evangelistic meetings; and many workers from local churches helped out. Before long, these new believers asked him Varley he could be *their* pastor. The new church that was formed was called the "Free Tabernacle"; and it seated 1,000 people. After pastoring there for about 12 years, he launched out as an evangelist, and travelled around the world to preach the Gospel.[3]

It all sounds good, doesn't it? To be sure, it was: yet, as I said, there was a dark corner in Varley's life. You see, for a period in Varley's life, he had deep struggles with pride and jealousy. While he was pastor of that church in Notting Hill, there was another local pastor whose preaching was attracting people from *Varley's* church to *his* church. The pastor probably had no intention of doing so; yet, Varley began to develop a deep resentment toward the man.[4] Years later, Varley confessed: "I shall never forget the sense of guilt and sin that possessed me over that business. Was I practically saying to Jesus Christ, 'Unless the prosperity of Thy church and people comes in this neighbourhood by me, success had better not come?' Was I really showing inability to rejoice in another worker's service? I felt that it was a sin of a very hateful character. I never asked the Lord to take away my life either before or since, but I did then, unless his grace would give me victory over this foul image of jealousy."[5]

Pride, envy, and even *malice* springing forth from pride and envy, are evils of which even saved people are very capable. The good news is that we who know Christ don't *have* to obey these sins, because Christ has broken the power of sin in our lives, and has given us power to put pride to death every day.

Saved people can be blinded by pride, to a point; yet, the Holy Spirit shows them the vileness of their pride, and won't stop convicting them about it until they humble themselves, and submit to Him (just as Varley did). Lost people, on the other hand, don't have this sensitivity; and they certainly don't have the sense that they are offending *God* by their pride. They walk around in pride all day long, and don't even realise it (or, if they do, they don't care). Haman, the enemy of the Jews, was such a man. In last week's message, we saw the sheer ugliness of Haman's pride, and his deep malice toward Mordecai; but this morning, we will see how his pride began to be abased. The title of this message is ***Malice in the Palace.***

Read Esther 6:1-12.

I. The honour for Mordecai's deed (vv. 1-3)

At the end of **chapter 5** last week, we saw that Haman's family and counsellors had advised him to build a 50-cubit (30-metre) high gallows for the purpose of impaling Mordecai; and they advised him to go to King Ahasuerus first thing in the morning, and make some trumped-up charge against him, so that he could execute him early in the day, and have the matter done and dusted before the banquet that afternoon. Satan was moving Haman to murder Mordecai *before* that banquet, so that Esther would be either too grieved by her cousin's death, or simply too afraid, to petition the king to save her people. All through the night, Satan was working overtime to derail God's plan, so that *all* the Jews in the vast Persian Empire (which was virtually all the Jews in the world) would be slaughtered on the 13th of Adar, just as scheduled. Haman's workers probably didn't finish building that gallows until sometime in the wee hours of the morning; and Haman himself could probably scarcely sleep that night, because he was so filled with glee at the thought that his enemy's life was about to be snuffed out. However, during those very same hours, *the LORD* was at work. All night long, God was preparing the king to have a *favourable* opinion of Mordecai the next morning, so that when he found out that Haman had been plotting to *murder* the very man who had saved his life, and all his people, he would show Haman no mercy.

Now, as I've said several times in this series, God's name is not to be found in **Esther. Esther** is the only book of the Bible in which God's name is not mentioned even once. God moved the author of **Esther** *not* to mention His name, just to prove that we don't have to *see God's name* written in text order to *see His power and providence* in history. For six years, God had been working behind the scenes, and moving His "chess pieces," in preparation for the big "checkmate." God's "checkmate" against Haman was now only hours away; and one of His last moves was to cause the king to have a sleepless night. All night long, Darius couldn't get a wink of sleep. This was no coincidence. *God* was causing the king's insomnia. By the way, God *often* causes people not to sleep at night, for His purposes. I assume that when I can't sleep, God wants me to *pray.* More than once I have awakened with a sense that I needed to pray for a specific person—and found out later that that person had been in a crisis at that very hour of the night. In **Psalm 119** David wrote, ***"At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments."***

