

The Certainty of Victory
Esther 9-10; December 13, 2020

Introduction

- Today I'm going to try and tie a bow on the book of Esther for us.
- Last week we learned about how Mordecai was elevated to 2nd in command, given the king's signet ring and was allowed to write an edict allowing the Jews, on the very day they were to be annihilated, to "defend their lives, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that may attack them, children and women included, and to plunder their goods" (8:11).
- When this news spread across the entire empire, "there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday" (8:17).
- Now here's the deal: the day of annihilation hadn't even happened, yet they responded as if it was a done deal. It's almost as if that edict assured victory for the Jews.
- Some have even suggested that the book could've ended with chapter 8.

So we come to chapter 9, and, ironically, while the author has crafted every chapter so far full of drama and suspense and last minute reversals, that's not the case today. We find out the end result in the very first verse.

- One commentator said it's like when you DVR a game or show to watch but you find out the results before you are able to watch it.
- Sometimes I'll do this and then text my family and friends and say, "Don't text me any updates about the game because I'm not live." I want to enjoy the suspense of not knowing how the game is going to end.

Read Esther 9:1.

- Why does the author remove the suspense of the story in chapter 9?
 - Here's why: the end of the story has never really been in question.
 - Do you remember Mordecai's confidence in Esther 4: 14

For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Est. 4:14 ESV)

- Where did Mordecai's confidence come from? How is it that the end of the story was never in doubt?
 - It's due to the main character who has yet to be explicitly identified, God.
 - God's imprint is everywhere in this book.
 - He is the one behind every apparent coincidence.
 - He is invisibly present and he is faithful to fulfill his covenant promises and to carry out his plan.
- Our chapter today brings to conclusion the story of how the Jews survive annihilation along with the initiation of a new feast, the feast of *Purim*, which was established to

commemorate God's saving of the Jewish people through Esther and Mordecai.

Read Esther 9:2-5.

I. The Great Reversal: from Annihilation to Victory (1-5).

- These verses generally describe how the Jews gained mastery over their enemies, including how they had favor from everywhere and were full of much confidence. They have everything going for them.
- It's important to note that the Jews were just trying to protect and defend themselves. It says they only laid their hands on "those who sought to harm them."
- Look at the favor that's described:
 - The people feared the Jews (2).
 - "And no one could stand against them..."
 - The officials feared Mordecai (3-4).
 - "All of the officials...helped the Jews..."
- As a result, the Jews struck all their enemies (5).

Read Esther 9:6-15.

II. Victory in Susa (6-15).

- 500 men were killed in Susa (5).
- Haman's 10 sons are killed (6-10).
- Esther makes a few requests (11-15).
 - An extra day for the Jews to defend themselves. Why?
 - The author doesn't tell us Esther's motives.
 - Given Haman's previous rank, there were probably many who were loyal to him and his decree in Susa.
 - It's possible there were still armed men in Susa committed to carrying out the first edict.
 - As a result, 300 more are killed in Susa.
 - Haman's sons to be hung on the gallows. Why?
 - I think this is connected to why Esther also requests a second day.
 - She requested they be hung publicly in order to deter others who may be considering conspiring against her, the Jews or the kingdom.
 - Additionally, it ensures that none of Haman's children would survive to mount revenge.
- In Susa, the Jews defended themselves on the 13th and 14th days of Adar.

Read Esther 9:16-17.

III. Victory throughout the Empire (16-17a).

- 75,000 were killed throughout the empire.
- They only defended themselves on the 13th.
- Why the repeated phrase: “but they laid no hands on the plunder?” (8:10, 15, 16).
 - The edict that Mordecai gave allowed them to plunder the goods (see 8:11; cf. 3:13).
 - Back in chapter 3, do you remember how Haman was introduced?
 - Haman, the Agagite.
 - Agag was the king of the Amalekites.
 - The Amalekites were enemies of Israel. They were the first to attack and try to destroy God’s people after crossing the Red Sea on the way to the Promised Land. As a result, God said this to Moses after they defeated Amalek:

“Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.”

- Fast forward many years: Saul is now king of Israel (cf. 1 Sam. 15). God tells Saul to completely destroy Agag and the Amalekites.
- But Saul spares King Agag along with the best of the sheep, oxen, fattened calves and lambs (cf. 1 Sam. 15:9).
- As a result, God regrets making Saul King over Israel (cf. 1 Sam. 15:11).
- I told you back in chapter 3 that this raised some theological questions:
 - God had promised to be at war with Amalek.
 - Would God still fulfill his promise to his people even as they are in exile as a result of having violated God’s covenant?
 - Would God still be faithful to his covenant promises even in spite of Israel’s unfaithfulness to him?
- Here’s why this phrase is repeated three times:
 - The Jews of Persia succeeded where Saul failed.
 - The book of Esther shows that God is faithful to do what he says he’s going to do.
 - Additionally, one commentator notes that Haman’s “Agagite” lineage reminds us there is a bigger struggle between good and evil playing out than the one occurring in Susa. Esther is a story within a far bigger story.

