

Let's Worship God

27th Aug. - 1st Sept. 2018

Esther



Esther

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Monday - Esther 9:11-19 - A Puzzling Question

Our world is marred by the destructive cycle of sectarian violence. One side attacks, the other strikes back. One killing is met by another, one atrocity breeds many in response. No-one wins.

If you were to cut these verses out of your Bible and read them in isolation, you might be rather unimpressed. Yes, the Jews had been wronged, but this is revenge on a horrifying scale. It's mindless sectarian violence. Perhaps cutting these verses out isn't such a bad idea.

Let's not be so hasty! Perhaps our unease says more about our 21st century squeamishness than it does about the facts on the ground. First of all, we need to remember that these enemies were on the loose and hungry for Jewish blood; killing them was an act of self-defence (v16).

Secondly, and more importantly, we need to see these events in their proper perspective. The Ancient Near East was a sordid place: full of barbaric practices, pagan rituals, and idolatrous worship. At the heart of the matter was a stubborn rebellion against the God who created all nations. This may be an unpopular thing to say, but these nations deserved this judgement.

At various points in the Old Testament, God called on his people to be the instruments of that judgement (Deuteronomy 7). In today's passage, God once again used the Jews in order to punish wicked rebellion against himself.

Perhaps as you read today's passage, you thought to yourself: "How can God be so severe?" You need to remember that these wicked, rebellious nations were spared for centuries before God executed his judgement.

Why did he allow sworn enemies to wreak havoc for so long? Why did he not act sooner? By the same token, why does he allow modern nations to repeatedly flaunt his laws? Why does he allow individuals to spend years in rebellion against him?

God graciously gives ample opportunity to repent. His patience is the real marvel here. How can God be so merciful? That's the most puzzling question of all.

Questions

1. What did Haman and others do when God showed them many years of mercy?
2. What will God do to those who continue to throw his patience back in his face?

Prayer Points

1. Thank God for the mercy and patience he has shown us. Without it, we would have faced the judgment we deserve.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth. Psalm 124:8

Praise: Psalm 61 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Esther

Tuesday - Esther 9:20-32 - Remembrance Day

Every year many countries pause to reflect on the horrors of war and the sacrifices of the fallen. In the UK, this annual event is known as Remembrance Day - an apt name for a day that's all about looking back.

Given our culture's tendency to fixate on the here and now, this is seen as an increasingly important event. The theory is that those who forget the painful mistakes of the past are more likely to make the same mistakes in the future. Since those mistakes had such horrific consequences, Remembrance Day is a rather gloomy affair.

Today's passage deals with a Jewish version of Remembrance Day. It performed much the same function: stopping painful lessons from being forgotten amidst the busyness of modern life. However, that's where the similarities end: The Feast of Purim was an unashamedly celebratory event.

Does this passage still matter in the 21st Century? Yes it does. Believers today may not be called to celebrate Purim, but we're still called to look back and learn the lessons of the past. Just like the Jews of centuries ago, it is good to reflect on God's deliverance.

If anything, we should be even more enthusiastic than the Jews in this passage. After all, their rescue was a temporary one; it did not deal with the problems of sin, guilt, and judgement. By contrast, we look back to the final, perfect, once and for all deliverance won by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us learn from these verses. Would it not be helpful to regularly and deliberately remember your salvation? Is it not good to remember what you were before rescue, remember the doom that awaited you, and remember how Jesus Christ has turned the tables?

But more than that, is it not vital that we commit ourselves to the official Remembrance Day celebrations of God's people? These aren't an annual, but a weekly event. God has set aside one day per week to remember our salvation through Jesus Christ. Isn't that something to cherish?

Questions

1. What happens when we forget the salvation we have received in Jesus Christ?
2. How can we get the most out of our weekly Remembrance Day?

