

Two Roads

C. S. Lewis wrote:

...every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole... all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow-creatures, and with itself... Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other. ⁱ

Which road are you on? Which road would the person who knows you best say you are on?

In Esther chapter 5, we see two people, Haman and Esther, moving in opposite directions on these two different roads that Lewis is speaking of. One is moving toward God and one is moving toward evil. Their direction and speed are determined by every choice that they make. I believe God wants us to examine each road and the decisions that mark the way. First, we need to examine...

I. The Markers on the Road to Hell.

Sorry about being so blunt, but there's really no way to dress up this pig. Jesus described this descending road in Matt. 7:13:

For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.

The Greek word for "destruction" here is *apollyon* which literally means "destruction, annihilation, ruin or punishment." That's basically a description of hell. Here in Esther 5, we are shown the markers that tell us if we're on that road. These are the markers of Haman's life which ended in destruction, annihilation, ruin and punishment.'

The first marker is malice. Malice by definition is: "*a desire to inflict injury or suffering on someone.*" We know it's against God's will to hold such feelings because malice is listed as a sin in the Old Testament and the New Testament instructs us:

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. (I Peter 2:1)

But Haman was doing just the opposite! He was INCREASING in malice, envy, and slander when it came to Mordecai. Remember back in Esther 3:3, when Haman saw that Mordecai wouldn't kneel before him, he was enraged? Well, now in Esther 5 when he saw Mordecai he was filled with rage again! Even though he had been invited to a banquet with the queen, he said to his wife:

...all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate. (Esther 5:13)

Just seeing Mordecai ruined his day! Is that true for anyone in your life? Be honest! If you see certain people in the grocery store, do you turn around and avoid

them? You may not have malicious thoughts of wanting to harm them physically, but if their very existence ruins your day, do you see what that means? It means you're demonstrating a behavior of people on the road to destruction. You need to lose that behavior pronto!

The second marker on this road to destruction as demonstrated by Haman is pride. God says through the prophet Isaiah:

...I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless. (Is. 13:11b)

In fact, pride (also described as "haughty eyes" in the Old Testament) is #1 on God's hate list. Yeah, you heard me right. God has a "hate" list. Prov. 6:16-19:

There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.

Actually, though pride is #1 on this list, the whole list is a perfect description of Haman!

On the pride issue, listen to Haman after coming home from the first banquet with Queen Esther: (Esther 5:10b - 12a)

Calling together his friends, and Zeresh, his wife, Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials. "And that's not all," Haman added. "I'm the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave."

It's not just ungodly wretches like Haman who are susceptible to the sin of pride. In the Old Testament, there was a good king, a man named Uzziah, who is described in II Chron. 26 with these words:

He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father Amaziah had done. (II Chron. 26:4)

But late in his life, after serving God faithfully for decades, pride entered his heart: (II Chron. 26:16):

...after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall.

He entered the temple to burn incense, something that only priests were allowed to do. Eighty priests confronted him right there in the temple. While Uzziah was screaming at them in anger, leprosy broke out on his forehead. He had leprosy for the rest of his life and his son Jotham had to step in and run the government.

The pride being criticized here isn't what we would call self-confidence. It's what we would call over-confidence or arrogance. The New Testament encourages self-confidence that is tempered by faith in God. Gal. 6:4, 5 say:

Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else...

Even the second great commandment teaches this when it says:

...love your neighbor as yourself. (Matt. 19:19)

If you hated yourself, then you would hate your neighbor. That's obviously not what this command is teaching. It's saying, "Don't consider yourself better or worse than others. In the same way you love and respect yourself, do that with others."

But the pride that the Bible rejects is the attitude that the Greeks encouraged. Aristotle said that the “great-souled man” had a profound regard for his own excellence. The Greeks thought that humility was “despicable.” Jesus taught the opposite. He listed arrogance as one of the “...evils [that] *come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’*”

Mordecai’s refusal to bow to Haman was not out of pride, but out of “holiness.” Proverbs 3:7 puts it this way:

**Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD and shun evil.**

Mordecai’s reverence for holiness caused him to shun the evil in Haman.

Malice and pride are two of the most obvious markers on the road to destruction. Haman displayed these markers clearly. But Esther displayed markers on the other road. So what we need to see next are...

II. The Markers on the Road to Rescue

This book is such a great teaching tool because it has such believable real life examples. As far as Haman was down the Road to Destruction, Esther was that far up the Road to Rescue. The markers in her life were the polar opposite of Haman’s. The opposite of malice is kindness, benevolence. Do you see that in Esther? The definition of benevolence is, *The desire to do good to others, to do an act of kindness to someone.* Esther’s actions to stop Haman’s genocide of her people was more about saving her people than it was about doing harm to Haman. In fact, Esther never asked that harm be done to Haman. She simply asked, as we’ll see in chapter 7, that she and her people might be saved. Esther was motivated first by benevolence.

