

Pictures of Grace from Esther

Esther

Edition 2

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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

I. Introduction:

- A. Today we will be surveying the Book of Esther with the intent to see pictured therein the grace of God in the salvation of sinners. Accordingly, I've titled this message, "Pictures of Grace from Esther."
- B. Most gospel commentators agree that the clear theme of the book of Esther is the divine providence of God in action, bringing about all things for the good of His people. With that in mind, and in order to survey this entire 10 chapter book, I'll begin by paraphrasing this very interesting story of the historical events as recorded in the book of Esther. And as I do so, be thinking of how God's grace in the eternal salvation of God's chosen people is pictured in this story of the temporal deliverance of the Jews, that chosen nation under the terms of the Old Covenant.
- C. First, a little background: The Bible records how the Jews returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity in 3 different groups. Zerubbabel had led out the first and largest group but there were some Jews who chose to stay behind and continue to live there among the heathen. The book of Esther relates the historical events impacting upon these Jews who had remained during this time between the 1st return led by Zerubbabel and prior to the 2nd group's return from captivity led by Ezra. The events of Esther took place in and around the Persian King's palace at a place called Shushan which was 1 of 3 capital cities of the Persian Empire. And there a fellow named Ahasuerus then reigned as king.

II. The Story: Now let me walk you through this story beginning with chapter 1.

A. Chapter 1:

- Chapter 1 tells us how King Ahasuerus held a big feast that lasted for many days in order to show off the riches and greatness of his kingdom.
- On the 7th day of the feast when it tells us that the king's heart "***was merry with wine***" (apparently having a bit too much to drink), he commanded that his beautiful wife, Queen Vashti, (Vash'- tie) appear before him and his guests to show off her beauty – as verse 12 tells us, "***...for she was fair to look upon.***"

- But Vashti refused to come which angered the king as well as all the princes gathered with him. The princes reasoned that if the king's wife could get away with such defiance, soon all of their wives would follow suit.
- Accordingly the princes recommended that the king issue a royal commandment to ban Vashti from his presence and to give the position of queen to someone else. And so he proceeded to do just that.

B. Chapter 2:

- As we reach chapter 2, after the king's anger had subsided somewhat, his servants suggested that he hold a beauty contest of sorts and bring virgins from all over the kingdom from which he might select a new queen. And so that plan was initiated.
- Meanwhile, in chapter 2, a character by the name of Mordecai is introduced as one of the Jews who had remained behind who now held a position in the king's palace. We learn that Mordecai is a cousin of Esther (for whom the book is named). Following the death of Esther's parents, Mordecai had taken his cousin Esther in and raised her like she was his own daughter.
- Well Esther was brought in with the many other virgins to be considered in the king's beauty contest. And Esther did not bother at that time to disclose that she was a Jew, following Mordecai's suggestion that she should keep that secret.
- Well, apparently Esther was quite the looker as she captured the king's fancy. As we read in chapter 2, verse 17, ***"And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti."***
- Now we also read at the end of chapter 2 how as Mordecai ***"sat in the king's gate..."*** – this describing his position of service in the king's palace – that he learned of a plot to do harm to (or perhaps even slay) the king by 2 of the king's chamberlains (or keepers of the door). Mordecai passed this information along through his cousin, Queen Esther. And following an investigation of the matter, the 2 men were put to death by hanging and their plot to harm the king was prevented due to Mordecai's intervention. You'll see the significance of this as the story develops further.

C. Chapter 3:

- As we proceed to chapter 3, we learn that the king promoted a man named Haman to a position above all the other princes of his great empire. Consequently, (and as commanded by the king) all the king's servants at the palace bowed and revered Haman – that is, everybody except one man – Mordecai. And we read in chapter 3, verse 5: ***"And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath."***

- When Haman then learned that Mordecai was a Jew, he came up with a plot to destroy not only Mordecai, but all of his people as well – the rest of the Jews. He presented a case to King Ahasuerus suggesting that there was a group of people dispersed throughout his kingdom (meaning the Jews) who did not obey the king’s laws and he told the king it was not in his interest to tolerate this.
- As a result, a letter was written and sealed by the king’s ring and circulated throughout the land decreeing that on a specific set day in the future that all the Jews (men, women, and children) were to be killed and all that they had (their spoils) were to be taken.

