Celebrate Good Times

(Esther 9-10)
(preached 2/18/15; Pine Grove BC Wed PM)

Introduction

Johnny's mom was in the kitchen making spaghetti for supper.

Halfway through making the sauce, she realized that she needed one more can of tomato sauce.

So, she called to Johnny who came to see her.

Johnny, will you go into the pantry and get me a can of sauce.

Johnny heads that way but stops and tells his mom that he is scared because the closet is dark.

She tells him, "It's okay Johnny. Jesus will be with you."

So, Johnny turns around and heads back to the pantry.

HE slowly opens the dark and sees all of the scary darkness.

In his fear, he says, "Jesus will you go in and get me a can of tomato soup."

That was fear does.

It paralyzes you.

And that is exactly what is going to happen to the enemies of the Jews in Esther 9.

They are going to be overcome with fear and dread and fall to the Jews.

Remember what Rahab said to the spies from Israel who came into her house?

"I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have [c]melted away before you. 10 For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the[d]Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you [e]utterly destroyed. 11 When we heard it, our hearts melted and no[f]courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. (Joshua 2:9-11)

The terror of the Lord is a dreadful emotion.

Because it strikes fear in the heart, and that is what we are going to see in the opening verses of Esther 9.

Now, remember we left off last week with the Persian king giving Mordecai and Esther to pass a law to save the Jews.

So they issued a law that allowed the Jews to take up arms and defend themselves on the day where the entire kingdom….

Had been given permission to kill all the Jews.

As a result, the Jews celebrated and made plans to defend themselves from these attackers.

And now when we come to chapter 9, 8 months have passed and the day has arrived when the attacks on the Jews will occur…

But it is also the day when the Jews have been given permission to defend themselves…

So, let's pick up in verse 1 in this first section that I have entitled…

I. It is Worthless to Fight Against God's People (9:1-19)

9 Now in the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar), on the thirteenth [a]day when the king's command and edict [b]were about to be executed, on the day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, it was turned to the contrary so that the Jews themselves gained the mastery over those who hated them. 2 The Jews assembled in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm; and no one could stand before them, for the dread of them had fallen on all the peoples.

I remember the first day I beat my daddy at fishing.

The man who had taught me how to fish now had it turned around on him.

It was a big deal to me because for the first time, the tables were turned.

And that is exactly what has happened in the opening verses of chapter 9.

After King Ahasuerus had passed a law allowing their destruction, the Jews had lived in fear of their enemies.

But now, their enemies are living in fear of the Jews.

Verse 3..

3 Even all the princes of the provinces, the satraps, the governors and those who were doing the king's business [c]assisted the Jews, because the dread of Mordecai had fallen on them. 4 Indeed, Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces; for the man Mordecai became greater and greater. 5 Thus the Jews struck all their enemies with [d]the sword, killing and destroying; and they did what they pleased to those who hated them.

Even the king's soldiers and officials joined to fight with the Jews..

And in verse 5, we see that Israel did as they pleased on that day.

Once again, we need to remember that this is not their fight but the Lord's.

He is the One avenging the evil plans that were set in motion because Haman hated the Jews.

The Jews are limited to exacting whatever revenge the Lord has allowed and nothing more.

Then verses 6-10 detail the retribution that went to the house of Haman…

6 At the citadel in Susa the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men, 7 and Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, 8 Poratha, Adalia,

Aridatha, [9] Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Vaizatha, [10] the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Jews' enemy; but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

Here, we see the names of Haman's 10 sons.

Why are they all listed? Maybe to live in shame for the rest of time.

Who knows exactly why they were named.

But it is interesting to note how the names are arranged in the original Hebrew text.

They are actually arranged like the shape of a gallows and it is possible that this is the order in which they were arranged on the gallows.

It is also true today that when the Jews read this text that they mention all the names in one breath…

To note that all of the sons died at once, which we see in verses 11-15..