Prayer Points

1. Confess the times you have forgotten the salvation you have received. Pray that God would help you to reflect on it more.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth. Psalm 124:8

Praise: Psalm 62 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Esther

Wednesday - Esther 10:1-3 - A Friend in High Places

It's the end of our journey. We've had ups and downs and twists and turns. We've seen tears of despair and tears of joy. Life will never be the same again.

Take Mordecai for example. He began the story as a fairly anonymous character, became an unsung hero, spent much of the book in Haman's crosshairs, and finished as the second most prominent man in the Persian Empire. What a rollercoaster!

It was quite a journey for the Jewish people as well. They endured a vicious smear campaign, lived under the shadow of a holocaust, and now finally, they had come out the other side. The most influential man in the palace used to plot their deaths; now he seeks their welfare (v3). How brilliant! How amazing!

It gets more amazing still. Remember: this book is not simply the story of the Jewish people, it is also a vivid reminder of God's work for believers today.

We can see many parallels, can't we? Like the Jews, we once lived under a death sentence (Romans 2:12). Like the Jews, we were powerless to deliver ourselves (Romans 3:20). Yet, like the Jews, we have a friend in high places.

Not Mordecai, but someone much, much better. Someone with power and influence, someone who delivers us, someone who seeks the welfare of his people. Jesus Christ lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25) gives us gracious gifts, and speaks peace to us (Ephesians 2:17). Isn't that amazing?

Yet, if you think that is worth celebrating, consider how Jesus accomplished all this. In order to save the day, Mordecai and Esther had to avoid the wooden gallows at all costs. If they were put to death, it was game over. Jesus Christ did the opposite. With great determination, he set his face to the cross and willingly died in our place. In doing so he dealt with our death sentence, conquered our enemies, and secured our salvation (Colossians 2:14-15). Now that's worth celebrating!

Questions

1. The Book of Esther is not the final deliverance of God's people. How do we see that in v1?
2. How is Jesus' deliverance better than Esther and Mordecai's rescue?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks to God for how this book has a happy ending. Praise him because in Jesus, the final ending is even better still.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth. Psalm 124:8

Praise: Psalm 63 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Esther

Thursday - Esther Overview - Living in Exile

We've finished the story, but there are still lessons to be learned. Rather than reading one particular passage today, let's look back at what we've already seen. For the rest of this week, I'd like us to chew over this story of God's salvation for his people.

There are three important themes I'd like us to consider over the next three days. We see these themes all throughout the book of Esther. Today's theme can be summed up in one word: exile.

Esther begins in Susa, ends in Susa, and every verse in between is set in the city. Callous and ungodly Ahasuerus is king at the start (1:1) and at the end (10:1). Have you considered how challenging it must have been to be a believer in a hostile land? Every day, God's people were breathing in noxious pagan values about wealth (1:6), parties (1:7), beauty (2:12), sex (2:14) and every other aspect of life.

They were constantly reminded of the might of the king (1:1) and the importance of fitting in by obeying his rule (3:12). It seems apt that God's name is never once mentioned, because in this ungodly society, it seemed like he didn't exist. It was hard to be faithful in Susa.

Of course, it's the same for many believers today. Our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20) and therefore we are exiles here on Earth (1 Peter 2:11). We are constantly and subtly assaulted by a world that rebels against Jesus Christ. We are bombarded with the world's values concerning money, gender, careers, family, religion, truth, life, and death. The pressure to become like those around us is enormous and God can so often seem absent.

Esther reminds us that even in a world where he is not acknowledged, God is still God. It challenges us to fix our eyes on him and strive for godliness. It is possible to be faithful while living in exile because God will always be faithful to us.

Questions

1. When do you most feel the pressure of living in exile?
2. Have you breathed in any values from the world without realising it?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that God would give you discernment to reject the values of the world and strength to follow him in a hostile environment.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth. Psalm 124:8

Praise: Psalm 64 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Esther

Friday - Esther Overview - Mess

The second of our three themes can also be summed up in one word: mess. Esther is a messy book with messy characters who find themselves in a messy situation. This shouldn't surprise us, because God isn't telling us a fairy tale; he's describing real life.