Now, how did Ahasuerus try to get to sleep? He called for a servant to come in and read him a "bedtime story"! Let's look again at **verses 1-3,** and see how this played out. **(Read Esther 6:1-3 again.)** Folks, what was the likelihood that of all the documents in the royal archives, the one document that they happened to read to the king that night was the record of when Mordecai exposed Bigthan and Teresh's plot to kill the king? That was a five-year old document! The likelihood was practically zero. Darius had been on the throne for about *twelve years* by this point. Imagine the endless volumes of court documents that there must have been in the royal archives, just from his own years of administration!

Now, just to give you a little perspective on how unlikely this was, consider what the Bible tells us about the Persians' voluminous record-keeping, in the books of **Ezra** and **Nehemiah**. In **Ezra 6:1-3,** we are told about a time, 12 years before this night, when King Darius had looked up an old document. He had looked up the record of the decree that King Cyrus once made to let the Jews go back to their land, and to rebuild the Temple. In our age of instant, digital communication, this may not seem like a big deal to us: but it was a very big deal to them. First of all, this document was 15 years old, and was from a previous king's administration. Secondly, it was *not* near to hand. Darius's servants began their search in the royal palace of Babylon (where King Darius was residing at the time); but they ended up sending messengers to another royal palace in the city of Achmetha—which was 300 miles northeast of Babylon, in the province of Media—before they finally found it. (Acmetha was the Hebrew pronunciation; but the Persian pronunciation was Ecbatana.) The reason the record was in Ecbatana, and not Babylon, is that Ecbatana was the city where Cyrus had spent the summer of 535 B.C., when he made that decree.[6] This means that Darius's servants had to review the history of Cyrus's reign, and determine that Cyrus had been in that particular location fifteen years earlier, before they even *knew* to look there. This was a huge undertaking; yet, they found that old decree in fairly short order. That is efficiency!

The Persians *loved* keeping records. They had a massive archive from which they could pull out records to read to King Ahasuerus that night. Yet, of the countless thousands of records that were available, the one they "happened" to pull up was the one with the record of Mordecai's uncovering of the assassination plot. This was like finding a needle in a haystack; yet, God led their fingers to the very document they He wanted them to read.

Now, according to the ancient Greek historian Herodotus, the Persian kings kept especially detailed records about those who served them well.[7] Obviously, there had been a very unusual oversight in Mordecai's situation, because failing to give a handsome reward to someone who had uncovered an assassination plot would have been unthinkable. For all their faults, the one thing that Persian kings did right was to reward faithfulness. Ahasuerus was probably mortified to hear that he hadn't rewarded this Jew named Mordecai! Was this just a weird

"glitch"? No! God had orchestrated this little bureaucratic blunder five years earlier, so that Mordecai's good deed would come to light at just the right time.

Brethren, there is much that we can "take home" from this. You see, oftentimes it seems that our service for the Lord is overlooked, forgotten, and unappreciated. You pour yourself into serving others in Jesus' name; yet no one seems to notice or care. In fact, you are often repaid for your kindness with a kick in the gut, by the very people on whom you've poured out so much love. Of course, you can expect this from the world, because lost people don't know or love God, or understand spiritual things. Sadly enough, even fellow Christians often fail to understand or appreciate what you are trying to do for the Lord. However, you may be sure that God is keeping track. Whether anyone *else* notices the little acts of service that you do for the Lord and for others—and whether or not you ever see any reward in this world—it *will* all come to light one day at the judgment; and you *will* be rewarded.

Read 1 Timothy 5:24-25.

