

Purim and Christmas!

Esther 9-10

Joy to the World!!!!

Read Esther 9:1-19. [Reality]

1 Now in the twelfth month,
which is the month of Adar,
on the thirteenth day of the same,
when the king's command and edict were about to be carried out,
on the very day
when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over
them, the reverse occurred:
the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them.

2 The Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King
Ahasuerus
to lay hands on those who sought their harm.
And no one could stand against them,
for the fear of them had fallen on all peoples.

3 All the officials of the provinces
and the satraps
and the governors
and the royal agents also
helped the Jews,
for the fear of Mordecai had fallen on them.

4 For Mordecai was great in the king's house,
and his fame spread throughout all the provinces,
for the man Mordecai grew more and more powerful.

5 The Jews struck all their enemies with the sword,
killing and destroying them,
and did as they pleased to those who hated them.

6 In Susa the citadel itself the Jews killed and destroyed 500
men,

7 and also killed
Parshandatha and Dalphon and Aspatha
8 and Poratha and Adalia and Aridatha
9 and Parmashta and Arisai and Aridai and

Vaizatha,

10 the ten sons of Haman the son of

Hammedatha,

the enemy of the Jews,
but they laid no hand on the
plunder.

11 That very day the number of those killed in Susa the citadel was reported
to the king.

12 And the king said to Queen Esther,
"In Susa the citadel the Jews have killed and destroyed
500 men
and also the ten sons of Haman.
What then have they done in the rest of the king's provinces!
Now what is your wish?
It shall be granted you.
And what further is your request?
It shall be fulfilled."

13 And Esther said,
"If it please the king,
let the Jews who are in Susa
be allowed tomorrow also
to do according to this day's edict.
And let the ten sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows."

14 So the king commanded this to be done.
A decree was issued in Susa,
and the ten sons of Haman were hanged.

15 The Jews who were in Susa
gathered also on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar
and they killed 300 men in Susa,
but they laid no hands on the plunder.

16 Now the rest of the Jews who were in the king's provinces
also gathered to defend their lives,
and got relief from their enemies
and killed 75,000 of those who hated them,
but they laid no hands on the plunder.

17 This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar,
and on the fourteenth day they **rested**
and made that a day of **feasting and gladness**.

18 But the Jews who were in Susa
gathered on the thirteenth day
and on the fourteenth,
and rested on the fifteenth day,
making that a day of **feasting and gladness**.

19 Therefore the Jews of the villages,
who live in the rural towns,
hold the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a day for **gladness**
and feasting,
as a **holiday**,
and as a day on which they send gifts of food to one another.

I have preached that this reversal of fortune in Esther is a foreshadow of the Final Judgment.

We have wrestled with the fact that when Jesus returns all who have opposed him or his people will suffer eternal judgment. We have wrestled with the fact that women and children will also be included in the judgment of that day. We have even wrestled with the truth that we, as God's people, are to rejoice and be glad for the occurrence of these things. Our salvation is the flipside of their demise. They are not two separate events, but one and the same event.

But there is a question that I have not yet raised that needs to be raised.

Why does God have actual foreshadows of the Final Judgment?

Why does he not simply tell us what the Final Judgment will be like?

Why is it necessary for there to be actual physical slaughters here and now?

2 Peter 2:3-6 ³ And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. ⁴ For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; ⁵ if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; ⁶ if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;

God gives us real pictures of the final judgment in order to impress upon us the REALITY of the Final Judgment.

The reality of the killing of more than 75,000 people on the 13th and 14th of Adar throughout the Persian Empire of all who hated the Jews is an example and a warning for all who would come after them.

When we begin to doubt whether or not the Final Judgment will occur...

When we begin to doubt whether or not there are enemies of God who will be destroyed...

When we begin to doubt whether or not good will truly triumph in the end...

We are called to remember the examples that God has already given us.

Noah and the Flood

Sodom and Gomorrah

Joshua entering the Promised Land

Judgment upon rebellious angels

Haman and all the enemies of the Jews

And the greatest example of all: The wrath of God's divine justice poured out upon Jesus on the cross.

If you want certainty that the Judgment is coming, reflect upon the cross. If it was not true that a terrible wrath was imminent, why on earth would it have been necessary for God to pour out wrath upon his beloved and sinless Son?

The REALITY is that a Judgment is Coming. And God has in his perfect wisdom, chosen to give examples of that Judgment, in time, so that we could truly take to heart the reality of that Judgment.

You see, it is one thing to wrestle with something that is future that we cannot see. It is quite another to wrestle with the slaughter of more than 75,000 Persians in one day. Or if you are the sort of person that numbers do not impress, how about being given the specific names of the 10 sons of Haman?

It is easier to deny, or at least ignore, the gladness of God and his people over the destruction of their enemies when the particulars of that Judgment are future and unknown. It is not so easy when we have an example of that Judgment staring us square in the face.

Consider the fact that in our chapter we have King Ahaseurus coming to Esther asking her if she has ANY further request. He is willing to grant her whatever she wants.

