

MONOPOLY +++

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Good morning, church. It is a great day to continue our series, Game On, and we're continuing week three, and we're getting into the game Monopoly. So we're going to look at the book of Esther through the life of Monopoly. In 1900, Lizzie Maggie invented a game called Monopolist, and the purpose of the game was twofold. You either could be a monopolizer and crush everybody you could, or you could do as well as you can, and you can learn the benefits of sharing your wealth and sharing what you get with the other game players.

In 1930, Charles Darrow started to learn about the game Monopolist and made his couple tweaks here and there, redesigned the name as Monopoly, and sold it to Parker Brothers, giving zero credit to Lizzie. And that's the game you and I know today.

We're going to today look at how to win in the game of life through Monopoly, and you're going to discover a choice. You can take the world's ways of Haman, or you can take the ways of the followers of God through Esther and Mordecai. Today we're going to look at five opportunities we have in the game. And for you to remember them, they'll be around the acronym BOARD, since we're looking at a Monopoly board.

First, will you choose to build the game on resentment? You have an opportunity to overturn overnight. All you win can actually undo you. You'll be invited to release your advantage, and that which you decide first is done for good.

Over the past three weeks we've journeyed with Esther, and we've seen this woman who is orphaned, this girl who is orphaned, who is adopted by her cousin Mordecai, who is then taken off into a far-distance land that is unknown to them, who then gets into a harem and is seen favorably by everybody she meets, and is seen very favorably by King Xerxes, who chooses to grant this Jew a crown as the queen of his entire empire, who is then plotted to be killed because of an affront to the pride of Haman by Mordecai. And not only is Mordecai to be killed, but all of the Jews are to be killed. And this queen gives her advantage to Mordecai and delivers her people, and in this book that doesn't mention God once, every single turning point of the story is a clear articulation of the grace, the work, and the favor of God. While his name may not be mentioned, his fame and his provision and foreshadowing can not be missed. So let's dive on in.

I don't know about you, but Monopoly can be one of those games that I initially have resentment. It is not a good game for me to play, because in the game, if you land on the blue or the red, your likelihood of winning the game with owning those properties immensely grows. So whoever owns those properties is a likely favorite to win. By the way, the worst properties to buy to win are the green. So if you're playing and you land on green, go ahead and skip it. Don't worry about it, because those who get green don't ever win.

In Esther 5:9-14, Haman went out that day happy and in high spirits. Everyone everywhere say happy. So he's just happy as a clam. He's going out. Life is really good. But when he sees Mordecai at the king's gate and observed that Mordecai neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage against Mordecai.

Nevertheless, Haman restrains himself and he goes home and he calls together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, and Haman boasts to them about the vastness of his wealth, his many sons and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above all other nobles and officials. Are you not just like falling in love going, I really want to be friends with this Haman? He just sounds like a fun guy. No, I mean, this guy right now is just saying, hey, by the way, look at me. Look at all the wealth I got. Look at all of this. I mean, he is as boisterous and as braggadocious as can be.

If that wasn't enough, he then decides, by the way, that's not all, Haman added. I'm the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave, and she invited me along with the king tomorrow. But none of this gives me satisfaction as long as I see that Jew sitting, Mordecai sitting at the king's gate. So everything he's just bragged about, all the things that everyone is sitting there going, holy smokes, you are blessed beyond bless. Everything's going well in your world. You even are saying it's so well that it's even that is well, that everyone would be like, wow, that's enough. That's not enough. You even have this amazing favor and dinner that's coming. And none of that brings you joy because of this one guy who has hurt your pride and your ego.

You would think maybe his wife and his friends will help him. So they're going to say a few things. So Zeresh and all his friends say to him, have a pole set up reaching to the height of 50 cubits and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai impaled on it. And then go to the king to the banquet and enjoy yourself. This suggestion delighted Haman and he had the pole set up.

So their wise counsel to this braggadocious person is, have him not only killed, but impaled on this pole that you set up for all the city to see that anyone who crosses you, this is what could happen to them. And then you can go to the banquet and be happy and eat and drink.

So in 2017, I retired from golf because I was really bad. And I just thought three hours of this misery, it's not worth the other person. And that was nine holes. And I was like, this isn't worth it for them or for me. And so I had given up golf. I'd given my clubs away to a kid who was working at a golf club. And I said, well, you get free golf because you have our own clubs. I said, I got good news for you. I have clubs. You can have mine. Take them. And so I was done.

