

When God is Attentive

After Solomon finished the temple of the Lord and the royal palace, Scripture tells us that “the Lord appeared to him at night,” (2 Chron. 7:12). God’s response isn’t focused on the beautiful architecture of the building, or the achievement of making such a grand structure. His focus is on attentiveness. “I have heard your prayer,” the Lord says. Now let’s back up a minute. What did Solomon pray about? You have to read 2 Chronicles 6 to find out that he was praying a prayer of dedication for the Temple that they’d just finished building.

In our Old Testament lesson today, is probably the most well known couple of verses from 2 Chronicles, which comes next. God says:

When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among My people, if My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and heal their land, (verses 13-14).

Notice the movement here. God says, “I will hear from heaven.” Heaven responds when God’s people pray. The moment we bow our heads to pray is the moment God lifts His hand to help. Prayer shouldn’t be our last resort. It’s not a last resort. It’s the ignition switch of divine action. It makes us more aware of all the things God’s doing to work good for our benefit.

God goes on, “My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place,” (verse 15). That’s covenant language, folks. It means heaven is alert. Heaven is engaged. Heaven is ready to move. This truth carries us into Romans 8 and into the story of Esther, where God’s name is never mentioned – but God’s fingerprints are all over the place. When God’s people act in faith, heaven is set in motion. **Read Romans 8:28-30.**

God’s at Work, Beyond What We Can See

Paul writes, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose,” (Rom. 8:28). Paul doesn’t tell us that all things are good. Some things aren’t good. Esther’s story reminds us of that. Genocide plots are not good. Fear is not good. Silence is not good. But Paul says God works in ALL things.

Even in the evil things. God isn’t absent in the chaos. In the heartbreak. In the illness. The cancer diagnosis. God is there, in the details. He works in the small

moments. Even in the moments that feel insignificant, delayed, or confusing. None of them are wasted when placed in God's hands.

Paul wrote the book of Romans to believers who knew suffering. He doesn't try to offer them some shallow comfort. He's not saying, "that's life, just get over it." Paul's proclaiming a deep assurance to the Church at Rome – and to us today, New Hope. That assurance is this: God's purposes are larger than the pain His people endure. That assurance is what sustained Esther. And it must sustain us!

Sometimes Crises Look God-Forsaken

There are times when we find ourselves in crises, and we may be tempted to wonder, "Where's God in this?" Queen Esther surely felt the same way. By Esther 4, the crisis has reached its peak. A royal decree has been issued to destroy the Jewish people. Esther is queen, but she's also trapped.

To approach the king without him summoning her could cost her her life. Yet Esther sends word to Mordecai. "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish," (Est. 4:16).

We might think this sounds rather reckless, but it's not. Esther demonstrates faithful resolve here. She moves from being on the sidelines in the issue of the upcoming holocaust, to being the leading figure standing in opposition to it. Esther doesn't know how things are going to end. She don't know what's going to happen to her. But she knows she needs to be obedient to the call, that perhaps, she was "made for a moment like this."

And notice where her story turns – not in the throne room, but in prayer and fasting. I said something to this effect earlier, but I'll say it again. The moment God's people bowed their heads, heaven lifted its hand to help. Before Esther ever steps forward, God is already hard at work.

Obedience Sets Heaven in Motion

On the third day, Esther approaches the king. The room is heavy with risk. But Scripture records, "When he [Xerxes] saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter," (Est. 5:2). That moment didn't begin with King Xerxes' favor.

Friends, that moment began three days earlier with prayer and fasting. It began when Esther decided to trust God with all the things which she could not control. I find it almost comical how Xerxes responds to her. He says, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you," (verse 3).

At face value, it seems like Esther could have just asked for the Jewish parts of the kingdom to be handed over to her. She could send messages to all the potentates to let them know a new sheriff was in town, and that Haman's decrees didn't fly anymore. But that's not how things worked. The reason Xerxes would say "up to half the kingdom would be given," is that it was a figure of speech in those days. He's just saying that he wanted to make her happy. Apparently Xerxes had enough sense to learn from his past mistake with Queen Vashti, that "happy wife means happy life!"

