

Sermon – 02/08/2009 pm

Joy for the Jews

Study Text: Esther 8

Haman was dead but the legacy of his wickedness lived on. The king had signed into law his plan to exterminate the Jews. This law remained on the books. In the strength of the Lord, Esther gained victory over Haman but she and her people were still under this death threat. She went to the king again asking him to revoke this law that had been published in all the provinces of the empire. Could this be done easily? Could it be done at all?

Our enemy Satan has been defeated, but he is still active in accusing and tempting us. Satan was defeated at the Cross. *Now the ruler of this world will be cast out* said Jesus (John 12:31). *The accuser of the brethren ... has been cast down and they overcame by the blood of the Lamb* (Revelation 12:10-11). We fight against a defeated enemy, but an enemy still scheming against us. He is imprisoned awaiting final destruction in the lake of fire, but even from prison he works his evil against us.

Haman's House

With Haman dead and disgraced his house became the property of the State. The king gave his house to Esther out of gratitude for uncovering the wicked works of Haman. The king was now aware that Esther was Jewish. She also told him that Mordecai was her relative. He was her cousin who had brought her up as his own daughter.

The tables were now turned with the king promoting Mordecai to the office that Haman held, and Esther giving him the house Haman lived in. As the book of Proverbs teaches *a good man leaves an inheritance for his children's children but a sinner's wealth is stored up for the righteous* (Proverbs 13:22). The king also gave Mordecai the royal signet ring that he had previously given to Haman. With this ring he could seal documents in the name of the king.

On the day of divine judgment the wicked will be condemned and the righteous will be rewarded. Scripture makes it abundantly clear that God is just and that he will *judge the earth in righteousness and the people in his truth* (Psalm 96:13). Abraham said *shall not the judge of all the earth do right* (Genesis 18:25). Paul reminds us that God *has set a day when he will judge the world in righteousness* by Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31). He will reward each one according to what they have done (Matthew 16:27).

Haman's Handiwork Counteracted

Esther spoke again to the king (8:3). No time frame is given for this meeting but it would appear to follow closely the previous events. Esther again approaches the king in his throne room, this time with more confidence but still with respect and humility. She implored him with tears to counteract the evil edict of Haman the Agagite (8:3). It was the third month so the edict would not come into effect for another nine months; but Esther was going to complete what she had started. This was a sense of urgency in removing this evil edict.

Esther asked King Xerxes to revoke the official letters sent out to all the provinces by Haman, the letters giving everyone permission to kill and plunder the Jews on the thirteenth day of the

twelfth month (3:13). But there was a problem. The laws of the Medes and Persians could not be changed.

Daniel's enemies reminded King Darius of this law about the laws. They got the king to make a law about praying so they could trap Daniel. The king regretted making this law when Daniel was arrested, but they told him it was the law of the Medes and Persians and that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed (Daniel 6:15). King Xerxes could not change or withdraw the edict drawn up by Haman and given the seal of the king.

What the king did was tell Esther and Mordecai to write another decree concerning the Jews (8:8). Mordecai called the king's scribes, dictated a new edict, and had it sealed with the king's signet ring. This edict was delivered to every corner of the empire, just like the first one. It was written in all the different languages spoken in the empire, including that of the Jews (8:9). There is no indication that Haman's edict was written in the language of the Jews. Mordecai wanted everyone, including the Jews to read the royal edict he was sending out.

How was Mordecai going to stop people from killing Jews on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month as permitted under the law? What was his new law? This new law granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and defend themselves (8:11). They were permitted to kill any who attacked them and to plunder their possessions also.

This edict had the effect of counteracting or annulling the previous one inciting violence against the Jews. People were still allowed to attack the Jews on this particular day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, but they could expect to meet fierce resistance.

If the law of the Medes and Persians could not be changed, how much less the law of Almighty God. God declared to Adam 'the day that you eat of that tree you will surely die'. It was Satan who said 'did God really say that'. Fools today say 'even if God did say that he did not mean it'. 'God does not condemn people to death any more. God loves all people and all will go to heaven' they say. But this is not what God says. It is easy to prove that God's word to Adam remains true – because we all die.

The wages of sin is death ... but the gift of God is eternal life (Romans 6:23). Has God changed his law? No. How then can we escape death and have life? God has in effect counteracted this law by sending his only begotten Son into this world. Jesus suffered God's wrath upon sin as he died on the Cross. Jesus had to die because of God's justice – and his mercy of course, his mercy to you who believe. Who God set forth as a propitiation by his blood ... that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:25-26).

Happy City

The Jews were greatly outnumbered but God was at work behind the scenes. Not many hated the Jews like Haman did. They were perplexed when Haman called them to rise up and kill the Jews (3:15). The people were glad when Mordecai became prime minister (8:15). Moreover, God put a fear of the Jews into the hearts of the people.

*Let not mercy and truth forsake you
Bind them around your neck
Write them on the tablet of your heart
And so find favour and high esteem
in the sight of God and man (Proverbs 3:4).*

The child Samuel grew in stature, and in favour both with the Lord and with men (I Samuel 2:26). As a young man Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men (Luke 2:52). The same things could be said about Mordecai. He maintained his integrity before God and before men. His refusal to bow before Haman pleased God, and caused men to respect him.

Not only the Jews but everyone in the city of Shushan was glad to see Mordecai in royal robes of rich blue and pure white, and wearing a gold crown. They were pleased to have Mordecai as prime minister. The Jews were especially glad because their enemy was dead and this upright servant of God was ruling over them. All over the empire there was rejoicing among the Jews when the new edict was published. They celebrated with feasting and a holiday (8:17).

With the fear of the Jews in their hearts many people actually wanted to become Jews. Many became proselytes at that time. There were many 'Rahabs' we might say. The people of Jericho were filled with fear of the Jews. Rahab, in faith, actually became one. 'While fear may have been the predominant motive, it was an altogether worthy reason for their action'. There is nothing wrong in fleeing to the Lord for refuge because you want to escape the coming judgment. We should all walk before the Lord in fear.

The Jews should not have been surprised at the Gentiles wanting to worship the Lord with them. The prophets kept on telling them this would happen. *Many peoples and strong nations will come and seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and pray before the Lord (Zechariah 8:22). A people I have not known will serve me (Psalm 18:43).*

It is interesting that it is when God's people are in great distress that they are most effective in their witness. Suffering sharpens the mind as to what things are important in life. The Jews had been fasting and praying earnestly at this time. Their neighbours were watching, as neighbours always do. When you come to church rather than go to the football, when you refuse to worship other gods as Mordecai did, then you will be noticed. You will suffer but you will be noticed and God will bless your witness.

What do people see when they look at the church today? Do they stand in awe or in fear of the people of God? Why not? Because they see Christians living like everyone else. They see Christians disregarding the commands of the Bible. They see Christians compromising with the world. They see church leaders having 'dialogue' with polytheists and pagans, as if there were other gods to be worshipped.

Will you live like Mordecai or indeed like your master Jesus Christ? Will you seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and reject the things of the world.

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