Then we moved here in 2019. I realized we love Omaha. Everything's great in Omaha. But golf is a thing here. And there's you just need stuff to do in the summer. And so then our family was one of the families that received some government money during the covid time. And I looked at Lori and I said, you know, I probably need to find a hobby again. What if I go get fitted for clubs, get clubs that actually work for me? And I take up golf again with this this free money? And she said, sure. And so I got clubs and I started golfing and I got fitted and I started golfing. And I'm still terrible at golf, but I have fun. I don't really care how I do. Most of the time when I play, I don't keep score like I'm out there for the company of the people. I'm out there for the enjoyment of the game. And I have a blast.

I get to golf every once in a while with a group of pastors on this special golf trip. And sometimes I'll go with them. And one time I went a few years ago and it was this match play thing where like you're

against another person in your foursome. And that's all you all that counts is how you do against that person. I didn't care how I was going to do. I was like, it doesn't matter. You'll probably win, whatever.

But the guy that I was with that was kind of on my team and foursome, he was really caring about how he was doing against the other guy. And we're on the first hole and he's going, I'm going to get in Bill's head so much this week. I'm just going to be all up in him. He's not even going to know what hit him. And like we're 70 yards out from the green at this point. And like we're on our second shot or third shot, my third shot and his second shot. We're 70 yards out. And he says, watch this Griff. And he goes and he gets his driver and he goes, Bill right now has no clue what I'm doing and what's going on. I'm like, I have no clue what you're doing. The entire match, he wanted to beat him and had resentment for the other guy so much. He was in his own head. He wasn't able to enjoy the day. He wasn't able to enjoy his own game. He wasn't able to enjoy the camaraderie.

About hole three, he went silent for the next 15 holes. So it wasn't that fun for me either.

Have you ever found yourself like Heyman? Where things are going pretty good in your life, but something in your life, someone in your life, something that's just a small hiccup is perturbing you so much. It becomes obsessive that you're constructing a plan to, to destroy it. Or you just kind of, every time you think about them, there's no good in your mind's your thoughts, right? The way of the world has us obsessed on how we can take out those or those things that bother us. And we lose sight of the blessings that are around us. We lose sight of the good favor that is there. And what actually ends up happening is it destroys us from the inside and destroys the relationships we have with others.

Now Monopoly is not a very good game for the soul. Matter of fact, there's so much about overturning overnight, all the tables that have happened. I want to give you some Monopoly facts that just maybe you might cause you to stop and think. 20% of families have completely banned monopoly at home because it causes too many arguments. Maybe you're in that 20%.

47% of adults polled recently reported getting into an actual argument or a fight while playing monopoly, ranking it well above other board games. As a matter of fact, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, there's a man serving jail time for shooting one of his family members because of monopoly. That's Oklahoma.

51% to 80%, I love these stats, it's basically everybody, of these games involve some form of shouting, cheating accusations, or rule disputes. No one go home and play monopoly for a Sunday afternoon game.

You see, it's so quick to overturn everything, to get caught up in our lifestyle of all the things that are happening with us, that we want to find ways to get advantages. And we get upset and we start to take something so personal that it destroys our relationships.

Esther 6:1-3 and 6-13, that night, the king couldn't sleep. So he ordered the book of Chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bithynna and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. So he discovers that Mordecai has saved his life. And then he asks the natural question, what honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this? And the king answered, nothing has been done for him, the attendants answered.

So when Haman entered the king, asked him, what should be done for a man whom the king delights to honor? Now Haman thought to himself, who is there that the king would rather honor than me? Again, we're seeing so much of the character and the way of Haman.

So he answered the king, well, for the man that the king delights to honor, have them bring a royal robe that the king has worn, and a horse that the king has ridden, one with the royal crest placed on its head. And then let the robe and the horse be entrusted to one of the king's most noble princes. Let him robe the man the king delights to honor and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him. This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor.

Go at once, the king commanded Haman, get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Don't neglect anything that you've recommended.

So Haman got the robe and the horse. He robed Mordecai. He led him on horseback through the city streets, proclaiming before him. This is done for the man the king delights to honor. And afterwards, Mordecai returned to the king's gate and Haman rushed home with his head covered in grief, told Zeresh, his wife and all his friends, everything that had happened to him and his advisors.

And his wife Zeresh said to him, since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him. You surely will come to ruin.

Haman now has everything overturned. And here's the two characteristics and qualities we see between Haman and Mordecai. Haman is thinking, I'm the one, I'm the noble one. And remember, even of this, even in his advice, he says, have the one of your very noble princes be the one who leads this man through the city gates. But Haman doesn't even recognize that he being chosen is still one of the noble princes. He's not even able to see that there's favor in his life because he is so outraged and he's been plotting and he's been working and he's been trying to manipulate every situation so that he would win.