So, Esther invites the king and Haman to a banquet – and then another. What looks like hesitation is actually divine timing. God is layering events, aligning hearts, and positioning outcomes. God is in the details. He works in the small moments. Even a delayed request, a carefully timed invitation, or a quiet pause can be part of God's greater purpose.

God Works 24/7

Then we reach one of the most understated turning points in the Bible. "That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him," (Est. 6:1). This is where many of us are tempted to explain the story away with chance or coincidence. But God invites us to see something deeper here.

There's a popular idea sometimes called "the butterfly effect." Maybe you've heard of it. It suggests that a butterfly flapping its wings in Africa can, through a chain of tiny atmospheric changes, eventually contribute to a hurricane forming in the Gulf of Mexico. Small, seemingly insignificant actions creating massive consequences.

It's a fascinating concept – but it falls short when we apply it to faith. Because when the world feels chaotic, when events seem random and out of control, we're not at the mercy of butterfly wings. When the world seems off the rails, hold fast to this truth – butterfly wings don't determine the course of history. God does!

The king's sleepless night wasn't caused by chance. Mordecai's forgotten reward wasn't an oversight. The timing of Haman's arrival in the courtyard wasn't accidental. This wasn't chaos colliding. It was providence – the protective care of Almighty God – unfolding.

God is in the details, friends. He works in the small moments. A restless night. A dusty scroll. A question asked at just the right time. Roman's 8:28 tells us that, "in all things God works for the good of those who love Him." Not some things. Not the big, dramatic moments only. ALL things.

While Esther sleeps, heaven is wide awake. While Mordecai waits, God is working. While Haman plots, God is positioning. This isn't the butterfly effect. It's the sovereignty of God. And friends, today, in the bleak midwinter – He IS still on the throne. Still working everything out for our good, because He loves us, and we love Him.

From Condemned to Honored

By morning, everything has changed. Haman is forced to honor Mordecai publicly. The man sentenced to death is now paraded through the city in royal robes. What turned the story? It wasn't luck. Or coincidence. It's not a butterfly in Africa flapping its wings. It happened because God's purposes cannot be derailed by human schemes.

Paul tells us in Romans, "For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified," (Rom. 8:29-30). See, it's not about fate or happenstance. It's about faithfulness. God's purposes aren't fragile.

They don't hinge on random outcomes or unseen variables. History isn't driven by chaos. It is guided by God. What God begins, He completes. Mordecai's faithfulness mattered. Esther's obedience mattered. The prayers of God's people mattered. Heaven had been set in motion long before the outcome was visible.

Living Between Promise and Fulfillment

Most of us live where Esther lived, and I'm not talking about Persia. We live between fear and resolution, between fasting and fulfillment. Between prayer and visible change. It's tempting to believe – to think – that small acts of faith don't matter. But the Bible shows us time and time again otherwise.

Paul doesn't promise the Romans immediate clarity. But his writing promises unshakable purpose. I've said this before, I hope you're catching it – God is in the details! He works in the small moments. The prayer whispered at night. The decision made in faith. The obedience that feels risky. None of it is wasted.

Right now, the world feels unstable. We see the news headlines. All the injustice. Fear threatens to overwhelm us. In times like these, we hold fast to this truth – history does not hinge on random chance. God is Sovereign. He's faithful. And right now, He's at work – even in the quiet of a snowy January day with subzero temperature wind-chills.

Heaven Set in Motion

The God who listened at the Temple in 2 Chronicles, who worked behind palace walls in Esther, and who assures us through Paul in Romans 8, is the same God we worship and serve today. When His people pray, heaven responds. When God's people obey, heaven moves. And when God's people trust, heaven works!

The moment you bow your head to pray is THE moment God lifts His hand to help. God IS in the details. And God – not chance, not some butterfly fluttering its wings in some far-off place – God alone directs the course of history. The course of His story. Heaven is not distant, friends. It's already set in motion!

Prayer: Faithful God, When we cannot see the way forward, help us to trust that You are already at work. Teach us to pray, to wait, and to obey with courage. Remind us that You work all things together for good according to Your purpose, and that nothing – seen or unseen – can thwart Your will. Set heaven in motion in our lives, that we may be shaped into the image of Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.