

Again, that is Esther 9, beginning at verse 20, reading through chapter 10, verse 3. We've come a long way in this series. I remember when we started this, and it seems like it went by a lot faster than the Colossians one. That's because it did. It's a shorter book. But it's been quite the journey. It's been quite a while since we got to resume this series.

I'm sure a few of you may have thought, is he done with Esther now? Is he not going to finish this out? But have no fear. We will finish the book of Esther. It's all good. But some of you might be thinking, well, what's Hunter going to do now? The story seems like it's done. All the major plot points have wrapped up. Haman and his cronies have been taken care of. The story's complete.

What are we going to do now? Well, remember what we've said about this passage. This is a day of the Lord. This is not just the bad guy getting his comeuppance. This is God delivering his people. And when God delivers his people, something else always happens. There's one other thing, and we're gonna read about what that one other thing is in this passage.

Before we do, let's ask God's help in prayer. Father in heaven, as you open up your word, we pray that you would speak to us. Lord, we don't need man's words, we don't need man's wisdom. We need yours, for in your word, there is life. We pray that in Jesus' name, amen. Reading from Esther chapter nine, beginning at verse 20.

Then Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Asuerus, both near and far, obliging them to celebrate the 14th day of the month of Adar and the 15th day of the same month annually. Because on those days the Jews rid themselves of their enemies, and it was a month which turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday. that they should make them days of feasting and rejoicing and sending portions of food to one another and gifts to the poor.

Thus the Jews undertook what they had started to do, and what Mordecai had written to them. For Haman, the son of Abedathah, the Agagite, the adversary of all the Jews, had schemed against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is, Lot, to disturb them and destroy them. But when it came to the king's attention, he commanded by letter that his wicked scheme, which he had devised against the Jews, should return on his own head. and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows.

Therefore, they called these days Purim, after the name Pur. And because of the instructions in this letter, both what they had seen in this regard and what had happened to them, the Jews established and made a custom for themselves and for their descendants, and for all those who allied themselves with them, so that they should not fail to celebrate these two days according to their regulation and according to their appointed time annually. So these days were to be remembered and celebrated throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city. And these days of Purim were not to fail from among the Jews, or their memory fade from their descendants.

Then Queen Esther, daughter of Abahel, with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm the second letter about Purim. And he sent letters to all the Jews, to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Azereus, namely words of peace and truth. To establish these days of Purim at their appointed times, just as Mordecai, the Jew, and Queen Esther had established for them, and just as they themselves had established for themselves and for their descendants with instructions for their times of fasting and their lamentations. And the command of Esther established these customs for Purim, and it was written in the book.

Now King Asuerus laid a tribute on the land and on the coastlands of the sea. and all the accomplishments of his authority and strength, and the full account of the greatness 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? For Mordecai the Jew was second only to King Asuerus, and great among the Jews, and in favor with the multitude of his kinsmen, one who sought the good of his people, and one who spoke for the welfare of his whole nation.

This is the word of the Lord. May he have his blessing to it. What is the purpose of a holiday? That may sound like a very broad question. I mean, after all, we have a lot of different holidays, and every holiday seems like it has a different purpose, and they seem to be adding more. It seems one of the pastimes of the federal government is making new holidays so we can get more of those precious three-day weekends. But there is one theme, one theme that draws all these various holidays together, one thing that we do on every single holiday.

You know what that is? Remember. Remember. The thing that draws all holidays together is we remember something. Think back to last weekend, Memorial Day. What's the purpose of Memorial Day? Well, it's to remember those who gave their all for this country, right? We remember something.

What's the purpose of Christmas, or what was its original purpose? To remember the incarnation, the birth of Jesus. There's all kinds, and so we have all kinds of holidays throughout the year, and what draws them all together is this idea of remembrance. And why are holidays necessary? Why do we have, why do people seem to want to establish holidays? Because we forget.

People have a tendency to forget, and that is certainly true of God's people. Again and again throughout redemptive history, God has had to remind his people of what he's done for them because they forget. What did the people of Israel do in the wilderness after they'd been delivered from Egypt? They forgot the Lord. What did they do every time the judge's cycle repeated in the book of Judges? After the judge died, they forgot the Lord.