D. Chapter 4:

- As we reach chapter 4, with this proclamation having been issued that would result in the elimination of all the Jews, we read of how distressed Mordecai and the rest of the Jews were over this tragic news. Things could not look worse for them. This news was brought to Esther’s attention as well and naturally she too grieved for her people.
- Mordecai proceeded to get word to Esther requesting that she intervene with the king and go before him to intercede on the behalf of her fellow Jews. She in turn relayed back to Mordecai how that under the king’s law, no would was to go into his inner court before him unless they had been summoned. To do so was to be put to death according to the law unless the king opted to hold out his scepter to spare them. She further related how 30 days had passed without her having been summoned into his inner court.
- In chapter 4, verse 14, we read Mordecai’s reply as he tells her, ***“For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”*** Wow – think about that as we go forward – how what may seem as unrelated events in our lives may indeed be used by God for the deliverance of others.
- So, Esther relayed back to Mordecai to have all the Jews in Shushan to fast for her and at the end of verse 16 in chapter 4, she said, ***“...I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.”*** So shortly thereafter, Esther did just that...

E. Chapter 5:

- And so in chapter 5, she enters in to see the king and beginning in verse 2, we read: ***“And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre. ³Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom.***

4And Esther answered, If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him."

- So the king summoned Haman and they had a banquet of wine (as it was called) and there Esther requested that Haman and the king come to a subsequent banquet she would prepare just for the 2 of them the next day.
- Well, as you might expect, Haman left quite thrilled about the banquet invitation and the other events of the day. But then as he left the palace he passed by Mordecai on the way out. And Mordecai not only did not bow, but didn't bother to even stand up.
- So Haman got home and told his wife and friends of the great news of his promotion and also the news of how only he and the king were invited to Queen Esther's banquet.
- But then he remembered Mordecai and so he also shared with them as we read in verse 13 of chapter 5, ***"Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."*** In seeing his distress, Haman's wife suggested he have a gallows built right away and appeal to the king the very next day to order the hanging of Mordecai so that Haman could be done with him. So Haman ordered the gallows built for Mordecai's demise.

F. Chapter 6:

- Now as reach chapter 6, we read in verses 1-2, ***"On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. 2And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana (Big-thay'-na) and Teresh, (Tee'-resh) two of the king's chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus."***
- We certainly see something here of God's providence. The king just 'happened' to have insomnia that night. And he just 'happened' to have read to him the entry about how Mordecai had intervened to spoil the plot of these 2 against the king.
- And then in verses 3-6 we read, ***"And the king said, What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him. 4And the king said, Who is in the court? Now Haman was come into the outward court of the king's house, to speak unto the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him. 5And the king's servants said unto him, Behold, Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in. 6So Haman came in. And the king said unto him, What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour? Now Haman thought in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself?"***

- So then Haman tells the king that you should put the royal apparel on him and with the king's crown, parade him around with the king's horse leading him. And he added to let one of your most noble princes deliver this to him and make the arrangements.
- All of this he imagined to be for himself, only to hear from the king in verse 10, ***“Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken.”***
- So Haman did as he was commanded and he went home afterwards and mourned over all of this with his wife.

G. Chapter 7:

- Now as we reach chapter 7, Haman is summoned to attend the banquet he had been invited to with Esther and the king. There, in Haman's presence, the king again asked Esther about her petition to him. And beginning in verse 3 we read:

“Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: ⁴For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage.

⁵Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so? ⁶And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.

- As the story continues, the king in his anger ordered Haman to be hung on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.

H. Chapter 8:

- In chapter 8 we read how Esther divulged to the king her relationship to Mordecai and in turn, Mordecai was elevated to a great position in the kingdom and was set over the house of Haman itself.
- Esther requested that the king reverse the decree that Haman had initiated to have all the Jews slaughtered. So the king signed a new proclamation commanding that the Jews should stand opposed to any who would so attack them and...

I. Chapter 9:

- ...when the appointed day came, the rulers, the lieutenants, the deputies, and the officers of the king decided to help the Jews against those still determined to follow the initial decree because they feared Mordecai who had become great in the King's house. So the Jews were victorious and slaughtered those that had planned to exterminate them from the kingdom. So through these turn of events the Jews were delivered but...