[11] On that day the number of those who were killed at the citadel in Susa [e]was reported to the king. [12] The king said to Queen Esther, "The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and the ten sons of Haman at the citadel in Susa. What then have they done in the rest of the king's provinces! Now what is your petition? It shall even be granted you. And what is your further request? It shall also be done." [13] Then said Esther, "If it pleases the king, let tomorrow also be granted to the Jews who are in Susa to do according to the

edict of today; and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows." [14] So the king commanded that it should be done so; and an edict was issued in Susa, and Haman's ten sons were hanged. [15] The Jews who were in Susa assembled also on the fourteenth day of the month Adar and killed three hundred men in Susa, but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

Some people see this as vindictive on Esther's part.

She wants an extra day in Susa so that the Jews can defend themselves completely, and she wants Haman's sons hanged…

Even though they are already dead.

Though I can understand why people may see this as sin on Esther's part..

I tend to see it as the picture of total destruction that God seems to have encouraged ever since Israel entered the Promised Land.

There is always the need to wipe out the enemies of God, and I think this is what we are seeing here.

And it was not uncommon to hang the bodies of the deceased in public.

IT was often a very clear reminder of the crime that had been committed.

In this case, it would be a clear picture of the principle of this section…

That it is not only hopeless to stand against God's people, it can be deadly.

When we see Jesus hanging on a cross, what is it a reminder of?

The high penalty for sin.

The high price for breaking God's law.

The consequence for disobedience.

When Jesus hung in the place of believers, it was a clear picture of the depth of God's wrath toward sin..

That he would hang His own Son on a cross.

We also see in verses 16-19 that the Jews were also successful defending themselves in the other parts of the kingdom…

Verse 16…

16 Now the rest of the Jews who were in the king's provinces assembled, to defend their lives and [f]rid themselves of their enemies, and kill 75,000 of those who hated them; but they did not lay their hands on the plunder. 17 This was done on the thirteenth day of the month Adar, and on the fourteenth [g]day they rested and made it a day of feasting and rejoicing.18 But the Jews who were in Susa assembled on the thirteenth and the fourteenth [h]of the same month, and they rested on the fifteenth [i]day and made it a day of feasting and rejoicing. 19 Therefore the Jews of the

rural areas, who live in the rural towns, make the fourteenth day of the month Adar a [j]holiday for rejoicing and feasting and sending portions of food to one another.

These verses point out that the hatred of the Jews was empire wide.

IF there were 127 provinces, this would mean that 600 people died in each province because they attacked the Jews.

In the rural areas, they defended themselves on the 13th and celebrated on the 14th.

While the Jews in the city of Susa defended themselves on the 13th and 14th and celebrated on the 15th.

And with that we move to this second section of chapter 9…

If the first 19 verses taught us that it is worthless to fight against God…

This next sections teaches us that…

II. It Is Worthwhile to Celebrate God's Goodness (9:20-32)

Verse 20…

20 Then Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, 21 obliging them to celebrate the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day [k] of the same month, annually, 22 because on those days the Jews [l] rid themselves of their enemies, and it was a month which was turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a [m] holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and rejoicing and sending portions of food to one another and gifts to the poor.

Listen to Psalm 30:10-12…

10 "Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me;
O Lord, be my helper."
11 You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;
You have loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness,
12 That my [d] soul may sing praise to You and not be silent.
O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever.

The Jews had gone from the threat of death to the total destruction of their enemies in less than a year.

What had been a reason to grieve was now a reason to dance.

We all know the feeling of getting good news.

I don't care what age you are, it leads to excitement and even the urge to dance.

Yet, how long do those feeling last?

Until the next trial starts…

Until the next bit of bad news..

So, God instituted a festival so that Israel would not forget His goodness to them in the book of Esther.

And we see the details of this feast on the next few verses…

Look at verse 23…

23 Thus the Jews undertook what they had started to do, and what Mordecai had written to them. 24 For Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the adversary of all the Jews, had schemed against the Jews to destroy them andhad cast Pur, that is the lot, to disturb them and destroy them. 25 But when it came [n]to the king's attention, he commanded by letter that his wicked scheme which he had [o]devised against the Jews, should return on his own head and that he and his sons should be hanged on the [p]gallows. 26 Therefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur. [q]And because of the instructions in this letter, both what they had seen

in this regard and what had happened to them, [27] the Jews established and [r]made a custom for themselves and for their [s]descendants and for all those who allied themselves with them, so that [t]they would not fail to celebrate these two days according to their[u]regulation and according to their appointed time annually. [28] So these days were to be remembered and celebrated throughout every generation, every family, every province and every city; and these days of Purim were not to[v]fail from among the Jews, or their memory [w]fade from their [x]descendants.

