

Sadness Into Gladness!

Our Text: **Esther 9:17-10:3** *This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar. And on the fourteenth of the month they rested and made it a day of feasting and gladness.*

But the Jews who were at Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth day, as well as on the fourteenth; and on the fifteenth of the month they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. Therefore the Jews of the villages who dwelt in the unwalled towns celebrated the fourteenth day of the month of Adar with gladness and feasting, as a holiday, and for sending presents to one another.

And Mordecai wrote these things and sent letters to all the Jews, near and far, who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, to establish among them that they should celebrate yearly the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar, as the days on which the Jews had rest from their enemies, as the month which was turned from sorrow to joy for them, and from mourning to a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and joy, of sending presents to one another and gifts to the poor. So the Jews accepted the custom which they had begun, as Mordecai had written to them, because Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to annihilate them, and had cast Pur (that is, the lot), to consume them and destroy them; but when Esther came before the king, he commanded by letter that this wicked plot which Haman had devised against the Jews should return on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows.

So they called these days Purim, after the name Pur. Therefore, because of all the words of this letter, what they had seen concerning this matter, and what had happened to them, the Jews established and imposed it upon themselves and their descendants and all who would join them, that without fail they should celebrate these two days every year, according to the written instructions and according to the prescribed time, that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city, that these days of Purim should not fail to be observed among the Jews, and that the memory of them should not perish among their descendants.

Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter about Purim. And Mordecai sent letters to all the Jews, to the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth, to confirm these days of Purim at their appointed time, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had prescribed for them, and as they had decreed for themselves and their descendants concerning matters of their fasting and lamenting. So the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim, and it was written in the book.

And King Ahasuerus imposed tribute on the land and on the islands of the sea. Now all the acts of his power and his might, and the 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 to King Ahasuerus, and was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his countrymen.

I want to start with a quote by Chuck Swindoll . . . ***“Most Christians seem to handle pain better than pleasure. For some strange reason we seem to do better with hard days than we do with easy days, with tough times rather than fun times. Stress and anxiety we expect. Reward and relief don’t seem natural. Many of our critics would tell us that it is because we operate so much of our lives under self-imposed guilt. They may be right! We somehow anticipate being***

“punished” for something we’ve done wrong or failed to do. We weep with those who weep much more easily than rejoice with those who rejoice.

Deep within our minds there seems to lurk a bad news mentality. Ever noticed that about yourself? If someone says to you, “I want to talk to you before long about something that’s been on my mind,” what is the first thing that springs to your mind? Is it, Oh, he wants to tell me something good? Not on your life. We expect the worst. It’s much more likely that you’ll find yourself saying, “Why don’t you just tell me now, so I don’t have to worry about it.” Or if someone says, “I’ve written you a letter. You’ll get it in a day or two,” your immediate response is, “Oh, no.” Rather than a letter of affirmation, we expect confrontation and criticism. Why are we like that? It’s as if we resist and run from the positive, since we live in such a negative setting. When will we ever learn to operate in the realm of grace? When will we ever allow ourselves sufficient freedom to really celebrate?

I honestly do not believe God desires us to grind out our existence in a long tunnel of tasks and responsibilities and deadlines. God has given us joy rather than sadness; He has exchanged our tears for smiles. Yet many still find themselves more comfortable mourning and fretting than rejoicing and celebrating.

Why is that? I think I know one of the reasons. I believe we do this because we are much more riveted to the past than focused on the future. And being negative by nature, being bad-news people by habit, we tend to pick out of the past the things that make us sigh and let them bleed into the present so that they color and stain our emotions, robbing us of a sense of humor, and making us prematurely grim as well as gray!

When we look back into the past, life stops being fun. The things that make us sigh are at least four in number: people, events, circumstances, and decisions. Let me, rather quickly, elaborate on these.

First: people of the past. I’m thinking of people we wronged, and people who wronged us. And because of past sadness connected with wrong relationships or unhappy, unfulfilling, unproductive relationships, our present is marred.

Second: events of the past. When we look back, we don’t remember the times of celebration, the great birthday parties, memorable wedding anniversaries, the joys of an evening around the fireplace, the pleasures of family togetherness. You know what we remember? We remember things like earthquakes or tornadoes or hurricanes or floods. We can even state the dates and often the hour!

“Three years ago today at 5:16 A.M., we had a 5.6 shaker.” “Today’s the anniversary of Hurricane Andrew.” “Remember the great flood of ’52?” Granted, these dates have significance for those who lived through the disaster or for

those who lost loved ones. But if we constantly measure our lives only by these events, our outlook becomes fearful and our attitude tends to be negative.