Even in the New Testament, Paul and the other apostles have to say, now remember, I told you this, I need to remind you. God again and again has to remind his people because we forget. And that's not just true of the people of God back then. That's true of you and me now.

We forget. I forget. You forget. We forget. In times of trial, we forget that God is sovereign. When temptation comes, we forget about the glory and love of Jesus and how much greater he is than whatever the devil is giving us. And we forget about God's power to save us from that temptation. And in times of even great happiness, in

times of leisure, we can forget God. We can forget his past graces, the hard times he brought us through. And so what do we do about this spiritual amnesia? How do we keep ourselves from forgetting? Well, the good news is we don't keep ourselves from forgetting. God has given us means to remember.

What we see in this passage is God's gracious provision to his people to remind them of the good things he's done for them in the past. How does God in this passage remind his people of the good things he has done for them in the past. There are really three ways. The first way that we see in this passage is through Holy Scripture. Holy Scripture. This is the first and foremost way that God reminds his people. Look at me at chapter 9, verse 20. Then Mordecai recorded these events. Stop right there just for a second. What did he record? Well, the passage tells us. Look at verse 24.

For Haman, the son of Hamedastah, the Agagite, the adversary of all the Jews, had schemed against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast purr that is lot to disturb and to destroy them. But when it came to the king's attention, he commanded by letter that his wicked scheme which he had devised against the Jews should return on his own head, and that he and his son should be hanged on the gallows. In other words, it's a summary of the book.

Well, the book of Esther was likely composed probably a little bit later than Mordecai, given some of the information it gives about Mordecai in chapter 10, especially. It's probably based on the letter that Mordecai wrote to the Jewish people. It's probably one of the major sources for it.

And so why does Mordecai write these events down? Why is he so concerned to write down what God did for his people through Esther and Mordecai? Is it pride? No, he wants the people of Israel to remember. And this is a pattern throughout redemptive history.

What did Moses do after God, through him, delivered his people out of exile in Egypt? He wrote it down. What did the apostles do after Jesus died, rose again, and ascended into heaven? They wrote the four gospels. This is the normal pattern throughout redemptive history. When God acts mightily in miraculous ways to save his people, they write it down. And they write it down for their encouragement.

And this is something we need to remember when we read the scriptures. Yes, absolutely, we need to read the scriptures for conviction. The scriptures search our hearts. We need to read the scriptures for instruction. 1 Timothy 3, all scriptures inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, training, and righteousness. Absolutely true. But in doing so, we should also read the scriptures for our encouragement. They are there also to encourage us. Well, look at Romans 15. Romans 15, four, for whatever was written in former days was written for your instruction, for our instruction, that by the endurance and encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope. Encouragement.

What about Hebrews chapter 11? This great hall of faith as it talks about all these different men throughout history who gave their all for the faith, ones, according to Hebrews 11, of whom the world was not worthy. How God worked through them. What does Hebrews 12 one say?

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses, that is those who testify about the glory and power of God, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. They encourage us. Now how do we have access to the testimony of this great cloud of witnesses?

Holy scripture. Holy Scripture, that's one of the reasons that we focus so much on the reading of Scripture and the preaching of Scripture, because that is what encourages us, that is what keeps us on the way. Think about how much the book of Esther itself has encouraged us, how much it has urged us on. Think back to chapter one. What did we learn there?

Even when corrupt, evil rulers are doing corrupt, evil things, God is still on the throne working out his good and perfect will for his people. What did we learn in chapter two? even when we sin, even when we rebel against God. Though God's providence never excuses our sin, we remain responsible for it. Our sin does not destroy the providence of God, does not destroy his plans. God even works through our sin for his good and perfect will.

What have you been reading in the last few chapters? how even when the evil one himself tries to destroy God's church, tries to destroy the gospel, God can turn that around for the salvation of his people, like he did at the cross, like he did in Esther.

That's encouraging, and we're supposed to be encouraged by the scriptures. That is our primary source of encouragement. But not only does God use holy scripture to remind his people of the good things that he's done for them. He also uses holy days, holy days. Look with me at verse 20 again.

Then Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Asuerus, both near and far, obliging them to celebrate the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and the fifteenth day of the same month annually.