III. Pictures of Grace Outline:

- A. ...now I'd like to direct our attention toward the pictures of the grace of God in the eternal deliverance of God's chosen people – the eternal salvation of spiritual Israel, God's elect. The nation Israel clearly was set apart as a chosen, favored people under the Old Covenant that existed until Christ came and abolished that temporary covenant by fulfilling all that was typified therein concerning Himself. So we can see pictures or illustrations of the deliverance of God's people eternally in this story of temporal deliverance of these national Jews who had remained behind.
- B. There are 3 things in this story I'd like for us to consider, as they relate to salvation by God's sovereign grace in Christ:
1. The Providence of God – His sovereign ordering and bringing about of all things necessary to bestow His grace and favor upon His people.
 2. The Pride of Man by Nature – This shows us the universal need for grace for all.
 3. Provision of the Cross – The very basis upon which God bestows the eternal blessings of grace upon His chosen people.

IV. The Providence of God:

- A. As I've indicated, most gospel commentators agree that the clear theme of the book of Esther is the divine providence of God in action so as to deliver or save His people. This refers to the truth that God directs and rules as a sovereign God in all things. My wife often refers to the lyrics from a country song, "Jesus take the wheel," but the reality is that our triune God's hand never leaves the wheel – He steers the course of history.
1. As we read in Psalms 135:6: ***"Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places."***
 2. At the end of Ephesians 1:11, we read of how God, ***"...worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:"***

3. And if you are a true believer, a chosen people unto eternal salvation in Christ (as evidenced by your sole dependence upon Him for all your salvation), then rejoice in the truth of Romans 8:28 where we read, ***“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”*** Think on that – even the worst circumstances God’s children might endure are for their eternal good – whether we can see it that way or not. God remains on the throne.

B. The story of Esther assures us that our Sovereign God orders and brings about all things for the salvation and good of His people. All the events that initially transpired in this story appear to be against God and His people. And yet, in hindsight, we see that what seemed to be to their detriment, was in reality the hand of God working all things out for their deliverance, all according to His own purpose and will. All is ordained by God. It’s no coincidence that you’re here today or that you’re listening to this message.

C. Accordingly, we can know that no matter how dire things appear to us, God is in control and on the throne, directing even what may seem to us to be the most insignificant details. As this story shows us, God even governs His enemies to achieve His own pleasure and will – even if their actions are motivated by the evil of their own hearts. That boggles the mind and is truly amazing to me! How far His ways are above us!

D. Now let’s recap the examples of God’s providence in action in this story of Esther – a turn of events, which if considered one at a time, we might be prone to consider as mere coincidences. But the reality is that nothing happens coincidentally or by happenstance. And in this story the providential hand of God is at work for the good of these undeserving Jews who had chosen to remain among the heathens rather than return to Jerusalem.

E. Consider the sequence of events:

1. First – Queen Vashti defies the king’s command, making room for a new queen.
2. Then Esther, the Jew, finds favor before the king among all the virgins of the kingdom that were brought before him. And so she becomes the Queen.
3. Then, after risking her life in coming before the king, Esther just ‘happened’ to put off revealing her request before the king for 1 more day.
4. Then on that night – the night just before Haman was planning to request that Mordecai be put to death – the king couldn’t sleep so he had his servant bring out the records of the kingdom to read to him. Why not bring in some entertainment? Why this?
5. Then out of the records of his kingdom which included 127 provinces stretching from India to Ethiopia, the servant just ‘happened’ to read the entry about Mordecai’s intervention on the king’s behalf.

