

**INTRO:** “Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements.” So begins Chinua Achebe’s bestselling work, *Things Fall Apart*. We begin the book with a powerful and influential character. I won’t give you all of the details because you should read the work, but what transpires in the book ends in the death of this main character. In its end, the irony of the work comes into play as a man says this about Okonkwo, “*That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia... and now he will be buried like a dog...*” Things fell apart. Although Chinua Achebe was one of the most gifted modern writers, he wasn’t the first or even the best at drawing out the irony of success. Irony is the contrast between what is expected and what actually happens. We never expect that fads come and go, people gain power then fail, nations rise and fall, but they do. This week, I read a story which I believe surpasses Achebe’s in bringing out this theme. It is the story of Haman in the book of Esther. Today, we will see Haman’s sudden fall from success in one of the most ironic plot twists in Scripture. And we will learn that ***God’s people must place their hope in God’s honor, not the honor of this world.***

Let’s look to **The Text**. I titled this sermon, *The Reversal of Honor*, because that is exactly what happens. One man begins with a place of honor while the other mourns. However, the tables turn in dramatic fashion. Look at our first section: **Haman is honored, but Mordecai is mourning in 5:9-14**. If you remember, Haman was a high-powered leader who plotted to kill the Jews after Mordecai, Esther’s relative, refused to bow down to him. The King, Ahasuerus, allowed Haman to do as he wished, so the Jewish people are expecting annihilation. But, in **Esther 5:1-8**, Esther got involved. She was the queen of Persia, although she was a Jew. God placed her there for this very moment so that she could intervene. And she did. Esther threw a feast for the king and Haman, and invited them to a second feast. We still don’t know exactly how her plan will pan out, and we don’t read of Esther at all in today’s text. Growing up, I became acquainted with soap operas (Southern women love their “stories”). Soap operas are dramatic episodes which follow numerous characters. I know you are wondering how your pastor knows so much about these, but that is beside the point. One of the aspects of soap operas is that it will shift from one character to another, going back and forth, and that is what is going on in our text: we shift from Esther’s perspective to Haman’s. And, as we should expect, Haman is feeling pretty good. **Haman is honored**. Look at **5:9-12**: **And Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king’s gate, that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai. 10 Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and brought his friends and his wife Zeresh. 11 And Haman recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the servants of the king. 12 Then Haman said, “Even Queen Esther let no one but me come with the king to the feast she prepared. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king.** Haman is pleased with himself: in **3:1**, he had been promoted; in **3:2-15**, he influenced the king to do whatever he wanted; in **5:1-8**, he (and only he) was invited to accompany the king at Esther’s feast. In **v9**, we see how that affected him: **And Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart**. The CSB says he was in “*good spirits*”. Haman goes home like a kid after a great day of school to tell his family and friends. He was on top of the world! Look at the descriptive words in **v11**: **splendor, riches, honored**. Haman was an honored man. But one person was bringing him down: Mordecai. This Jew had the audacity to refuse to honor Haman. Mordecai should be scared now that Haman was going to kill his people, but he isn’t. In **v9**, Mordecai **neither rose nor trembled before him**.

And Haman is filled with wrath against Mordecai. Wrath, is deeper than just anger in this book. In [1:12](#) and [2:1](#) it describes the King's fury against his queen, Vashti, which led him to ban her from his presence; in [3:5](#) the word described Haman's anger which led to his plan to exterminate all Jews. Later, this same word is used to describe the King's rage which leads him to kill another man in [7:7, 10](#). This is more than the anger you get when you lose a video game. This anger leads to action. Read [v13-14](#): Haman just recounted all of his good fortune, but continues: **Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.** He hated Mordecai enough that it surpassed the joy he had in his success. Mordecai's presence spoiled everything. **14 Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows fifty cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged upon it. Then go joyfully with the king to the feast."** This idea pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made. We see the effect of advice on Haman: his wife and friends advised him that, if Mordecai was driving him this crazy, he should have him killed. But this wouldn't be just any death: it would be a public ceremony. They wanted gallows (an execution device used for hanging) to be made **fifty cubits high**. Fifty cubits was 75 feet high. That is 8 stories tall! I have a photo of an eight-story building. This is high up. Some scholars suggest that it was so high that it would have to be attached to a building. They wanted to hang Mordecai on something so high that the entire city could see his death. Haman had the gallows made. But think for a moment, what is the problem with this plan? Haman planned to kill Mordecai without one person's permission: the king. Persia may have been a wild society, but public hangings weren't done on a whim. The king had to approve of this. We will get there in a moment. But, for now, see the difference between Haman and Mordecai. Haman is honored while **Mordecai is mourning** at the king's gate. That is where he was in [4:1-3](#), and that is where he remains. He is mourning the coming tragedy. Mordecai is also a condemned man at this point. And this is where our story gets juicy. Look at the next section. We will see:

**Mordecai is honored, but Haman is mourning** in [6:1-13](#). In [6:1-11](#), we see how **Mordecai is honored**. **On that night the king could not sleep**. Stop for a moment. We see an odd series of events in these next verses which, if we haven't been reading the book, may appear to be coincidence. But we *have* been reading, and we know that there is an additional character in Esther: the invisible God. Here, the king just so happens to be sleepless; the Hebrew literally reads, "*his sleep fled him*". I call this section "Sleepless in Susa". It reminds me of [Dan 2](#) when King Nebuchadnezzar couldn't sleep because of dreams; he calls Daniel in to interpret those dreams. Who sent those dreams, church? God did. And God is in control of this sleepless king, here. The LXX, the Greek Old Testament, actually says, "*The Lord withdrew sleep from the king.*" This isn't original to the text, but I think it is true. And then something else miraculous happens: **And he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king**. This is great. What do you do when you are sleepless? Maybe you turn on the t.v. Maybe you look at a magazine. Maybe you get up and get some food. This king gets the most boring book off of his shelf to read: the book of the chronicles of his reign. It was about the daily happenings while he was king. This is like reading the dictionary. Maybe it would put him to sleep! **2 And it was found written how Mordecai had told about Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, and who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus**. In [Esther 2](#), Mordecai had revealed a plot to assassinate the king and had saved his life. And, at the time, we thought the king wasn't so grateful: all he did was put his name in a book! But, remember, God is in control, and the king just so happens to read this story

on his sleepless night. This is getting good! What will happen next? **3** And the king said, “What honor or distinction has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?” The king’s young men who attended him said, “Nothing has been done for him.” And this is my favorite part: **4** And the king said, “Who is in the court?” Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king’s palace to speak to the king about having Mordecai hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for him. **5** And the king’s young men told him, “Haman is there, standing in the court.” And the king said, “Let him come in.” Haman just so happens to be at the palace; he came to ask permission to have Mordecai killed (remember, he needed his permission), this same Mordecai whom the king had just read about. And it is Haman who the king tells to come into his court. **6** So Haman came in, and the king said to him, “What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?” And Haman said to himself, “Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?” **7** And Haman said to the king, “For the man whom the king delights to honor, **8** let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and the horse that the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown is set. **9** And let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king’s most noble officials. Let them dress the man whom the king delights to honor, and let them lead him on the horse through the square of the city, proclaiming before him: ‘Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.’ ” Do you see what just happened? The king asks what should be done to honor this man, and Haman thinks, “*There is no one the king would like to honor more than me!*” He thinks he is talking about him. Haman suggests a public honor: he would wear the king’s robes, ride the king’s horse, have the crown, and be paraded by the king’s people in front of the city! Haman wants public honor to go along with his riches. But here is the irony: who is the king talking about honoring? Not Haman! It is Haman’s worst enemy! Then it gets even better: **10** Then the king said to Haman, “Hurry; take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king’s gate. Leave out nothing that you have mentioned.” **11** So Haman took the robes and the horse, and he dressed Mordecai and led him through the square of the city, proclaiming before him, “Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.” The king not only honors Mordecai, but he makes Haman do it! Can you picture Haman’s face? Mordecai the Jew (**v10** points that part out) is being honored by the enemy of the Jews. And that leads us to the reversal: Mordecai is honored but **Haman is mourning**. Read the last two verses, **6:12-13** Then Mordecai returned to the king’s gate. But Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered. **13** And Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, “If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him.” Haman goes home with a different attitude than earlier: he is mourning. And his advisors and wife have different words for him: “If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him.” These people now realize that history is against him. They understand that Mordecai’s people, the Jews, have the upper hand. Maybe they know Israel’s past in Egypt and God’s mighty deliverance; maybe they know of this small nation’s accomplishments against mightier nations. What they do know is this: if Haman is against the Jews, he will not win. They didn’t say “he *might* not overcome them” but that he will *surely* fall. Would they be right? We will see next week. Even his advisors realize that Haman is a condemned man because the God of the Jews is against him. There has been a complete reversal of honor. So, now, I would like for us to get deeper and see...