Third: circumstances of the past. Conversations. Difficult situations. Relational barriers. Divorce conflicts. Racial injustices. Standing toe-to-toe with one of our teenagers. A jobless interlude. These serve as perpetual anchors, holding our joy in check.

Fourth: decisions of the past. This may be the worst of the four. There isn't a person reading these lines who hasn't made wrong decisions, hurried and costly decisions, foolish decisions. Who hasn't made weak decisions, who hasn't gone too far . . . or not far enough? So, today we're all hung up because we are snagged on some decision of the past—a decision which, in fact, we cannot change!

The enemy of our souls loves to taunt us with these past failures, wrongs, disappointments, disasters, and calamities. And if we let him continue doing this, our life becomes a long and dark tunnel, with very little light at the end.

Fortunately, God has given us a magnificent solution that can make a difference. I call these fourteen words the secret of celebrating life. . . . forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on. . . .

Philippians 3:13–14 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Do you have any idea what Paul's philosophy will do to your whole life? It will turn you into a much more lighthearted celebrant. You will discover that you mourn and sigh less, and you begin to laugh at life with God by your side."

So, now that the Jews had successfully defended themselves, as God has been defending them, it was time to feast and rejoice in all that God had done! *Why should they stop, and celebrate, and remember?*

- It's totally sad when a nation **(or a church)** forgets its heroes and the providential events that have kept it alive.
- How easy it is for a new generation to come along and take for granted the blessings that previous generations struggled and sacrificed to attain!
- And if we don't know the names and history of our local church, I would encourage us *(when we're allowed after this whole stupid Covid-19 thing)*, to talk to the people who have been here a while and ask them questions about how we got to this point and who was involved.

The bottom line is that the Jews just weren't willing to make that mistake! So they established the Feast of Purim to remind their children year after year that God had saved Israel from destruction!

Let's be certain, Purim is not a Christian festival . . . However, Christians certainly ought to rejoice with our Jewish friends because every spiritual blessing we have has come through the Jews!

- **The Jews gave to the world the knowledge of the true and living God.**
- **Also the Scriptures.**
- **And ultimately the Savior.**
- **The first Christians were Jewish believers, and so were the first missionaries.**
- **Jesus was a Jew who died on Passover, a Jewish feast day, and rose again from the dead on another Jewish holy day, the Feast of Firstfruits.**
- **The Holy Spirit came from heaven upon a group of Jewish believers on a Jewish holiday, Pentecost.**
- **If there had been no Jews, there would be no church!**

John 4:22 You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.

So let's repeat this . . . There is absolutely nothing wrong with *meaningful* tradition!

“The church is always one generation short of extinction, and if we don't pass on to our children and grandchildren what God has done for us and our fathers, the church will die of apathy and ignorance.” Warren Wiersbe
Psalms 34:11 Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

The problem happens when tradition gradually becomes “*traditionalism*”!

Theologian Jaroslav Pelikan said it well, “***Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.***”

- The Jews in the provinces finished their fighting on the thirteenth day of Adar (March) and spent the next day celebrating.
- But since the Jews in Shushan were still defending themselves on the fourteenth day, they didn't get to celebrate until the fifteenth.
- In the beginning, the Jews were united in their victory but divided in their celebration . . . It all depended on whether you lived in the city or the country.
- Mordecai, however, later issued a letter that instructed all the Jews to celebrate on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month:

Esther 9:20–22 And Mordecai wrote these things and sent letters to all the Jews, near and far, who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, to establish among them that they should celebrate yearly the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar, as the days on which the Jews had rest from their enemies, as the month which was turned from sorrow to joy for them, and from mourning to

a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and joy, of sending presents to one another and gifts to the poor.

This still happens today . . .

- The Jews begin their celebration with a fast on the thirteenth day of the month and this commemorates the date on which Haman's evil decree was issued.
- They go to the synagogue and hear the book of Esther publicly read, and whenever the name of Haman is mentioned, they cry out, "**May he be accursed!**" or "**May his name perish!**"
- Children bring a special Purim rattle called a "**gregar**" and use it to make noise every time they hear Haman's name read.
- On the morning of the fourteenth day of the month, the Jews again go to the synagogue, where the Esther story is read again and the congregation engages in prayer.
- The story about Moses and the Amalekites (*Exodus 17:8–16*) is also read.