Christian, no matter how lonely your service to God may seem, or how much it may seem that you aren't having any impact for the Lord, don't be discouraged! It's natural to look for *some* indication that what you are doing for God actually matters, and that you *are* making a difference for Him. Yet, oftentimes God *doesn't allow* you to have those little confirmations—just to keep you humble. Also, God often causes your acts of service to come to light at a later time, for a very specific purpose—just as He did in Mordecai's case. I'm sure that Mordecai would have been encouraged to receive *some* little recognition for what he'd done for the king—not because he desired a "pat on the back," but because it would have given him renewed hope that Esther had *not* been hauled off to the king's harem in vain—that God had *not* forgotten them—and that there *was*, indeed, some divine purpose in all this. Yet, God *didn't* give Mordecai that little encouragement: He remained silent for five more long years. Probably all Mordecai wanted was *some* little sign that he was not labouring for the Lord in vain. If so, the day finally dawned when he *got* that confirmation; and when that confirmation came, it was far greater that anything that Mordecai could have asked or thought.

This is the way God works, folks. His ways or not our ways; and His thoughts are infinitely higher than our thoughts. Sometimes we get weak and weary in our service to Him; and we feel that just the slightest little "boost"—some little miraculous sign or token—would be nice. God realises this: yet, He doesn't *have* to give us some dramatic sign. What He *does* give us are the promises in His Word. To Christians who are weary, here is what He promises.

Read Hebrews 6:10-12.

Many of the Christians in Paul's reading audience were weary and discouraged because of the persecution that they were undergoing for their faith in Christ; and this was one of the main reasons why Paul wrote this letter. Paul wrote this letter to commend these battered believers for the fruit that they had already produced for the Lord, even in the face of persecution. Nevertheless, Paul says, "The labour of love that you've wrought for Christ is good. You've been diligent in your service. However, you also need to keep your '***assurance of hope*,'** so that you won't grow slothful in your service." What, then, is the **"*assurance of hope*"**? And how do we keep it? Paul answers this question at the end of this same chapter, in **verses 19 and 20.** He says, ***"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus."***

Brethren, *Jesus* is our Anchor! *He* is our Hope. *He* is the One who has steadfastly secured our place in Heaven. Nothing can change that fact. However, what *can* change is **our assurance of that fact.** The Anchor doesn't waver; but *our confidence* in our Anchor can waver. How, then, do we keep our confidence in our Anchor? By reading His Word. By learning more and more about our Saviour. That is why Paul, in the epistle of **Hebrews,** gave his readers rich doctrines about Christ from the Old Testament. These believers had produced *genuine good works* in their lives; however, if they did not remain *solidly grounded in the Word*, then eventually, their fruit would begin to wane; and they would lose much reward.

Christians who are grounded in God's Word, and who are abiding in God's Word, are *enduring* Christians. If you aren't reading God's Word, you will begin to lose confidence in your Anchor; and before long, you will stop trying to serve the Lord—especially during those long, dry seasons of spiritual "drought," when it seems that God is silent, and that everything is parched and dry. Christians who are not abiding in the Word, and continuing in prayer, and fellowshipping with God's people, *will* backslide. Some Christians begin to lose their confidence in Christ's power to save *and* keep them; and they become filled with doubt and frustration, and stop trying to serve God. Eventually, they sink into despair; and they float through life without any power to serve God. Other Christians don't lose their confidence that they are saved; but they do lose confidence that God remembers their labour of love, and that their service to Him matters. Folks, no Christian needs to live this way! If you have been saved, you are *risen with Christ.* He has saved you for time and eternity, and has given you the power to bring forth fruit in your life, which *will* redound to His glory for all eternity.

Read Jeremiah 17:5-8.

II. The harbinger of Haman's doom (vv. 4-12)

(Read Esther 6:4-12 again.) By this time, it was early morning; and it was time to start getting ready for the business of the day. However, before the king's court was even open for business, who came in to see the king but his trusty vizier, **Haman!** When the king heard footsteps in the outer court, he asked who was in the court; and when his servants told him that it was Haman, the king bade him to come in. Haman undoubtedly had a big smile on his face. He was used to turning on his charm, and manipulating the king every which way he wished. He thought that the king would be like putty in his hands, just as he had been in the past. He was just about to ask the king for permission to hang Mordecai; but the king spoke up first, and said, ***"What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?"***