**The Truths** of this passage. What lessons do we see here? I see three things:

1. **There is IRONY in this passage.** Haman is on top of the world, but, less than 24 hours later, is mourning like the Jews. The lowly one, Mordecai, has replaced the powerful Haman in the eyes of the king and the world. There are several pieces of irony here: first, we see **the irony of worldly honor**. The honor of this world leaves just as quickly as it comes. Just ask Haman. He had riches, children, a good job, and even Esther's attention, but that wasn't enough. He wanted public honor. But, as **Prov 16:18** tells us, **pride goes before destruction**. The irony of worldly honor is that it is temporary. As one commentary states, *the satisfaction that depends on worldly honor and glory can be extinguished easily*. We learn that lesson from Haman. But we also see **the irony of worldly advice**. Earlier, King Ahasuerus took bad advice and de-crowned his queen. Here, we see more bad advice. Haman is under just as much influence as Ahasuerus, and he fails. He builds a gallows to destroy Mordecai, and, in **Esther 7**, Haman hangs on these very gallows. The irony of worldly advice is that it is not all-knowing; those who give advice cannot promise anything. Here, Haman gets some bad counsel, and even they realize it in the final verse. **Be careful, friends, who you turn to for advice. Is it arrogant guidance, pretending to know all things? Or is it humble and gentle advice? Worldly advice will turn against you if you turn to the wrong advisors.** Thirdly, we see **the irony of worldly vengeance**. Haman acts on vengeance, and it backfires quickly. In revenge, he builds his own execution device. **Revenge is never sweet enough in this world. In fact, it often ironically turns back on you.** The ironies in this passage, of worldly honor and worldly advice and worldly vengeance, remain today: all of these can ultimately cause more harm than good. That is the irony in this text. But, second, see that
2. **There is THEOLOGY in this passage.** This book is a "theological history" because it tells us about history but also tells us about the God of history. Both of these come up in this passage. First, we learn in this passage that **the curse of sin means the downfall of worldly things**. Ask yourself this question: what, above all, is responsible for Haman's downfall? His own sin. Scripture reveals that the sin of man is, first and foremost, the desire to be more than we really are. Satan's reasoning for Eve eating the fruit is this in **Gen 3:4-5**: **"You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."** Man's sin is rooted in a desire to be God. And that is exactly what Haman is trying: he wants to control who lives and who dies; he wants to be "god" over Mordecai. And the result of that is promised to us in **Gen 3:17-19**: pain and death. Man will not be god; man will return to dust. Man wants honor above God and the result is the downfall of all honor. In **Gen 11**, mankind tries to build a tower to be like God, but God destroys man's futile attempt as quickly as it begins. Man's attempt to be honored above all will fail. In the end, Haman's fall is evidence of the downfall of all things in sin. Isaiah testifies to this when he says, in **2:11**: **The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.** Referring to Tyre and Sidon in **23:8-9**: **Who has purposed this against Tyre, the bestower of crowns, whose merchants were princes, whose traders were the honored of the earth? The Lord of hosts has purposed it, to defile the pompous pride of all glory, to dishonor all the honored of the earth.** The curse of sin means the downfall of worldly things. All earthly achievements will vanish; all wealth will pass away; all honors, like that of Haman, will leave. If you are here and have placed your hope in this world, this text shows that you have made a grave mistake because this world will pass away along with everything in it. That is the result of sin. Don't place your trust in those things. So what can I trust? That is the second point of theology in this passage: although the curse of sin is the downfall of worldly