Exodus 17:8-16 Now Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose us some men and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand." So Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands became heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." And Moses built an altar and called its name, The-LORD-Is-My-Banner; for he said, "Because the LORD has sworn: the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

- Then the celebrants go home to a festive holiday meal with gifts and special foods, and the celebrating continues on the next day.
- They also send gifts and food to the poor and needy so that everybody can rejoice together.
- The name "**Purim**" is the plural of the Babylonian word **pur**, which means "**lot**".
- It originates from Haman's casting of lots to determine the day when the Jews would be destroyed (Esther 9:24; Esther 3:7).
- Even though there was no divine sanction given to this new feast, the Jews determined that it would be celebrated from generation to generation.
- Note the emphasis on teaching the children the meaning of Purim so that the message of the feast would not be lost in future generations.

Why go through all of this? There is a godly patriotism that goes beyond mere nationalism and civic pride and gives glory to God for what He has done. To see the hand of God in history and praise God for His goodness and mercy and to ask God to forgive us for our sins are perhaps the best ways for the Christian patriot to celebrate a national holiday. (*For example Thanksgiving or 4th of July.*)

BUT GODLY PATRIOTISM MUST INCLUDE DEDICATION THAT FOLLOWS THE CELEBRATION!!!

The American political leader Adlai Stevenson said, ***“Patriotism is not short, frenzied outbursts of emotion, but the tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime.”***

So to sum all of this up . . . **The story of the victory of the Jews over their enemies was celebrated in an annual feast, and it recorded in two official letters, then written in a journal, and ultimately included in the Old Testament Scriptures!**

Philosopher George Santayana was right when he said, ***“Those who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it.”***

Mordecai Added To The Hall Of Fame!

Esther 10:1-3 And King Ahasuerus imposed tribute on the land and on the islands of the sea. Now all the acts of his power and his might, and the 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 to King Ahasuerus, and was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his countrymen.

Notice that Mordecai, unlike his predecessor Haman, used his office to serve the king and help the Jews.

Sometimes when people are elevated to a high office, they forget their roots and ignore the needs of the common people . . . Mordecai wasn't that kind of man. Even though his political deeds are recorded in the official annals of the empire, what he did for his people has been recorded by the Lord and will be rewarded.

We also have to ask why did the author mention the new tax program of King Ahasuerus? What does this have to do with Mordecai and the Jews?

Some Bible students think that maybe it was Mordecai who engineered this new system of tribute as a substitute for war and plunder as a source of kingdom wealth. Now that there was peace in the kingdom, the Jews were free to work, earn money, and prosper; and the prosperity of the Jews increased the prosperity of the empire in general.

What Mordecai did was the king that the throne deserved a share in that prosperity . . .

- It was the king who had chosen Esther, a Jewess.
- It was also the king that promoted Mordecai, a Jew.
- All three of them had worked together to save the Jews from destruction.
- Therefore, the people of the empire, Jews and Gentiles alike, had an obligation to their monarch.

But the important thing in this small chapter is that God continued to use Mordecai to help the Jewish people . . . **And He will continue to help them and all of us who belong to Him!**

The exciting drama of Esther is over, but the blessings go right on . . .

- God preserved the Jewish nation so that we today can have a Bible and a Savior.
- Now it's our job to tell the whole world about this Savior and seek to win as many as we can to the Lord.
- We are the King's couriers, and we dare not fail!

“This is as good a time as any to state that one of the great themes of Christianity is triumphant hope. Not just hope as in a distant, vague dream, but triumphant hope, the kind of hope where all things end right. In the midst of the struggles and the storms and the sufferings of life, we can advance our thoughts beyond today and see relief . . . triumph . . . victory. Because, in the end, God does indeed win.

Think that through. All earthly woes, all financial pressures, all emotional trauma, all physical disabilities and handicaps, all domestic conflicts, all international wars and frightening rumors of wars, all demonic oppressions and satanic attacks, All that ends. And we will be with Him who wins! And that means nothing but harmony and unity and victory and joy and praise and delight.

We'll be changed down inside. We'll have new natures. We'll have new minds. We'll have new bodies. We'll have the joy of living forever and ever in praise and adoration of our God.

In the end, God comes out on top. His plan prevails. That's why I love the story of Esther. Not only does it have a great plot that keeps you on the edge of your seat, but when it comes to the final scene, things turn out right. Things end well. God wins . . . “ Chuck Swindoll

And so will all who belong to Him!!!

Let's pray . . .