Can you imagine the visions of glory that were dancing around in Haman's conceited head? It never occurred to him that the king might be speaking of someone *else.* He instantly assumed that *he* was the one whom the king delighted to honour; and he decided to go hog-wild with his suggestions. He was *really* going to make this good. It was probably all he could do not to use the pronouns "I" or "me" as he suggested that this "man" should be clothed with the king's own royal apparel, and be made to ride on the king's own royal horse, and have a royal crown put on his head, and have someone parade him through the streets of Shushan, and cry out, ***"Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour."*** He wanted people to see him as though he were *the king himself*, in everything but actual name. In fact, he may have seen this as an opportunity to start "grooming" the people of Persia to accept *him* as the king of Persia someday. He may have already been hatching schemes to *overthrow* Darius in the future. At any rate, he was about to get the shock of his life. Can you imagine the horror that Haman must have felt when the king told him to go and do all these things for his enemy, Mordecai?

Did Haman have a hard time hiding his mortification? I'm sure he did! Yet, he couldn't miss a beat: he *had* to act as though he were overjoyed to do this thing. This reminds me of a story that Pastor White (the pastor of my home church in America) once told me. Years before I met Pastor White, when he was pastoring a church in Texas, he was out in town one day: and he saw one of the church's deacons on the street. However, he was surprised to see that he was lighting up a cigarette. Pastor White decided to catch him off guard by approaching from behind; and when the deacon heard him calling his name, he *sucked* that dirty old cigarette into his mouth, to hide it! I don't know if he was hiding it in one of the sides of his mouth, or between his lip and gums, or under his tongue; but he did his best not to let on that a cigarette was in his mouth. Pastor White made sure that he talked with him an extra-long time, so that he would have to taste that nasty thing for as long as possible. The man smiled and chatted; but Pastor White could plainly see that he wasn't himself. So it must have been with Haman. He had to put on his best acting job ever, because if he dared show that he didn't like this assignment, it could cost him his life. On the outside he had to smile; but on the inside he was trembling with rage and fear. Haman was now beginning to "taste" the ill fruit of his own

pride and malice, which was coming to harvest! In **Isaiah 3:10-11** the Lord says, ***"Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall <u>eat</u> the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him."*** **Daniel 4:37** says that ***"Those that walk in pride"*** God is ***"able to abase."***

So, what's the "takeaway" for *us*? After all, Haman was a lost man who had no fear of God, and who was consumed with pride. Surely this has no relevance to *us. We* don't have any pride issues, right? If this be what you think, you're fooling yourself! We *all* have pride issues, because we all have sinful hearts. If you have received God's gift of salvation, then you have a *new* heart, created in righteousness, which was placed in you at the moment you were born again; yet, as long as you are still in this mortal, sin-cursed body, you will continue to have the *old, sinful* heart, as well. In **Mark 7,** Jesus said, ***"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, <u>pride</u>, foolishness."***

It's easy to see pride in *others*; but most of the time you aren't aware of the pride in your *own* heart (just as you usually can't smell your own bad breath, or your own body odour). But *God* smells your pride; and it reeks in His nostrils! **Psalm 138:6** says, ***"Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off."*** Perhaps what I'm saying is offensive to you, because you don't really see yourself as a sinner (or at least, not a terrible one). If so, you aren't saved! Before you can receive God's gift of salvation, you need to realise that you *need* salvation, because you *are* a sinner. Every true child of God knows his sinfulness well. **Dr. Samuel Johnson,** the man who wrote the first dictionary of the English language, and who was also a devout believer, said, "I've never read of a crime but what I, too, might have committed the crime."[8] The 18th-century preacher **John Wesley** said that when he looked into his own heart, he saw "nothing but hell."[9] **John Bunyan,** the 17th-century author of *The Pilgrim's Progress,* said, "When I saw John Bunyan as *God* saw John Bunyan, I did not say I was a *sinner*; I said that I was a sinner *from the top of my head to the soles of my feet*."[10] Christian, don't ever allow yourself to start forgetting that you are a sinner "from the top of your head to the soles of your feet!" If even Jesus' eleven saved disciples struggled with pride, you may be sure that you will struggle with pride in your heart, too!

Read Mark 10:35-45.