Verses 23-25 are simply a summary of what happened in the book of Esther..

But then verse 26 explains why this celebration is called Purim..

Remember when Haman cast lots, or Pur, to determine which day to destroy the Jews in chapter 3..

Well, what actually turned up was the day that his people would die…

Rather than the people of God.

Which again point to the fact that God even controls the roll of the dice….

And this 2 day celebration was to be part of Jewish tradition forever…

And on March 4 at sunset, Purim 2015 will start and it will continue until nightfall on March 5.

It is a celebration that involves the reading of the book of Esther, and every time the name Haman is read…

The people hiss and boo and shake their groggers.

They then go home and eat a big feast and give gifts to one another and to the poor.

Here is how an official Jewish website describes the celebration today….

"Purim is celebrated on the 14th day of Adar, which is usually in March. The 13th of Adar is the day that Haman chose for the extermination of the Jews, and the day that the Jews battled their enemies for their lives. On the day afterwards, the 14th, they celebrated their survival. In cities that were walled in the time of Joshua, Purim is celebrated on the 15th of the month, because the book of Esther says that in Shushan (a walled city), deliverance from the massacre was not complete until the next day. The 15th is referred to as Shushan Purim"

Now, this is not a Christian festival, but we should rejoice with God's deliverance of the Jews in the book of Esther.

Because the Jews gave us our Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ..

They also gave us the OT.

The first NT missionaries were all Jewish.

We are grateful that God preserved the lives of the Jewish people…

And our responsibility today is to evangelize Jewish people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There is no harm in celebrating God's goodness to them in the book of Esther….

Because we all have stories of God's deliverance in our lives.

And we have talked about this on Sunday nights, but it is good to have dates and times in our own lives where we celebrate God's goodness toward us.

The generation before me often did this through pictures.

My grandmother had books of photos that she would flip through often.

I'm sure they would be constant reminders of God's goodness through the years.

To a certain extent, my generation has Facebook and other social media that we often use to celebrate God's goodness.

Just the other day, Tonya was showing me pictures that we posted to the internet as we prepared to leave for seminary.

And now that we are on the other side, we are reminded of God's faithfulness to bring us through that.

That's the greatest lesson that we get from all these festivals of the Jews.

It is good to remember the Lord's kindness to us in real ways.

The point of the festival is not how you celebrate it but why you are celebrating it.

Unfortunately, the Jews never quite understood that and now these festivals are geared more toward man than they are toward God..

In fact, the Jews were so consumed with their festivals that they tried to impose them on the early church…

Yet Paul wrote in Col 2:16…

16 Therefore no one is to [n]act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath [o]day— 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the [p]substance [q]belongs to Christ.

What Paul was saying is that all the festivals, food laws, sacrifices, even the Sabbath are not placed upon the church…

Because we have seen the reality of what all those things pointed to..

Which is the person of Jesus Christ…

Purim is a celebration that God delivered his people from certain destruction.

Jesus is the ultimate picture of that because HE delivered us from the death sentence of sin.

So, we celebrate Jesus, not Purim.

We don't have to celebrate the picture of a person, we celebrate the person.

We don't celebrate the shadow, we celebrate the Person who casts the shadow.

IF you want to go to Purim, go and use it as an opportunity to share the gospel.

If you want to celebrate Passover, go and use it as an opportunity to point Jews to the true Passover Lamb.

But you are not required to do any of that.

You simply need to celebrate and proclaim the truth that Jesus is the One to all the OT food laws, festivals and Sabbaths point.

That is a truth that Jews today desperately need to hear.

Because they see these festivals as a way to be right with God.

But the only way to be right with the Father is through the Son.

So, we see this festival instituted here in Esther 9:23-28.

