

**When God is Silent**  
**Always Take the Time to Celebrate**  
**Esther 9:1, 18-32**

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**Text Introduction:** For the last couple of Sundays we have been considering the powerful story of Esther. The book of Esther contains the story of God's purposeful intervention in the lives of the Jews who were living under Persian domination. The search for a new queen convenes because the king has selfishly removed the former queen for invalid reasons. Esther, a Jew, is chosen to be queen. Meanwhile, Mordecai, Esther's cousin and guardian, overheard the plans of a scheme to kill the king. Relaying this news to Esther, Mordecai's name is recorded for saving the king. Suddenly, another character, Haman, arrives on the scene as the king's "right-hand-man." Angered at Mordecai's refusal to bow in his presence, Haman devises a plan to exterminate the Jews. Mordecai, learning of this plot convinces Esther that perhaps she has attained such a position as queen to bring salvation to her people, the Jews. At this point in the story two meetings with the king are planned—one requested by Esther and the other by Haman. Esther's request is for the king to intervene for the Jews; Haman's request is for Mordecai's life. On the night before this meeting, the king cannot sleep and reads from the records of the king. The reading reminds the king of Mordecai's intervention to save his life and wonders what has been done to honor him. The result of the king not sleeping ultimately results in several things. First, Mordecai is finally honored (by Haman of all people). Second, upon hearing of the plan to exterminate the Jews, the king orders the hanging of Haman on the gallows he had made for Mordecai. Third, the king gives Mordecai Haman's job. Most importantly, the fourth result is the salvation of the Jews. Whereas the king could not reverse his earlier decree, he allowed the Jews to defend themselves. In defending themselves, they destroyed their enemies. In surveying this whole story the last two weeks, we learned that God is always at work even though we do not always see where He is at work. We have also learned that even though God is sovereign, He works through people to accomplish His purposes. I want to turn now to the end of the story.

**Text:** <sup>1</sup> The king's command and law went into effect on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month Adar. On the day when the Jews' enemies had hoped to overpower them, just the opposite happened. The Jews overpowered those who hated them.

<sup>18</sup> But the Jews in Susa had assembled on the thirteenth and the fourteenth days of the month. They rested on the fifteenth day of the month, and it became a day of feasting and rejoicing. <sup>19</sup> This explains why the rural Jews who live in villages observe the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as [a time of] rejoicing and feasting. It is a holiday when they send gifts to one another.

<sup>20</sup> Mordecai recorded these events and sent letters to all the Jews in all of King Ahasuerus' provinces, both near and far. <sup>21</sup> [He ordered] them to celebrate the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month Adar every year <sup>22</sup> because during those days the Jews got rid of their enemies. That was the month when their sorrow was turned into rejoicing and their mourning into a holiday. They were to be days of feasting, rejoicing, and of sending gifts to one another and the poor.

<sup>23</sup> So the Jews agreed to continue the practice they had begun, as Mordecai had written them to do. <sup>24</sup> For Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to

destroy them. He cast the Pur (that is, the lot) to crush and destroy them.<sup>25</sup> But when the matter was brought before the king, he commanded by letter that the evil plan Haman had devised against the Jews return on his own head and that he should be hanged with his sons on the gallows.<sup>26</sup> For this reason these days are called Purim, from the word Pur.

Because of all the instructions in this letter as well as what they had witnessed and what had happened to them,<sup>27</sup> the Jews bound themselves, their descendants, and all who joined with them [to a commitment] that they would not fail to celebrate these two days each and every year according to the written instructions and according to the time appointed.<sup>28</sup> These days are remembered and celebrated by every generation, family, province, and city, so that these days of Purim will not lose their significance in Jewish life and their memory will not fade from their descendants.

<sup>29</sup> Queen Esther daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, wrote this second letter with full authority to confirm the letter about Purim.<sup>30</sup> He sent letters with messages of peace and faithfulness to all the Jews who were in the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus,<sup>31</sup> in order to confirm these days of Purim at their proper time just as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had established them and just as they had committed themselves and their descendants to the practices of fasting and lamentation.<sup>32</sup> So Esther's command confirmed these customs of Purim, which were then written into the record.