Esther's story involves kidnap (2:8), sexual exploitation (2:14), and neglect (4:11). Meanwhile her fellow Jews plumbed the very depths of despair (4:3). What a mess! Then there's the characters themselves. Esther and Mordecai were undoubtedly heroes, yet they are painted with fine brush strokes. We don't want to be uncharitable, but there are awkward questions that we could ask. Esther kept her Jewishness a secret (2:10), so much so that her true identity took her husband by surprise (7:4). How did she manage this? Would this have been possible without compromising on her faith? The book doesn't tell us for sure.

Other awkward questions raise their heads through no fault of these characters. Why were they in Susa in the first place? Why not Jerusalem? Had their ancestors compromised on their principles? Had they valued the bright lights of the capital more than the fellowship of God's people? Were Esther and Mordecai caught up in this mess because of their forefathers' sin?

Let's not lose sight of Esther and Mordecai's heroism, but let's not turn them into superheroes either. They were ordinary, possibly messy people, in a messy situation. We shouldn't be afraid to admit that, because God is the true hero of this book.

Is your life a messy one? Are there skeletons in your closet? Perhaps your family is fractured. Perhaps your past is painful. Perhaps your dreams are dead. Maybe you have wronged others or maybe you have been horribly wronged. Esther teaches us: mess doesn't have to mean the end.

This book reminds us that God works in messy places through messy people. God can glorify himself by cultivating fruit in your life. He worked through Esther. Pray that he would work through you.

Questions

1. In what ways could you describe your life as a mess?
2. How should you feel when you see God working through messy people?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks for how God works in messy situations through messy people. Pray that he would glorify himself by working through you.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth. Psalm 124:8
Praise: Psalm 65 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

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Saturday - Esther Overview - God's Deliverance

We have one final theme to consider, and what a theme it is! Esther, above all else, is a story of God's deliverance.

Things seemed utterly hopeless. Haman's holocaust was official government policy and the date was set in stone (3:13). The machinery of the empire would soon turn its force upon God's covenant people. Ahasuerus was too powerful to resist (1:1), Haman was too crafty to outfox. This was the Jews' darkest hour.

Yet, rescue came. In fact, not just rescue; complete reversal (9:22). Midway through the book, no-one could see any way out for the Jews. By the end of the book, no-one could doubt that God was on their side.

Every single one of us who follows Jesus has experienced God's deliverance. He has delivered us from condemnation, shattered sin's grip over us, and brought us from death to life. Satan, like Haman, has been undone by his own rebellion (7:10). Esther's story prepares us for the greatest story of all: Jesus Christ's victorious death on the cross and triumphant resurrection from the grave. Victory is ours!

Of course, there are still challenges to be faced; we live in exile after all. God's people face opposition, temptation, sickness, bereavements, and job losses. Yet those trials will never have the final say.

The same God who turned Esther's darkness into light will uphold his people as they pass through their darkest hour. The Spirit of Christ gives us resolve in the face of opposition, victory in the face of temptation, strength in the face of sickness, comfort in the face of bereavement, and patience in the face of unemployment. He upholds exhausted parents, frustrated workers, lonely children and discouraged elders.

As with Esther, Christ's working can be subtle. It may not be spectacular, but it gets the job done. God's fingerprints were all over this Jewish rescue. Look carefully and you'll see them on your deliverance as well. What a God we worship! What a salvation we enjoy!

Questions

1. What has been your favourite lesson from the book of Esther?
2. How will our studies on Esther cause you to praise God more?

Prayer Points

1. Worship God for our incredible deliverance and our incredible saviour Jesus Christ.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth. Psalm 124:8
Praise: Psalm 66 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

The goal of Let's Worship God is to encourage and help you in your worship of God each day.

**God tells us that
Ezra read from
the book of the Law
day after day
and that
the people of God
were filled with joy!**

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