Because on those days the Jews rid themselves of their enemies, and it was a month which was turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into holiday, that they should make them days of feasting and rejoicing and sending portions of food to one another, and gifts to the poor. This is the establishment of the Feast of Purim, one of what became the seven feasts in the Jewish calendar. How do we know it's Purim? Well, the text tells us in verse 26. Therefore they called these days Purim, after the name Pur, because the instructions in this letter, both what they had seen in this regard and what had happened to them. The establishment of Purim. Like I said, this feast was added to the five feasts that were originally given under Moses. Hanukkah later joined it.

And what's interesting about Purim, Purim finds a place at the end of the Jewish year. This is interesting because for bonus points, does anyone remember what the very first feast in the Jewish year is? Passover. It's Passover. So the Jewish year begins with God's great deliverance at their inception and it ends with God's great deliverance more recently in their exile.

It's beautiful. And we know that God blessed this institution of Purim because, for one thing, it's in the Bible. I mean, that seems like it's a pretty good indication. But the other reason is because Jesus himself celebrated it. We know that from John chapter five, verse one. where Jesus goes to a feast. It doesn't mention Purim by name, but given the time of year at which he was going and the order of the different Jewish feasts, most scholars would agree that the feast that Jesus is attending is Purim. This celebration of God's great deliverance through Esther and Mordecai. Beautiful story.

Now, what did you do on the day of Purim? What was the day of Purim about? Well, we can see a few things in this text. The first thing that you did on Purim was rest. Like all the Jewish holidays, it was a special Sabbath. And it was a day to cease from your regular labors and just take time to worship God. It was a day of rest.

The second thing was the reading of the Book of Esther. This was actually, it still is, the most important aspect of the Feast of Purim. To this day, there is almost no exceptions for a Jew attending the reading of the Book of Esther on Purim. At the time of Jesus, for instance, the priests were allowed to stop their sacrificial service to attend the reading of the Book of Esther.

That's how important they found the reading of this book. Because they needed to remember how God delivered them. So the reading of the Book of Esther, this rest, also eating and drinking. It talks about how they feasted and rejoiced. This actually makes a lot of sense given the content of the Book of Esther. The Book of Esther is punctuated by these different feasts. In fact, there are a lot of scholars that would argue that you can outline the entire Book of Esther just based on the feasts. I won't give you all the details on that, but just to give you one example, the Book of Esther begins with two feasts, right?

One feast for the whole Persian Empire, and one feast for just those in Susa. And then how does the Book of Esther end? One feast for everyone, for all the Jews throughout the empire, on the 14th day of Adar, and then one feast for those in Susa on the 15th day of Adar. Feasts.

And finally, the giving of gifts. The giving of gifts, we see that in verse 22. They were sending portions of food to one another and giving gifts to the poor. It was a day to be generous. And why do you think that it would be so important for the Jews at this time to be generous on the day of Purim? Well, two reasons. One, because God had been so generous to them.

Remember where they are. They're in exile. Why are they in exile? Because they sinned. And yet, even though they sinned, even though they were, even though the reason they were in Persia in the first place is because of their sin, God nevertheless preserved them. Because he's generous, he's good.

Also, And we tend to focus on the aspect of Purim, that is, the aspect of Haman's scheme that was most devastating, the killing of all the Jews. But remember, the motivation for the killing of the Jews that the edict had, it was so you could plunder their property. In other words, Haman sent out this decree and said, if anyone wants to kill the Jews and take their stuff, go for it. And the greed was meant to get people to actually do it.

And so the giving of gifts is a bit of an ironic twist on it. Like, you, Haman, wanted to deprive us not just of our lives, but of our property. But now we have so much because of what God has blessed us with, we can give gifts to the poor. Generosity, gifts to the poor.

And all of these things, all of these different aspects of the day of Purim were all to be done in a spirit of thanksgiving to God, remembering the good thing he'd accomplished for them through Esther and Mordecai. What about us? As far as I can tell, I don't think anyone here is of the opinion that we need to continue to celebrate the different Jewish feasts on their calendar. Now there isn't necessarily something wrong with us recognizing when Purim happens and taking some time to remember what God did through Esther and Mordecai, but that's certainly not required. So what sort of holy days do we have?

Well, the one divinely established holy day that we have is Sunday, today. And on Sundays, we remember a deliverance much greater than the one wrought through Esther and Mordecai. Esther and Mordecai was but a type, a shadow. Esther delivered her people from an earthly king and an earthly edict that would have deprived them of their earthly lives.