Jesus' own disciples—the men that He had chosen to spread the Gospel throughout the world—were struggling with pride (again!); and once again, Jesus had to remind them that in His Kingdom, the way up is down. In Christ's Kingdom, the way to be honoured is not by promoting yourself; rather, the way to be honoured is by *humbling* yourself (not pretentiously, but sincerely). In **Philippians 2,** Paul urges believers, ***"Let nothing be done through strife or***

vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

Now, make no mistake about it: God *does* praise His people for their labours. Praise *is* a good thing, and has a rightful place. *Mordecai* didn't have a choice as to whether or not to accept this lavish praise from the king: it was just *given* to him. (In reality, it was *God* who bestowed this honour on him.) Mordecai didn't dare tell the king "no"; he *had* to receive this gift! He probably *didn't wish* to have this thing done to him; yet, at the same time, he must have realised that this was a sign from God that deliverance for the Jews was on the way! Perhaps he was even beginning to wonder whether God was soon going to put him in a much *greater* position, so that He could use his influence to defend the nation of Israel. (If so, he was spot-on right!) After years of obscurity and loneliness, Mordecai was suddenly being catapulted into recognition and honour. Yet, instead of *inflating* his head, the honour that Mordecai received that day inspired him to go back to his job at the king's gate, and do his regular duties. He didn't take the rest of the day off, and get plenty of "selfies": he got back to work! The praise that he had just received *refined* him, and made him even more fit for service.

Read Proverbs 27:21.

Praise (when it is received in the right way) can *refine* a person—just as fire refines silver, and gets rid of the dross. Now, it may seem strange that God would liken praise to a refining fire. When we think of "fire," we usually think of hard trials in our lives, which remove sins such as pride and self-will. However, *praise* can refine a person, too. How so? Because praise (in the right measure, and *at the right time* in your life, when you are spiritually *ready* to receive it) can encourage you to develop *more* godly character in your life. You see, even though we are God's *servants*, doing what it is our *duty* to do, God still promises to *reward* us, and to say "Well done!" However, our duties are only truly "well done" when they have been done with a humble, grateful heart, for the sole purpose of glorifying *the Lord,* and not self.

Read Luke 17:7-10 and 19:11-19.

What was Jesus' point in His parable of service in **Luke 17?** His point is that when He returns to earth one day, and His servants stand before Him to be judged, they will not be *"<u>thanked</u>"* for their service. Why? Because serving God is your *duty.* (We are *not* doing God a favour by serving Him. He is not obliged to us!) Yet, as we just saw in **Luke 19,** God <u>will</u> *honour*, *commend*, and *reward* us for the service that we truly did for Him, just because He loves us. He will say, ***"Well done, thou good and faithful servant."*** Christian, as you walk in humility, and allow the Lord to mould you more and more into His image, you will develop *His*

> character in your life; and if and when it comes time to be advanced or honoured in this world, you will see your advancement as an opportunity to serve the Lord in an even greater way. You will receive it not in pride, but with your finger pointing upward to God, and saying, "Not I, but Christ, be honoured, loved, and exalted!"

Conclusion: As we close this morning, I would ask, "Do you know Christ as your personal Saviour?" Have you been saved? If you are seeing, for the first time, that you are separated from God and in need of salvation, don't put off the matter of salvation. Humble yourself today, and ask Christ to save you, and to come into your heart and be your Lord and Master. Believe that the atonement that He made for you on the cross is all you need, and that His precious blood is sufficient to wash away *all* your sins. **If you are saved already,** allow the Lord to humble your heart today. Pride is deceitful and insidious, and must constantly be guarded against, and abased. Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up—just as He did for Mordecai!

[1]Robert J. Morgan, *Preacher's Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publications, 2007), p. 272.

[2]Alexander Marshall, "Life Story of Henry Varley," Brethren Archive, https://www.brethrenarchive.org/people/henry-varley/snippets/life-story-of-henry-varley/

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] Morgan, *Preacher's Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations,* p. 272

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1985), p. 663.

[7] *Ibid,* p. 709.

[8] Morgan, *Preacher's Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations,* p. 456.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] *Ibid.*