Mordecai, Mordecai is just letting the work of God happen through his life. He's just quietly going through his life, being a servant, sitting at the gate, even after this prestigious honor, notice what Mordecai does. He goes back to the gate and sits. He's trusting in the provision and the peace of God. He's trusting in the protection of God for himself and for his people, even though he knows there's a plot against him.

So as I'm learning more about golf and golfing with people, a lot of times we play and in the foursome, it will be, you know, figure out your handicap and they've got this thing called Jen, which I don't know what my handicap is because I'm not going to pay for something to tell me how bad I am. So I just say, I don't know, I'm like a 20 to a 25, somewhere in there. I'm probably like a 30 to a 35. But when I say that, people are like, I don't want to golf with you. So I like 20 to 25. So that's kind of where I'm at probably.

But I guess there's this thing called sandbagging. And that's when they say that their handicap is worse than it actually is so that they get this advantage. And then they get more strokes on holes that they really shouldn't get them. And these people aren't really looked with favor, I've learned, because they're sandbagging through the course.

The question I think that we ask when we look at Mordecai and we look at Haman today is if we choose the way of Mordecai, we stop trying to force a resolution or force a way or trying to find ways to get our favor and our way elevated. But instead, what we actually do is we release everything to God, we pray about it, and we let God do God's work. Which God's work is that for those who believe in him, all things work for good for his glory. And so allowing that to happen allows us to choose the way of Mordecai and the way of God.

Now as we move through the board game, we get to where all you win can actually undo you. There is a strategy to win a monopoly, and that strategy is to buy every single property that you land on, all of them. It's the worst strategy to win that you can, because you actually don't end up having cash, you can't do more, and you're just property poor. People that employ that strategy usually lose quickly.

In Esther 7:1-10, the king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet, and as they were drinking wine on the second day, the king asked, Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given to you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted to you.

Queen Esther answered, if I have found favor with you, your majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life. And this is my petition. Spare my people. This is my request. For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed, and annihilated.

King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, who is he? Where is he? This man who has dared to do such a thing. And Esther says, an adversary and the enemy. It is this vile Haman.

And then Haman realizing, or Haman was terrified before the king and queen. The king got up in rage and left his wine and went out into the palace garden. Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life.

Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. And the king said, will he even molest the queen while she is with me in this house?

And as soon as the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. Harbonah, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, a pole is reaching to the height of fifty cubits, stands by Haman's house. He set it up for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king.

And the king said, impale him on it. So they impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided.

Friends, it is here where Haman has said, I want to go all in. I want to end when I am forsaking everything in order to have it all. Even plotting to annihilate a people because my pride and my ego has been bruised. And what happens? He loses it all.

This pole that he had set up for all of the kingdom to see, to know, to be afraid of Haman, that if you cross him in any way, death is certainly yours. Became a pole that showed deliverance for Queen Esther, Mordecai and all of the Jews.

A foreshadowing of the hill of Golgotha, where the Romans had set up a cross that anyone who would be crucified would say to the entire world, that if you cross Rome, you will die. Death and destruction is yours. And on that very cross that is where Christ was bared for all the sins of the world, where he defeated death and destruction. And all the world would look now at the cross and see deliverance for all who claim Jesus is Lord and Savior of all.

That the gospel would proclaim for all of eternity, that the Father's wrath would be poured out on one so that none in the name of Jesus would ever suffer eternal damnation. You see, our God has given it all for you and I to have full victory.

That is the foreshadowing that we see today in the book of Esther. And that when we go all in, not for the ways of the world, but for the ways of God, we will find everlasting and eternal life. And it will be yours.

Now is an opportunity for you and for me to think about how are you going all in for God? How are you trusting in him? How are you giving him everything? And when you see that we have a lot to give to God, because we come as broken people and he restores us, he claims us, he names us, and he makes us his own. That we get to bring him our best, and from our best brought to God, he turns it into perfection to flow for the rest. So that everyone would see the power, the grace, and the glory for all.

And it's there that you can then release your advantage. In Monopoly, there's a rule I've actually never seen it used. And that the rule is that you can give your property or your get out of jail free card to any player at any time. That's something you have as an advantage. You can give any property and any jail out of free card to any of the players at any time. It's called releasing your advantage.

And this is what happens in Esther, Esther 8:1 and 2. That same day, that same day, King Xerxes gave Queen Esther the entire estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came into the presence of the king. Esther had told him how he was related to her. The king took off his signet ring, which he had reclaimed from Haman, and he presented it to Mordecai. Esther appointed him over Haman's estates.