Jesus, through his death, through his resurrection on the third day, on the first day of the week, on Sunday, delivered us from the righteous edict of wrath against us, accomplished because of Adam, because of Adam's sin. We were a condemned people, condemned to die just as much as the Jewish people were under Haman. Only our decree of death was righteous. And then Jesus came. the perfect son of God, who fulfilled the law that we could never fulfill, kept the law that Adam had broken, and then died the death that we deserved, all of our sins being laid on him, and then the wrath of God laid upon his head. And then, after he takes this penalty for sin, he is raised from the dead. On that first day of the week, declaring his victory over sin, death and the devil offering eternal life to all who trust in him. That is what we celebrate every Sunday. And you know what? That's a gift. That's a gift.

Now, I think often we get, we get so caught up in keeping the Sabbath that we don't recognize it as a gift. It becomes a chore. Now, I'm not saying that we should forget about keeping the Sabbath. or that we shouldn't read the fourth commandment, or that we shouldn't be examining our lives in a way to try to keep the fourth commandment. Obviously, we should. But in doing so, we must never forget that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. It is a gift. It is a good thing God has given us, something we're meant to enjoy.

I think of my parents when I'm when I just got back from visiting home. And my mom, she's out in the kitchen, she's doing this, that, and the other thing. She's making sure everything's ready to go, getting the frying pan out, whatever else. I don't know what she does in the kitchen.

But eventually, my dad has to say, Susie, it's time to relax. Come, sit with us. It's time to enjoy time together. That's what the Sabbath is. It's the gift of rest. It's a time where Jesus comes to Martha and says, Martha, Martha, you are so busy about so many, so preoccupied with so many things, but only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better part and will not be taken from her. Come sit at my feet. It's a gift.

But not only does God give us Sundays, there is a sense in which we may set aside days for Thanksgiving as well. I know most of you don't read the Book of Church Order for your devotional reading. I usually don't either. But there's some good stuff in there.

And in chapter 62, it says, The observance of days of fasting and thanksgiving as dispensations of divine providence may direct is both scriptural and rational. There are times in God's providence where you might experience a particular deliverance from God, a particular good providence. And it is godly and it is right. if you would like to set aside a day to thank him for it.

That's good. That's great. I mean, we do that as a church. What is Reformation Weekend? Reformation Weekend is a time we set aside to remember the good deliverance that God did for his people through the Protestant Reformation. That's great. If you want to do that individually, as a family, or even as a whole church, that's good.

It's a good reminder because we forget. We forget when God does good things for us. We so often, the next day, it's out of our minds. So setting aside a day to remember those things, to thank God for them, that's good. It's a good gift from God. So how does God remind us of the good things he's done for us? Well, he gives us, first and foremost, holy scripture. He also gives us holy days. Third, and finally, he gives us holy legacies. Holy legacies. What is a legacy? It's not a word that's used a lot, especially not in my generation. In my generation, the thing that everyone likes to talk about is longevity, at least right now. Tell you how many YouTube, TikTok videos are of these health experts or self-proclaimed health experts that are telling you all about how you can increase your longevity.

As a humorous example, I was watching one video where a guy was walking around with an umbrella, a UV umbrella, everywhere he went. And they're like, why are you doing that? Oh, did you know like 90% of skin aging comes from UV rays outside? I'm not walking anywhere with an umbrella. Now we laugh at that, but that's in our bloodstream, isn't it? Our culture is obsessed with longevity, trying to stay as young and live as long as we possibly can.

But you know, the greatest generations, the greatest men throughout history usually weren't concerned about longevity. George Washington, when he slept outside in the cold with his soldiers during the Revolutionary War, he wasn't concerned about longevity, was he? No. He was concerned about legacy. Legacy.

Now, legacy, we shouldn't confuse this with some kind of pride. wanting your name to go down in history. There are plenty of serial killers that had that kind of deranged idea and became infamous to do it. That's not what legacy is about. Legacy is about leaving something for your children. It's done out of love for your children and their children's children. It's like leaving someone an inheritance. but it's greater than that. You want to leave them not just a physical inheritance, but a spiritual one. An example to look to, something to inspire them. And that is godly, that is good. What kind of legacies do we see in this book?