What is it that she asks for?

One more day to continue the slaughter in the city of Susa.

One more day to complete the job.

Of all the things that Esther could have asked for, why does she ask for this? Many condemn Esther here for wanting such a thing.

But if we condemn Esther, we are going contrary to the author's intention in communicating it to us.

There is no hint that Esther has fallen into personal vengeance in the text itself. We read that into the text from our own feelings and thoughts.

We may wonder at Queen Esther requesting a second day of destruction in Susa, but rather than questioning her motives or morality, we ought to understand the necessity of completing the task.

This judgment in Esther was not truly absolute or King Ahaseurus would be included as well. But it is an example to us that when God does bring his final judgment it will be terrible and it will be complete.

Oh that the REALITY of this final judgment would not remain surreal in our hearts. It is not something that we should simply ignore or accept in some general way. The reality of this day ought to affect how we make choices each

and every day. Even as Christians, we need to reflect upon the stark reality of the final judgment.

The passage I just read in 2 Peter was given as a warning to Christians, at least Christians in name. It was given as a warning to false prophets within the Church.

Without real examples in history, the coming judgment would become surreal to our hearts. Be thankful that God has given us real examples in history that we would be the better prepared for this day.

The Judgment of God is not a philosophical concept. It is a reality. Esther brings that front and center to our hearts and minds.

Read Esther 9:20-32. [Backward and Forward looking Celebration]

20 And Mordecai recorded these things
and sent letters to all the Jews
who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus,
both near and far,
21 obliging them to keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar
and also the fifteenth day of the same,
year by year,
22 as the days on which the Jews got relief from their
enemies,
and as the month
that had been turned for them from sorrow into
gladness
and from mourning into a holiday;
that they should make them days of **feasting and
gladness,**
days for sending gifts of food to one another
and gifts to the poor.
23 So the Jews accepted what they had started to do,
and what Mordecai had written to them.
24 For Haman the Agagite,
the son of Hammedatha,
the enemy of all the Jews,
had plotted against the Jews to destroy them,
and had cast Pur (that is, cast lots),
to crush and to destroy them.
25 But when it came before the king,
he gave orders in writing
that **his evil plan that he had devised against the Jews
should return on his own head,**

and that he and his sons should be hanged on the
gallows.

26 Therefore they called these days Purim,
after the term Pur.

Therefore, because of all that was written in this letter,
and of what they had faced in this matter,
and of what had happened to them,

27 the Jews firmly obligated
themselves
and their offspring
and all who joined them,

that without fail they would keep these two days
according to what was written
and at the time appointed every year,
28 that these days should be remembered
and kept throughout every generation,
in every clan, province, and city,
and that these days of Purim should never fall
into disuse
among the Jews,
nor should the commemoration of these days
cease
among their descendants.

29 Then Queen Esther,
the daughter of Abihail,
and Mordecai the Jew
gave full written authority,
confirming this second letter about Purim.

30 Letters were sent to all the Jews,
to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus,
in words of peace and truth,

31 that these days of Purim should be observed at their
appointed seasons,

as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther obligated
them,

and as they had obligated themselves and their
offspring,

with regard to their fasts and their lamenting.

32 The command of Queen Esther confirmed these practices of Purim,
and it was recorded in writing.

Celebration is Appropriate!

1. Holiday (A Good Day) - v. 22. (Holy Day)
 - a. Mordecai and Esther make what was already spontaneously occurring into an obligation for all Jews of every generation.
 - i. “So the Jews accepted what they had started to do,” (v. 23)
 - ii. Many in our day think that something can only be heartfelt if it is spontaneous. If you make it an obligation you “deflate the balloon” of its joy and gladness.
 - iii. I want to point out here a situation that begins spontaneously, but is also made an enduring obligation.
 - iv. Mordecai and Esther recognize that the spontaneous joy of the first generation should be observed by all who would come after them.
 1. They “obliged”
 - a. themselves
 - b. and their offspring
 - c. and all who joined them.
 - i. This is how covenants work...

The Purpose of this Holiday is both to “look back” and to “look forward”.

Backward looking Celebration

1. This is the day/s when the Jews got relief from their enemies. [remembered]
 - a. I find it interesting that if you lived in Susa, you celebrated Purim on the 15th of Adar, while those who lived in other places celebrated on the 14th of Adar. This roots their celebration firmly in the history of the events. Looking back upon that historical situation was important to the feast itself.
2. The very name of the feast would remind them to look back: Purim.
 - a. The casting of lots is a strange name to call this Holiday.
 - b. But it would be a firm reminder to those who celebrate that God is the one who controls all things for their redemption - even the outcome of the casting of lots.
 - c. Esther teaches us that God’s redemption does not have to come through the means of great miracles. God is able to save through the means of Providence!
3. This holiday called the people to remember when the Evil plan of Haman was turned on its head!

