



Esther 9 describes the origin of a 2500 year old celebration among the Jews. As long celebrated as it might be, we may be tempted to place it among the numerous cultural celebrations in the Bible and move on. Yet, as we heard Sunday, Esther 9 provides us with an example of godly celebration, and as such, answers a problem we looked at several weeks ago. In *Impossible People* Os Guinness describes the cultural perspective that we need only pay attention to the new and innovative. In what he calls generationalism, anything of any age or duration is considered antiquated and outdated, and the result is a loss of tradition and the dismantling of family and church. Several factors contribute to generationalism, including *routinization* and *corruption*. As he describes them, consider how godly celebration can not only deter generationalism, but actually build relationships between children, parents, grandparents, and others that display the gospel.

How then do we think through the challenge of healthy tradition in an age that favors incessant change and relentless innovation, and talks of nothing but progress and relevance—and suffers from generationalism? We must begin by openly facing the fact that there will always be tensions and differences between generations. Needless to say, the core reason for Jews and Christians lies in the fall. If sin is the claim to “the right to myself” and to “my view of things,” then the tension between the generations simply plays that out on a generational level. The individual’s *I* is inflated to the generation’s *we*. The prophet’s attack on those who say, “I am, who but I?” is transferred to the generation that claims the same. “We are, and who but we?” . . . *Routinization* is the process through which everything, however revolutionary, fresh, shocking or bizarre, comes to be accepted as routine, taken for granted and therefore ripe to be rejected by the next generation. To be sure, the routine of good habits builds character and virtue. But bad habits build what William Blake called “mind-forged manacles” and at their worst, addictions. I remember a sign in the Australian outback, “Choose your rut carefully. You will be in it for the next 400 miles!” In the same way, success all too easily breeds complacency, a fear of risk and a preference for the comfortable rather than the challenging—and the routines that become ruts.

. . . Another factor aggravating the tensions between the generations is *corruption*. “All power tends to corrupt,” Lord Acton said famously, “Absolute power corrupts absolutely.” But it is not only power that corrupts. Possessions can corrupt too, whether material possessions such as money, property or market share, or immaterial possessions such as status and reputation. With both power and possessions, there is a tendency toward the same progression: moving from accumulation to preservation and then to monopolization, and finally to corruption. The simple litmus test is change and our attitudes to it. When change occurs, those who have the most are those who have the most to lose, and it then becomes obvious whether we have power and we own our possessions, or our possessions have the power and they own us. To those who cling to power and possessions, there is a healthy reminder in Kris Kristofferson’s famous line, “Freedom’s just another word for nothin’ left to lose.”

Impossible People

Discussion Questions

How can routine celebrations (birthdays, anniversaries, Easter, Thanksgiving etc.) help us think about more than just ourselves?

The Jews not only refused the plunder of their enemies, but they also prepared for Purim with fasting. How can saying “no” to one’s own desires as a matter of routine give us eyes to see God’s activity and help us recognize our own values?

Generosity should be a natural response to recognizing God’s goodness to us. How is generosity a part of your celebrations, and how can your generosity point your children, grandchildren, and others to God’s goodness to us?