Well, we see a couple of very poor legacies. Think of the legacy of Haman, a legacy of infamy. You know, when the Jews read the book of Esther, little kids will write the name of Haman on the bottom of their shoes and every time his name is mentioned in the book, they stamp their foot. Or they burn him in effigy. Whatever else they might do. It's a legacy of infamy. He is known as the one who opposed God's people and was destroyed for it. A legacy of infamy. That's worse than no legacy at all, I'd say. What about the legacy of Asuerus? Look at chapter 10, verse 1. Now, King Asuerus laid a tribute on the land and on the coastlands of the sea.

Now, I don't know about you, but when I read that, I thought, what is this doing here? What is the point of this? This seems like an odd note to insert here. Well, the answer comes when you look at the word for tribute. It means a particularly harsh tribute, a great tax. The idea is that through all the shenanigans that have happened throughout this book, it's cost the court some money.

And now Asuerus needs to get that money back so he can go back to having his lavish parties and getting righteously drunk. In other words, the Asuerus, as I've said before, that we meet in chapter 10, is the same one we met in chapter one. He's a flat character, hasn't learned anything. And what is his legacy? Well, not much. Yeah, he was rich. Yeah, he was prosperous. Yes, he was powerful, but what good was all of that when he's remembered as a drunk, as a glutton, and as a fool? A legacy of, well, not much.

What about two godly legacies? Think of a legacy of Mordecai. Look at verse three. For Mordecai, the Jew, was second only to King Asuerus, and great among the Jews, and in favor with the multitude of his kinsmen, one who sought the good of his people, and one who spoke for the welfare of his whole nation. What a legacy.

One exalted to a high position, but unlike Asuerus, didn't abuse it, instead worked for the good of his people, and is remembered as one who spoke peace to them. That's not how Mordecai began, is it? No, what's the first thing we remember Mordecai saying?

Well, he told Esther, Esther, Esther, it's dangerous to be a Jew here. You need to hide your heritage. That whole people of God stuff, keeping God's law, stop doing that. You need to act like a Persian, protect yourself, border up. That's not how he ended, was it? No, God did a work on him. And in the end, he ended with a godly legacy. Friend, if you don't feel like you've left much of a legacy, it's not too late. It's not. You may still leave a godly legacy.

Think of Mordecai. Or think of the legacy of Esther. Look at verse 29 of chapter 9. Then Queen Esther, daughter of Abahail. One second. Abahail. That's Esther's Jewish father. This is the only time, other than in chapter two, that Abahel is mentioned. Why?

Well, because Esther has embraced her heritage, hasn't she? She's embraced, yes, being queen of Persia, but also being a Jew. Or, verse 32, and the command of Esther established these customs for Purim, and it was written in the book. Esther comes into her identity both as one of God's people and as a queen.

That's not where she started, was it? No. No, she started as a people pleaser. Whatever you say, Mordecai. Everyone loves Esther. And did she start as much of a queen? Not really. She was basically a trophy wife to start with. Picked for her beauty. Afraid to even come into the king's presence lest she be killed. Is that how she ended? No. No, she is remembered for what God made her in the end. She left a godly legacy.

What about you? What kind of legacy will you leave? Moreover, what kind of legacies do you have? What kind of legacies do you possess? How many of you have fathers, grandfathers, great-grandfathers who served the Lord faithfully? How many of you have stories where God delivered them, was faithful to them, was righteous towards them? How many of you have Hebrews 11 stories from your family's past or from a friend's past, someone dear to you?

Treasure those. They are God's means to encourage you. God uses those godly legacies to encourage even you right now. How does God remind his people of the good things he's done for them? Well, he's given them, first and foremost, Holy Scripture, the perfect, infallible word of God that contains the record of his faithfulness. He gives them holy days, days set aside, days to be different, days to remember in all the busyness of life.

And he gives us godly legacies. Men and women, we can look back on. Great saints. Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you for your reminders. Lord, we forget. We are constantly under the strain of spiritual amnesia. Remind us again. Bring to our minds godly men and women from the past who can encourage us. Help us to be in your word that we might be encouraged and help us set aside a Sunday that we might remember the glorious gifts you've given us. Help us, Father, in Jesus' name, amen.