**Introduction:** We have examined the story of Esther as a Biblical lesson on God's sovereignty. We have learned that God is absolutely always in control. Even in His sovereignty, though, He sometimes works through us. The lesson before us today is that we need to celebrate God's sovereignty. At the right time God acts. When He does, we must not fail to celebrate. The Jews inaugurated a Feast of Celebration to remember God's provision for them. Their celebration is a reminder to us of our own need to worship. You see, like the Jews of Esther's day, we have been saved. Because of Jesus Christ, as believers in the cross, we can have continual celebration.

### **Four Benefits of Continual Celebration**

#### **Joy**

##### Joy Stealers

When good things happen, we rejoice. When bad things happen, we mourn. Be careful of those things that steal your joy. Because we live in constant contact with these joy stealers, we must focus on joy. Continual celebration helps us to focus on joy.

What are the joy stealers? Joy stealers could be any number of things, but these seem to come to mind: people, tragic events, circumstances, and even poor choices of the past. So, we live in constant tension whether or not we allow these things to take away our joy.

This is one of the reasons for worship.

*We need to make sure that our rejoicing is of the same magnitude as our requesting.*

## **Remembrance**

Like many stories of the Old Testament, the primary reason for the annual celebration was so that the victory would not be forgotten. Just as God wanted the tribes of Israel to set up stones of remembrance when they crossed the Jordan, Mordecai wanted the people of his day to always remember God's deliverance. Just as God wanted the Jews to have an annual feast of sleeping in tents to remember God's protection during those years that they wandered around the wilderness, the people of Mordecai's day would need to remember their protection. Just as God wanted Israel to remember the passing over of the death angel with the Feast of Passover, so God wanted the people to remember this passing over of death.

Today, when we gather on a Sunday, hopefully much more is happening than an American custom of Sunday worship. Hopefully, we have gathered to remember the cross, remember the Gospel—the good news that God has come into our world to save us from our sin. Hopefully, we have gathered with the purpose of drawing aside to remember all that God has done, is doing, and will do in our lives.

*Focusing on joy causes us to remember.*

## **Perspective**

A third benefit of continual celebration is perspective. Chapter 10:1 can be a depressing text. No, I'm not just talking about the issue of taxation. Esther 10:1 reminds us that for Esther, Mordecai, and the Jews, much returned to normal. The king was still king. He was still doing what kings do.

Yes, Esther's story tells us that "it might get worse before it gets better, but things are getting better." In fact, with God, one day we will celebrate that things are not only better, but perfect.

Drawing aside to worship brings us to a point of reorienting toward God's perspective. As Christians, we ought to look at all things from the perspective of our ultimate victory in Christ. (This can be like, but in a much better way, watching the replay of a sporting event in which your team wins and you already know they are going to win. You don't get discouraged when bad things happen to your team when you already know the outcome.)

*Thanks and faith go hand in hand!*

## **Prompts Service**

One of the beautiful parts of this ninth chapter is the sharing with others in need. Their celebration was not so inwardly focused that they did not use the occasion of celebration to bless others.

## **Conclusion:**

Has God been silent in your life? One day, you will see His answer. When you get the answer, never fail to celebrate. No matter how rough the stretch gets or how devastating the silence, don't forget to celebrate. That's what the citizens of Enterprise, Alabama did. In 1915, a pesky beetle called the boll weevil started invading the primary crop and economic vehicle, cotton. Some farmers were losing whole crops. A Mr. H.M. Sessions convinced some financial backers to go into the peanut business. Boll

weevils did not like peanuts. Soon, other farmers began raising peanuts and then other crops. In just a few short years, the economy soon turned around. What did Enterprise, Alabama decide to do? They erected a monument to the boll weevil. At the base of the monument appears the following inscription:

"In profound appreciation of the Boll Weevil and what it has done as the herald of prosperity this monument was erected by the citizens of Enterprise, Coffee County, Alabama.

That's exactly what the people of Esther's day did. The pur or lot was cast by Haman to decide the day that the Jews would be exterminated. When they were looking for a name for their celebration, they said "Let's call it The Feast of Purim."

I'm reminded that over 2,000 years ago, on a Friday, Jesus, the one called Messiah, God's appointed one, was arrested, tried, and crucified. But now, that once dark Friday is called "Good Friday."