Read Esther 9:17-32.

IV. The Feast of Purim is Inaugurated (17b-32).

These verses show how the spontaneous celebrations seen in 9:16-19 give way to a properly organized, annual festival. In fact, one of the purposes the book of Esther serves is to explain why the Jews celebrate Purim. The author tells the story of Esther and Mordecai to say, “See, this

is why we celebrate Purim” (so Jobes).

- Mordecai records all of the events that happened and sent letters to all the Jews (9:20ff).
- Queen Esther and Mordecai both confirm and put in writing these practices for Purim (9:29-32).
- It is also fitting that these events are written down because God told Moses to write it down that God would wipe out the memory of Amalek (cf. Exod. 17:14).

1. The origin of Purim (9:26; cf. chapter 3).

- Purim is the Hebrew plural of *Pur*. Haman cast *pur*, that is “lots,” to determine the day he wanted to annihilate the Jews.
- There’s irony in the name: while Haman casts lots, God determines the roll and the lot of his people.

2. The two different dates for celebrating Purim.

- In the city of Susa, there was fighting on both the 13th and 14th, so they celebrated on the 15th (9:18).
- In the villages and rural towns, there was only fighting on the 13th, so they celebrated on the 14th (9:17b, 19).
- At the time Esther was written, Purim was celebrated on two different days and the author felt the need to explain why this was the case.
 - The mention of “peace and truth” (9:30) confirm this truth. Their hope was to bring peace and unity with the true and correct way of celebrating Purim.
- They don’t celebrate on the day of victory, but the day on which there was rest and relief. What does this teach us?
 - This means that the celebration is no “malicious glee over the slaughter of their enemies” but rather commemorates that they “gained relief from their enemies” (Frederic Bush).
- Jews still keep the Feast of Purim today. Most celebrate it on Adar 14, though some do celebrate on Adar 15.
 - In 2021, it will be observed February 25 and 26.

3. The celebration of Purim.

- It is fitting that Esther ends with feasting.
 - There is movement in the book of Esther from the pagan feasts of chapter 1 to Esther’s feasts in chapters 5 and 7 to the feasts of God’s people at the end.
- It was a day of feasting, gladness, a holiday (9:18-19, 22).
 - Fasting and mourning and sorrow has given way to feasting and joy and gladness.
- It was a day of sending gifts of food to one another (9:19).
- It was a day of sending gifts to the poor (9:22).
 - Everyone was to share in this feasting (cf. Deut 16:9-12 for a similar practice with the Feast of Weeks).
- Tradition informs us that, in addition to the above, Jews would:
 - The book of Esther is read in its entirety.

- Noisemakers are used during the reading. People cheer at Mordecai's name and hiss and boo at Haman's name.
- In one sense, this feast is kind of like a Sabbath. They are celebrating rest and relief from their enemies (so Jobes).
 - The reason I mention this is because feasts in the Bible including regular practices of the Sabbath were to retrospective and prospective. They forced you to look back and remember and as a result caused you to look forward with great hope.
 - Purim was celebrated as a sign that they will never be destroyed as a people.
- Purim is also different than the other feasts commanded by Moses in the Law.
 - Mordecai wasn't a prophet or king.
 - This celebrate wasn't given by God but rather arose from the spontaneous response of God's people to his faithfulness to them.

Read Esther 10:1-3.

V. Mordecai's Rank and Rule (10:1-3).

- We see one final reversal: under Mordecai's reign, the Jews experienced the complete opposite of what happened under Haman's reign.
 - Mordecai sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his people.
 - In fact, even though Mordecai isn't king and Israel currently had no king, these words ring with hope that God will provide a king like Mordecai who will seek the welfare of his people.

Conclusion

As we wrap up, I want to share 4 truths that summarize some of the things we've learned in this book:

1. God's Word assures the survival of his people.

- God had made a covenant with Israel that through them he would bring about an offspring who would be a king and bless the nations.
 - With Israel on the verge of annihilation, would God keep his word.
- The reason this chapter repeated mentions, "they laid no hand on the plunder," was to remind us of God's Word. He has promised to wipe out the Amalekites and he was faithful to do what he says he would do.
- Karen Jobes references a Jewish scholar (Abraham Saba) who says "...that this great deliverance achieved without miracles was the reason the Jewish people finally came to rest their faith on the Torah, the Word of God, rather than miraculous displays of his power. The story of Esther implies that what God's Word has decreed will happen, even without miracles." (Jobes).
- This book is a call to faith in the faithfulness and power of God's Word. He will do exactly what he says he will do.