Is that true of you? How long does it take for you to respond to someone in need? You know, to be honest, that’s not that easy for me. My wife is much more sensitive to people’s needs than I am. When I get into a task, I can really “zone out” and not really notice if someone is in need. Jesus was not like that. Once when He was going to celebrate a feast in Jerusalem, He passed by the pool of Bethesda and saw a disabled man. In John 5 it says: (John 5:6)

When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time...

Now, it goes on to say that He healed him, but what I notice is that it says He *...learned that he had been in this condition for a long time.* How did Jesus learn that? Miraculously? No, I think He probably just asked him. He stopped and talked to this man. You know what? I’ve got to become more like Jesus in this regard. How about you?

The second marker of Haman on his road to destruction was pride, an over-confidence or even an obsession with his own desires and wants. The opposite of pride is humility, even meekness. This is Esther. In fact, she is so meek that most of us probably question the slow speed at which she reveals her request of the king. When she first appears in the court, the king asks her:

...What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you. (Esther 5:3)

Isn’t this the perfect opening? Why doesn’t she just blurt it out, “Save me and my people”? That’s what most of us would’ve done, right?

Well, I don't know for sure, but just consider the situation for a minute. All Esther knows is that the genocide is Haman's idea but the King signed the decree. She doesn't know how "invested" the King is in this whole idea. And if I'm right in deducing that Esther has been trained in debate by Mordecai, then every debater worth his salt knows that you want to know as much about the opposition's argument as possible before you launch your final appeal. Esther is patient but also humble enough not to assume that she has all the facts. She is confident of one thing: she will probably have only one shot at saving her people and she wants to make it her best shot.

Malice and pride vs. kindness and humility – these are just the first two markers on each of the roads being displayed in Esther 5. But what determines which road we're on? In other words, where's the entrance to each? This takes us back to the first two verses in this chapter where we see...

III. The Prerequisite of Grace

Esther chapter 5 begins with a moving conclusion to the events and drama of Esther chapter 4. Last week when we ended, Esther was fasting. An Old Testament euphemism for fasting is the phrase "humble yourself" or "deny yourself." She hadn't eaten in three days. How beautiful would you look or feel if you hadn't eaten in three days? Chapter 5, verses 1, 2 say:

On the third day Esther put on her royal robes (the Hebrew literally says, "*she put on her royalty*") **and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall,** (which means that he was probably tending to some official business) **facing the entrance. When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court...**

Remember, this was against the law! Esther was breaking the law just to walk into the court of the king! Her life could have ended at that instant! But God has His own higher law. Prov. 21:1 describes it:

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD;

He directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.

This higher law took effect the moment Esther entered the court. And where did the LORD direct king Xerxes heart? **When he 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.** (Esther 5:2)

Could you use a picture of grace today? Here it is. Esther is standing in a king's court without royal blood, not having done anything to earn it, yet wearing royal robes. By all rights, she should die but she doesn't appear frightened. Perhaps it's because it's as Major Ian Thomas said last week, "She was already dead having died of her own decision..." He goes on to say, "Dead men cannot die, nor can they be frightened... In fact, there is nothing quite so relaxing as being dead – dead [that is] to your own ability... to accomplish anything [for God]." ⁱⁱ

Here in the Old Testament, nearly 500 years before Christ would go to the cross, we have a real-life example of what it takes to have our sins forgiven and become a son or daughter of God – you die to self and are resurrected to life in Christ. Rom. 6:11 spells it out:

...count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

If you've done that, you are saved from the judgment of hell. If you haven't, you aren't. The prelude of this chapter describes the "on ramps" to the Road to Destruction or the Road to Rescue. Which road are you on today? If you want to be on the Road to Rescue, the voice on your spiritual MapQuest is saying, "Turn right now." Travel on this road and you are safe from judgment forever. How do you "turn right now"? Three steps: First, admit that you've sinned. Tell Jesus you've been on the wrong road. Step two: ask Jesus to forgive you. Forgiveness from God is free but not automatic. You need to ask for it. Step three: receive His grace. The instant you do that, you will die and be resurrected spiritually. Col. 3:3 declares the reality:

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

Right here, at the end of this sermon, if you've never done this or even if you're unsure if you've ever done, do it now! Experience the freedom from fear that comes from being "dead to sin" and "alive to God." Put yourself for the first time on the Road to Rescue - a road from which you can never be removed. Let's pray...

ⁱ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1952), p. 86

ⁱⁱ Major W. Ian Thomas, *If I Perish, I Perish* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 61