And then in verses 29-32, Esther adds a couple more requirements to the festival…

29 Then Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter about Purim. 30 He sent letters to all the Jews, to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, namely, words of peace and truth, 31 to establish these days of Purim at their appointed times, just as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had established for them, and just as they had established for themselves and for their [y]descendants with[z]instructions for their times of fasting and their lamentations. 32 The command of Esther established these [aa]customs for Purim, and it was written in the book.

Esther added that the Jews should also fast and weep as part of the celebration of Purim.

These would symbolize the mourning aspect of the book of Esther, where Mordecai tore his clothes and all the Jews mourned when the law to kill them was issued.

Matthew Henry says this…

"The more cries we have offered up in our trouble, and the more prayers for deliverance, the more we are obliged to be thankful to God for deliverance."

The famous saying is this…

Every cloud has a silver lining.

But it is also true that the silver lining is only silver when seen against the dark cloud.

We must celebrate the goodness of God but never forget the depths from which we have been delivered.

And the point of the fasting and weeping is to remind the Jews of the death sentence that had hung over their head in the book of Esther.

That's why salvation begins with a weeping over sin.

A man must see his need for a Savior before he even look for a Savior.

And Esther wanted to make sure that the Jews never forgot how bad it was before they celebrated how great their God was.

Then the book closes with chapter 10…

We have seen that it is WORTHLESS to oppose God's people…

But that it is WORTHWHILE to celebrate God's goodness…

In these final verses, we see that….

III. God's People are Worthy of Promotion (10:1-3)

Verse 1…

10 Now King Ahasuerus laid a tribute on the land and on the coastlands of the sea. 2 And all the [a]accomplishments of his authority and strength, and the full account of the greatness of Mordecai to which the king [b]advanced him, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia?3 For Mordecai the Jew was second only to King Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews and in favor with his many kinsmen, one who sought the good of his people and one who spoke for the welfare of his whole nation.

Folks debate whether these verses should be here…

But I think they are certainly an important part of the story..

Remember when Haman was second in charge of the kingdom…

He promised the king that he would give him so much money if the king would allow him to plunder the Jews…

Yet, his replacement, Mordecai, was even more valuable for the Persian kingdom than Haman.

We see that he brought a financial windfall to the kingdom because the king imposed greater taxes on the people.

And though we look at that with horror, it is certainly a sign of financial health that the people of a nation can pay more tax.

And I think that is the point here…

With Mordecai as second in charge, the Persian kingdom still flourished.

Mordecai's name became famous enough to be included in the book of the history of the Persian kingdom.

And what a strange coincidence that is..

What was the king reading when he remembered that Mordecai had not been honored for his act of loyalty.

The book of the chronicles of the kingdom.

And now, Mordecai's name will go into it again as a tribute to his greatness in the kingdom.

And with that, we close the book of Esther.

Conclusion

And I think it is an incredible book of God's sovereignty in the world.

When I look at the book of Esther, you see God's hand everywhere but God's name nowhere.

When you look at the book of Esther, you see no miracles but you see things that are impossible to believe.

A Jewish orphan becoming a queen.

A Jewish man overhearing a plot to kill the king.

A wicked man casting a lot that lands on a day 11 months in the future.

A pagan king tossing in his sleep.

An history book turning to the right page.

A timid queen going before the powerful king.

A wicked man building his own death trap.

A Jewish nation destroying her enemies in one day.

Those are incredible miracles that all take place in the book of Esther.

And when you look at the book of Esther, you get a real picture of the lives that most of us live.

Lives where God's hand isn't seen but it moves everyday in our life.

Lives where no miracles take place, yet we enjoy God's supernatural protection every day.

Lives where we are imperfect people, yet we are still useful to God in our imperfections.

And that is really the key verse in the entire book of Esther…

"And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14)

And I would challenge us all to be aware of key moments in our lives.

Though our lives may seem to be unimportant and insignificant at times, do not fall into the trap of thinking that God's hand isn't at work in your life.

Maybe God is preparing you through various trials and sufferings for a time in your life…

For such a time when He would use you in a mighty way.

God's pattern is to work through ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

Maybe you are just ordinary enough but obedient enough to be used by Him.