That ring, which was designed to signify to the world death and destruction of a people, is now worn by Mordecai to show deliverance and protection of a people. Do we not see that that cross, which was designed to show to the world death and destruction of a people, anyone who would be against the kingdom of Rome, is now worn around our necks as Christians, as a sign of deliverance and of peace and of protection from our God?

You see, the advantage of God is given to you. You have his advantage of grace, of mercy. You have his advantage of the Father seeing Jesus in you, seeing and proclaiming eternal and everlasting life through the gift of holy communion.

This is your advantage that has been given to you, not because of anything you have done, but because of everything he has done for you.

In Esther 8:7 and 8, King Xerxes replies to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, Because Haman had attacked the Jews, I have given the estate to Esther, and they have impaled him on the pole he set up.

Now write another decree in the king's name on behalf of the Jews, as it seems best to you. Seal it with the king's signet ring. No document written in the king's name and sealed with the ring can ever be revoked.

You have his advantage.

I love playing golf with Mark Zender. I really do. Every time we play together, Mark is always trying to give me his advantage. Mark golfs a lot, so he'll help me as we go. When we putt, he'll help me. He'll line up where the putt's going. He'll tell me. He'll give me the read and say, here's exactly how you should hit it.

When we golf, he'll say to me, here, try to hit it this way. Try to do it this way. And it's not in a way that's like, he's better. He's genuinely wanting me to do well. He always gives me his advantage on the golf course.

I want you to think about some way that God has blessed you. Maybe it's with kindness. Maybe it's with favor. Maybe it's with grace. Maybe it's with fortune. How are you using that advantage to help other people? How are you using that advantage to encourage, to equip, to empower? How are you using that advantage to be a foreshadowing of the love and the grace and the advantage of Jesus?

Because when we seek first to just be like Jesus, and when we decide to do that first, then everything else is done for great good. And it's done well.

In Esther 9:20-22, Mordecai records these events, and he sends letters to the Jews throughout the province of King Xerxes, near and far, to have them celebrate annually the 14th and 15th day of the month of Adar, as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as a month when the sorrow was turned into joy, and their mourning into the day of celebration.

He wrote to them to observe the days as days of feasting and of joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor. This is called Purim. It's actually still celebrated by the Jews to this day, and it comes from this event in the life of Esther and Mordecai.

Peter and I golfed a few weeks ago with two young men, two students. Peter and I are both okay golfers. Peter is in a handicap of 15 to 17, and I'm, you know, 20-25. We were golfing with a scratch golfer, meaning he just pretty much pars every hole, and we're golfing with a guy who's a three handicapper.

Now these two young men were pretty braggadocious. Not as bad as Haman, but pretty close. They were ready to just wail and whoop on Peter and I. And Peter and I went in the same way we both go into everything. We were just happy to be out there with them. We were just ready to have fun. We weren't really concerned about much. We just had chosen to seek out building a relationship and having fun with three others that loved Jesus.

And in God's wise providence of deliverance, we beat these two boys pretty well. And Peter and I will celebrate our Purim at Taco Bell once lettuce is okay again.

In Matthew 6:19-21, it says, Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moths and vermin do not destroy, where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Where are you seeking first the kingdom of God? Where are you seeking first to love God with your whole heart, soul, and mind, and to then love your neighbors as yourselves?

I know that there are times in my life where I've chosen the way of Haman, where I put my own will, my own ways, the things I want first and foremost. And I need to write those things that I put before God down.

As today you leave, I want to invite you to grab a Monopoly money and write something right now that you're seeking to put second, to put further down the list, because you're ready to put God first. Today you're ready to choose the way of Esther, Mordecai, who all chose the way of following Yahweh, and who you and I choose the way of following the way, the truth, and the life, Jesus. And when we do this, we win the game of life.

Will you please stand at all campuses to pray with me?

Gracious God, we thank you and praise you that you have come and you have chosen each and every one of us, that you've shown us life and life to its fullest.

And so today, O Lord, lead us forth to be foreshadows of your return and your resurrection, to be people who give everything to you first and foremost, to love you and to love others.

And for those times where we have chosen the way of the world, the way of Haman, forgive us, renew us, and restore us, and lead us as your people, so that they may see in us Jesus, the one who has given us everlasting and eternal life, and who has won, defeating sin, death, and the devil, for each and every one of us, today, tomorrow, and forever.

And all of God's people everywhere said, amen and amen.