things, we see the invisible God in this passage. **The promise of God means the victory of His people.** Although Haman's fall is evidence of his sin, Mordecai's rise is evidence of God's grace in the honoring of His people. Don't overlook the hand of God here: He keeps the king awake; He has him read the chronicles; He brings Haman in the court at the right time. Only God could orchestrate this. We are beginning to see that it is not only Esther who was brought to the kingdom for such a time as this but God brought Mordecai, the King, and even Haman to work out his good purposes to rescue his people, the weak and lowly Jews. This has been his plan all along: **1 Cor 1:28-29** says "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are." We see him do it in Israel both in Egypt and the Promised Land; we see it in Mordecai; and we ultimately see it in Jesus Christ, a servant who was killed for the salvation of mankind. God's people will not be weak forever. He is making them strong, and his Son will get all of the glory from this world. The promise of God in this passage means the victory of His people. We see it in Mordecai: the weak one according to the world is honored. So I ask, which side of history will you be on? Will you be on the side of this world which will pass away or will you be on the side of Christ? We know who will win. This passage gives us a hint. If you are here this morning and are placing your hope on this world, the words of Haman's advisors is a word to you as well: "you will not overcome but will surely fall." But if you place your faith in Jesus Christ, you will rise in victory with him. If you are weak, tired, overlooked, and hated by this world, there is good news: so was Jesus, but history is shining towards Him. He will win. That is the theology of this passage. Lastly,

3. **There is GODLY PRACTICE in this passage.** There are two major pictures of godly practice I would like you to see in Mordecai. Christians, first, **we live as good citizens in this world.** This aspect may be overlooked if we aren't careful: Mordecai's honor comes when the king remembers that Mordecai saved his life. We are tempted to see Mordecai's unwillingness to bow before Haman as an act of rebellion against the empire. But that isn't the full picture: he followed the laws of the land, and he honored the King when that didn't go against his faith. We can make the same application for Esther (which I will make next week) but realize the point: they are living in an evil empire, but they are still living honorably as citizens in this world. Mordecai isn't saying, "*I am a Jew, so forget you King, I don't have to listen to you!*" He saved the king's life. God saved Mordecai's life through this. I have shown throughout this sermon series that we live in a world just like this one in Esther. Although this world is evil, that doesn't give Christians an excuse to treat other people as if their lives don't matter, even if they worship false gods; in fact, shouldn't we care even more about the lives of those who would go to Hell if we let them die? We value life. The church must stand up against the evils of racism, genocide, and abortion; the church must care for orphans, refugees, and helpless children; the church must speak in truth and love to those trapped in sin; as good citizens, we don't seek the death of those with whom we disagree, and we don't devalue them with our words and actions. We live as good citizens in this world. I could point out in history how Christians have often missed this. I pray for a generation that understands our role as Christians in this world: to love all lives, to point others to Christ, and the fight ferociously against the evils of hatred. But we don't hang our hope on this world. Don't miss this: we live as good citizens *in* this world, but, Scripture testifies, we are not *of* this world. That is our second practice: **We live for another world.** Notice how Haman responds to being honored in **Esther 5**: he runs home and gloats. But

Mordecai is honored in **Esther 6**, and how does he respond? We see it in **v12**: he returned to the king's gate. What was he doing? The same thing he does in **Esther 4**: he mourns the coming destruction of his people. He didn't take the day off to brag about his newfound honor, but continues to keep his eyes on the Lord. Mordecai, even when honored in this world, lived for another world. Christian, although we are called to live as good citizens in this world, we do so with an eye on another world. We must be active in this world. But we are active because our hope is in a better world. That world, **Rev 21-22** tells us, will have no death, no tears, and no pain. The honor you will receive in that world will last forever. Christian, we can love people here in this world precisely because we believe there is another world to come. We share that good news. What greater news is there to share to this hopeless world than that there is a better world to come. This week, in VBS, let that be your heart, teachers and helpers; it even fits the theme! We live for another world, so we take every opportunity to point others to that world. Are you taking those opportunities as an individual? Are we as a church? It is my prayer that FBC Cuba would live as good citizens in this world but with our vision on another world. ***God's people must place their hope in God's honor, not the honor of this world.*** Would you pray with me?