6. And then that morning Haman just ‘happened’ to be the one in the court when the king asked, “Who was there,” that he might consult with about how to honor Mordecai.
7. And Haman then gave counsel designed to honor himself which ultimately would be followed, but not to honor him, but his enemy Mordecai. And it would result in the deliverance of the Jews he sought to destroy, and instead result in his own destruction. What a turn of events!
- F. As God says through the Prophet Isaiah in Isa. 46, beginning at the end of verse 9: ***“I am God, and there is none like me, ¹⁰Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:”*** Now if you truly believe that salvation is by grace, then you rejoice in the truth that a sovereign God works all things according to the pleasure of His own will and providentially causes His counsel to stand. You see, if you’re truly dependent upon salvation by grace, then you could have no real hope if God did not order things so as to bring about a sure and certain salvation for all the objects of His mercy and grace. He must providentially have arranged all the events that resulted in the death of Christ on the cross, that He might bear the penalty due unto all the sins of God’s elect that were charged to His account so that in turn, they might possess the merit of His obedience unto death – His righteousness. And knowing that none will come to Christ unless the Father draws Him (according to John 6:44), then what hope would there be if God did not declare the end from the beginning and insure that they for whom Christ died would indeed come to Him by the blood-bought, God-given gift of faith.
- G. Conversely, if you, like most, imagine that salvation is conditioned on you the sinner – then the sovereign providential workings of God shouldn’t really matter to you. Such really don’t need this sovereign hand of God’s divine providence directing their affairs as they imagine that their eternal fate lies in some work of their hand – some decision they make, their faith, their religion, their baptism – something other than a sovereign work of mercy done for them. BUT THAT’S NOT GRACE! – That’s salvation by works which the scriptures declare shall not be. As Romans 3:20 teaches us, ***“...by deeds of the law <by your meeting a presumed requirement or condition in order to be saved> there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.”***
- H. So we can see that without the hand of divine providence by a sovereign God, the message of salvation by grace – a saving work done outside of the sinner, for the sinner, by the Sinner’s Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ – would be completely void of any assurance of eternal life – a message without hope. But because our sovereign God is on the throne, the message of salvation by grace, (based upon the merits of the God-man who cannot and did not fail) speaks of a sure and certain eternal salvation for each and every one who comes to Him – pleading His righteousness.

V. The Pride of Man by Nature:

- A. Secondly, I want us to consider the natural pride of fallen humanity as illustrated by Haman. You may wonder, “How does the pride of man relate to eternal salvation by God’s grace?” Well – consider this – that man’s fallen, sinful, depraved, self-consumed nature necessitates grace. It’s why we need salvation by God’s grace.
- B. Recall in our story how we read in chapter 6, verse 6: **“So Haman came in. And the king said unto him, What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour? Now Haman thought in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself?”** Now with us having the benefit of the whole story, unlike Haman, our tendency is to think that surely if we were in Haman’s position, we would not be so presumptuous as Haman was by believing that the king intended to honor him. But think about it. Haman had just been elevated to the highest position under the king. Why wouldn’t he imagine that he, above all others, was the intended recipient of the king’s honor? It was natural for him to assume as much.
- C. Well, I believe that in Haman we see a picture of the natural, self-consumed pride that initially causes us all to make a similar tragic and erroneous presumption – that we too, will be eternally blessed by the King of Kings based upon something that we likewise presume to have merited for ourselves. I’m speaking of the religious pride fostered in so many pulpits across our land and that permeates most of so-called ‘Christianity’ in our day. Think of the audacity that we once had (and that countless others persist) in imagining that God would delight to honor us with eternal life – not solely on the merits of His Son’s redemptive work – but rather based upon something done in, by, or through us that made up the real distinction between us and others (the saved and the lost).
- D. I know I used to think that I trusted in Christ as my Savior, only to have pointed out to me (thank God) that my perception of Christ and His work at that time denied that very assertion – that He was my Savior. In believing that Christ died for all without exception, by default I had to be depending upon something done by, in, or through me, the sinner that would distinguish me from those who perish – that would merit for me the ultimate honor from the king – eternal life itself. You see at that time I believed Christ died for all – including the multitudes that perish. So obviously, something else (not Christ) had to make the difference.
- E. But I thank God that He providentially brought the Gospel of God’s grace my way – as He does to all those for whom Christ died – so as to reveal to me my desperate need for His mercy and grace. I must have the righteousness of the God-man. Why? Because of who I am, a sinner – I need salvation by God’s sovereign grace!

VI. Provision of the Cross – Lastly, let us consider the Provision of the Cross, the very basis upon which God bestows the eternal blessings of grace upon His chosen people – spiritual Israel.

A. The Intercession of Esther:

1. First consider how Esther interceded on behalf of her people as she entered the inner court of the king. Esther had said I will go in and if I perish, I perish.
2. Well likewise, in the everlasting covenant of grace, our Lord and Savior, God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, took on the responsibility for His people and agreed to become incarnate in time and to go willingly to the cross of Calvary and actually die to pay the penalty before God's justice due unto their sins. And He too – did not perish for He was raised from the dead – showing forth that He and all He represented were accepted before a holy God – having perfectly satisfied all that was required for their salvation. Oh what beauty the Father sees in the Person and work of the Son to so accept Him and all He represented.