- a. The whole point of writing the book of Esther was to etch the historical events themselves into the minds of those who celebrated the feast.
- b. Without the historical events themselves, the feast is emptied of his meaning.

Purim was a backward looking celebration... But it was also a forward looking celebration.

Read Esther 10:1-3.

ESV **Esther 10:1**

King Ahasuerus imposed tax on the land and on the coastlands of the sea.

² And all the acts of his power and might,
and the full account of the high honor of Mordecai,
to which the king 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 in rank to King Ahasuerus,
and he was great among the Jews
and popular with the multitude of his brothers,
for he sought the welfare of his people
and spoke peace to all his people.

Purim was also a Forward Looking Celebration!

1. Some wonder why chapter 10 is even included in the book of Esther. It really does feel “post-climactic”.
 - a. What do we really care that King Ahasuerus imposed tax the land?
 - b. What does that have to do with the redemption of the Jews?
 - c. Well, it helps us to understand that the Redemption of Esther’s day was not the Final Redemption. It fell short of the promised “Peace on Earth”.
 - d. King Ahasuerus still in command.
 - i. Mordecai is great, but not great enough. He is still second in command to a pagan king.
 - ii. And this pagan king is still imposing taxes on the land.
 1. **Esther 2:18** Then the king gave a great feast for all his officials and servants; it was Esther's feast. He also granted a remission of taxes to the provinces and gave gifts with royal generosity.

- iii. It is true that Mordecai became great and spoke peace to his brothers, but it is not true that Mordecai truly brought Peace on earth.
- iv. The celebration of Purim is a forward looking celebration, pointing all who celebrated to true peace that was to come.

This brings us to a very important question.

Why do Christians not celebrate Purim?

The Jews continue to celebrate the feast, even though much of its true meaning has been lost to them. I have read of some situations where Jews will continue to celebrate this feast even though in their beliefs they have become Atheists. This is truly sad.

But what about Christians - should we keep the OT feasts?
Should we celebrate Purim?

Yes and No.

Colossians 2:15-17 ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. ¹⁶ Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

The Redemption in Esther is a shadow that points forward to substance that is found in Christ!

There are no direct prophecies found in the book of Esther.

There is no mention of “the Messiah” and his coming.

On the one hand it appears to be a book intended for Jews only.

But if you understand what Paul is saying in Colossians and if you understand Luke 24:27...

Luke 24:27 ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

... You will see that we cannot read Esther without seeing Christ and the great Reversal that his life, death, and resurrection brought about.

Nor can we read Esther and not think about the Future Return of Christ and Final Judgment Day that belongs to him as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Hebrews 4:9 ⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God

As Christians, we do not technically celebrate the OT feasts. They are only shadows. We have the substance in Christ.

Could we actually celebrate Purim today as our reminder that God will conquer all evil, without acknowledging the fulfillment of this in Christ? Hardly.

But that does not mean that it is wrong to celebrate feasts today. There is a place for the celebration of the Great Work of Redemption brought in Christ!

And I believe that our holidays of Christmas and Easter, in their best expressions, capture some of the celebration that we ought to have as Christians.

Feasting, gladness, giving of gifts (of food) to one another, and gifts to the poor...

This is a pretty good description of what our holidays ought to be about.

But although I personally see a place for the celebration of holidays such as Easter and Christmas, I also truly respect the practice of the Puritans in their decision to not celebrate these holidays.

Many wrongly accuse the Puritans (many of whom were Presbyterian) with being prudish and having something against celebration. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Puritans loved celebration.

And they believed in the celebration of Christmas and Easter. But they believed that Christmas and Easter ought to be celebrated every Lord's Day.

Every Sunday should be a feast day!

Communion is a feast - hardly a feast physically, but it ought to be a feast spiritually.

So, rather than disdain the Puritans, we ought to learn from them. They fixed their celebrations in Christ and they saw worship as central to any celebration they might have.

Now, we are ready to come to the conclusion.

As a kid, I remember growing up loving the Christmas season. There was joy in the air. It was magical, and the magic was not just because I was getting presents.

The mantras: Peace on Earth! And Goodwill towards men! rang true in my ears. This is what my heart truly desired. As I got older and became a true believer, I began to see that the Peace on Earth that I sang about as a child, was not exactly what I thought of it then. I had this conception that all would be well and everyone would be happy.

As Sandy has often said, “This is sentimental nonsense.”
Jesus does bring “peace on earth and goodwill toward men,” but it is only those men “upon whom his favor rests.”

For all of those who oppose his rule and are enemies of his bride, the church, there will be judgment.

Esther makes this point absolutely clear.

And I believe we would be better able to celebrate the joy of the Christmas season if we keep in mind the message of Esther.

We might bring practices of celebrating this season more in line with the biblical concept of the celebration of the victory in Christ!

Jesus does bring Peace on Earth!

Jesus does speak peace.

Jesus does seek our welfare.

The fullness of our peace and welfare awaits the day of his return, but the edict has been sent out and it is our duty and obligation to celebrate His victory today.

Joy to the World!