- Every day is a spiritual war and we fight this war by the power of the Spirit as we take up the sword of the Spirit, the word of God.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. (Eph. 6:10-11 ESV)

...and [take] the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication (Eph. 6:17b-18a ESV)

What is the connection between the Spirit, the Word of God and waging war?

- The Word of God is the Spirit-inspired Word of God and when we read it and meditate on it and believe it, faith crushes the lies of the enemy.
- What you most need is the truth of God's Word and his promises for his people to battle the lies that are being thrown at you all day and every day from every direction (internal and external).
- This is why it's so important that we fill our minds with the Spirit-inspired Scriptures (cf. Romans 8:5, 13; 10:17).

Introduce 2021 Personal Bible Reading and Prayer Goals:

- As we look ahead to 2021, one of the areas that the elders want to see God work in the people of RHC is through increasing rhythms of personal Bible reading and prayer. God's Word is our daily bread. We must feast on it. I want you to consider three challenges for 2021:
 - Read one chapter in the Bible for 5 days every week.
 - Spend at least one intentional timeslot in prayer 5 days every week
 - Write down at least one key takeaway every day from your time Word and Prayer.
- Today, you're going to receive an email from me asking you to complete a quick 5 minute survey. This survey is completely anonymous and will help us evaluate where we are as a church so we can take steps together in 2021. It's not meant to induce guilt...but rather to just capture where we are and to help me learn as a pastor how I can better help you take next steps.
- In the coming weeks, we'll be sharing more information about our church-wide personal Bible reading and prayer plan which will begin on Monday, January 4. We'll be sharing a number of resources to help you take steps in this area.

2. The feast of Purim points to a greater feast to come.

- Why did Mordecai want them to keep this feast for years to come?
 - He didn't want them to forget...even in the darkest times, God always keeps his promises.
 - One commentator notes: "Purim was meant to be a shadow of the cross."
- The Lord's Supper
 - Jesus has a meal with his disciples before a very dark day.
 - Satan sought to crush and destroy Jesus.

- On the cross Jesus yells, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”
 - No one knew what God was doing.
 - But Jesus knew.
 - Jesus was conquering sin and death to disarm our enemies and set us free.
 - That day became the day that we receive relief and rest from our enemies.
- So Jesus had absolute truth: “Into your hands I commit my Spirit.” God did not abandon him (see Acts 2:31).
- Why do we regularly celebrate Communion?
 - We need to be reminded often of how the story ends.
 - We need to be reminded that in the end, God wins and keeps his promises.
- But the Lord’s Supper points to an even greater feast.
- The Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:6-9).
 - We will feast with Jesus in the new heavens and new earth.

3. The reversals in Esther point to a greater reversal in the gospel.

The story of Esther is a part of our story. Think about it...

- If Haman succeeds, the Jewish people would’ve been wiped out.
- God’s promise of an offspring through Abraham and a king through David would’ve been thwarted.
- There would’ve been no fulfillment in Jesus, no gospel and no church.
- But through a series of amazing reversals, the Jews go from annihilation and fasting to feasting and victory.
- God is the God of greater reversals.

These reversals point to a greater reversal to come in the gospel.

Read Luke 1:46-55.

The gospel itself shows the most amazing reversal.

4. The Point: Even when God is invisible, victory is certain for those who are in Christ.

- Connect:
 - We don’t always understand what God is doing.
 - We don’t always know why certain things happen.
- The certainty of the survival of the Jews points to a greater certainty that we have in Jesus. The death and resurrection of Jesus have secured victory for us (see 1 Cor. 16). What remains for us is to reap the fruit of the gospel’s work in our lives as we wait for the consummation of all things.
- Just like there was no suspense in our story today, there’s no suspense in how our story will end.
 - In the end, God will win and be victorious.
 - Every enemy will be defeated.

- Every injustice will be made right.
- God's kingdom will come in its fullness.
- There will be a new heaven and earth with peace and justice and flourishing.
- God will keep every single one of his promises.
- We must fight the fight of faith. Faith is the conviction of things not seen.
 - Don't let the middle of the story confuse you.
 - Don't let the prosperity of the wicked throw you off.
 - Don't let the suffering of God's people throw you off.
- God is invisibly present and you can trust him with everything.