B. The Golden Scepter:

1. Next consider the golden scepter of the king. The beautiful Queen Esther risked her life to enter into the king's inner court. As I related, the law said that in doing so, Esther must die – condemned by the law of the land. But as we also read, instead she found favor in the sight of the sovereign king who held out his golden scepter, sparing her life, declaring her accepted before the king. And this acceptance ultimately led to the deliverance of all her people for whom she interceded.
2. A scepter is a staff borne by a sovereign (such as a king) as an emblem of authority by which he rules.
3. Well likewise, there is an authority or basis upon which the kingdom of God is established and upon which acceptance into God's presence is entered into. In Hebrews 1:8 we read: "***But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.***"
4. So we see that righteousness itself is the authority or the basis upon which this eternal kingdom is established, upon which it is entered into, and through which grace itself reigns in this kingdom. So see how this illustrates God's grace – His favor based solely on the merits of Christ's finished work, His righteousness.
5. As Romans 5:21 tells us, grace reigns "***...through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.***" So this eternal kingdom, inhabited by God's chosen people from every generation is based upon that which was finished and accomplished when God's justice was satisfied by Christ's obedience unto death (His righteousness) some 2000 years ago – the very righteousness which God has imputed to all for whom Christ lived and died.

And it's on that basis, the scepter of righteousness, that all of God's chosen people in Christ shall not perish, but rather are found accepted in the One that interceded for them – in the beloved, the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is on that same basis – His righteousness, the basis of His Person and work – that they are eternally delivered!

C. The Decree Sealed:

1. Recall that near the end of the story, the King had issued a decree for the benefit of Esther, Mordecai, and the rest of the Jews. In chapter 8, verse 8, the king said to Esther and Mordecai, ***“Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring: for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse.”***
2. Well, likewise, for any who have the seal of the King of Kings, they have an assurance of salvation that none can reverse. In Ephesians 1:11-13, we read: ***“In whom <speaking of Christ> also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:<The divine providence of a Sovereign God> ¹²That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. ¹³In whom ye also trusted, <speaking to the Gentiles> after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.”***
3. To be “sealed” here speaks of having confirmed in our minds the absolute certainty of salvation by the free and sovereign grace of God in Christ – wherein He truly redeemed a people, meeting every condition of their salvation through His shed blood – by His obedience unto death. And this confirmation is the work of God the Holy Spirit upon all those that God saves whereby they have a promise of the inheritance of life everlasting.
4. And it cannot be reversed! As Christ said in John 10:27-29: ***“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: ²⁸And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.”***
5. Like the decree of the king – all who come to Christ for all of their salvation, accepted in their Mediator, based on the scepter of the kingdom – His righteousness – they are sealed for all eternity! What grace!

D. The Intercession of Mordecai:

1. Lastly, let me show you the last verse of the Book of Esther. Mordecai can be seen there as a picture of Christ's ongoing intercession. Recall that Mordecai had been advanced to a great place in the kingdom and so we read in Esther 10:3: ***"For Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed."***
2. In this we see a picture of our risen Savior sitting on the throne at the right hand of God the Father, ever interceding for His people – all on the basis of His finished work of righteousness.
 - (a) In Romans 8:33-34 we read: ***"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. ³⁴Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."***
 - (b) In Hebrews 7:25 we read of Christ: ***"Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."***
3. You see all those who come to Christ for all of their salvation, have an advocate before the Father, who ever intercedes on their behalf – all on the basis of His Person as the God-man Mediator who has finished the work of righteousness for His People. So here too we see a picture of salvation by grace – the preserving favor of God upon an undeserving people (in and of themselves) who come before Him without any merit other than the merit of their Substitute and Savior – the righteousness of God in Christ.

VII. Closing: I hope you've been able to see this morning in our survey of Esther, these 3 beautiful pictures of God's grace in delivering His people unto eternal salvation in Christ. We see here:

1. The Providence of God – His sovereign ordering and bringing about of all things necessary to bestow His grace and favor upon His people.
2. The Pride of Man by Nature – Showing us the universal need for grace for all.
3. The Provision of the Cross – The very basis upon which God bestows the eternal blessings of grace upon His children.

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself – the Bible.