

Sight Unseen: When God Goes Off the Grid!

Week 6: Set Aside to Celebrate

I. Today, we're finishing up an incredible journey through the Book of Esther. It's been a wild ride and if you missed some of the story, please go back and listen to the podcast or access past messages on the website. And speaking of past messages, thank you Pastor Mike for the powerful word last weekend on Esther 8!

- A. If you want to follow in your Bible, go ahead and turn to Esther 9. We'll be finishing up the story today showing how King Ahasuerus's edict would payout. King Ahasuerus (Hebrew pronunciation) or King Xerxes (Greek pronunciation), but same person we're talking about, had been convinced by Haman to issue an edict annihilating the Jewish race. The king is presented as having a very passive role in all this until he realizes that his queen, Esther, happens to be a Jew. Esther is fueled by faith and comes to the realization that she's been placed in her position for such a time as this. She makes it known that Haman's plan to annihilate the Jews is going to significantly impact the king because Queen Esther is a Jew!
- B. It's difficult for us to put ourselves in the ancient world of the Bible. We emphasize the love of God, which we should. God is love. But somehow, we must expand our definition of love to include the justice and wrath of God. Why? The Biblical characteristics of God, both Old and New Testament, include justice and wrath. Wrath is another way of saying, "divine anger." Do we want a God that turns a blind eye to injustice? I didn't think so. Some things aren't meant for us to fully understand but I do believe a close look at Esther 9 gives us a great insight into how the love of God and the justice of God are not mutually exclusive.
- C. King Ahasuerus's edict giving Haman the power to annihilate the Jews couldn't be overturned. Even though Haman got abruptly voted off the island, the edict still stood. On the 13th day of the month Adar, an edict had been declared that anyone opposed to the Jewish people in the 127 provinces of Persia could legally attack and kill a Jewish person and claim their property as their own. There was no going back on that. So, what options does King Ahasuerus have to protect his queen and the people to whom she belongs? Here's the option:
- Esther 8:11-12 (CSB) [Slide]: 11 The king's edict gave the Jews in each and every city the right to assemble and defend themselves, to destroy, kill, and annihilate every ethnic and provincial army hostile to them, including women and children, and to take their possessions as spoils of war. 12 This would take place on a single day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month Adar.
- D. A few weeks ago, I hosted a chapel for our local hockey team, and I had a few things prepared for the time. Toward the end of our time, I got a sense that I needed to listen and see what questions they had. As Christians, I think we often make the mistake of answering questions that no one is asking. The questions started to fire off and they were really good questions. One of the questions was something like this, "I'm a hockey player who likes to fight, do you think God would still take me?" It made me pause for a moment and think about a response. We eventually discussed how God does give some people a warrior mentality not to aggressively go after people, but to take a stand against evil. Sometimes that means taking a physical stand. So yes, God will take you and not only that, but when we're empowered by God's Spirit to exercise the discipline of self-control, that warrior mentality can be a powerful force for good. Somewhere along the way Christianity got boiled down to taking on the characteristics of a passive hippy. That's an overreaction and a mischaracterization of love. We don't go looking for a fight by any means. We even go so far as to proactively suppress physical altercations, but there may come a time when we have to take a physical stand against evil.
- E. There are some key terms in this edict that need to be highlighted. We read this passage through our western and modern cultural perspective, and we might have a hard time swallowing how God chose to work this out. We might think this is fighting evil with evil which the Bible says to steer clear of. It isn't fighting evil with evil and here's why.

1. Listen to the parameters around this edict:

[Slide]: Assemble and Defend

2. Destroy, kill, and annihilate any army? Nope! Any army

[Slide]: Hostile to them.

3. The king couldn't revoke the edict to annihilate the Jews, but he could publicly announce whose side he is on and send out a new edict that the Jews had the right to defend themselves.

a. My wife, Bethany, reminds us often in our family that the world isn't all rainbows and unicorns. Violence is never the answer to solve a problem. That is emphatically contrary to Scripture, but we do take a stand against evil and sometimes that is a physical stand. Otherwise, evil will prevail if the righteous stand by and do nothing.

II. Throughout the Book of Esther, it looks like God has gone off the grid. Evil seems like it's getting the upper hand and just when Mordecai, Esther, or God's people seem to be at the end of their rope, a solution comes from the unlikely of places. In the face of these uncertainties and no explicit mention of God throughout the book, God works through the obedience of people who are willing to be fueled by faith. People willing to walk by faith not by sight. Everyone can walk through a door that is clearly visible and makes sense. Faith is stepping out into the unknown not knowing how events will unfold but simply taking God at His Word. The theme of the series has been the reminder that it might feel like God has gone off the grid, but He hasn't!

A. In fact:

[Slide]: God is making a way; we obey today!

1. It really is that simple!

9 years after our story began with the king hosting a 180-day party, 5 years after Esther becomes queen and the failed assassination attempt is uncovered by Mordecai, 11 months after Haman is exposed and the edict to annihilate the Jews is reversed, we reach the culmination of the story of Esther.

2. How does the story culminate? Esther 9 tells us:

Esther 9:1-2 (CSB) [Slide]: 1 The king's command and law went into effect on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month Adar. On the day when the Jews' enemies had hoped to overpower them, just the opposite happened. The Jews overpowered those who hated them. 2 In each of King Ahasuerus's provinces the Jews assembled in their cities to attack those who intended to harm them. Not a single person could withstand them; fear of them fell on every nationality.

Continuing in verse 16:

Esther 9:16-17 (CSB) [Slide]: 16 The rest of the Jews in the royal provinces assembled, defended themselves, and gained relief from their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand of those who hated them, but they did not seize any plunder. 17 They fought on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar and rested on the fourteenth, and it became a day of feasting and rejoicing.

3. God provided and preserved His people! Why? It's pretty simple really. God makes good on His:

[Slide]: Promise!

a. God was sight unseen! God seemed to be off the grid, but we knew God was going to make a way before the story even got started! God never fails on His promises! He's a Man of His Word! God made a covenant with His people going all the way back to Abraham.

Genesis 12:1-3 (CSB) [Slide]: 1 The LORD said to Abram: Go out from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt, and all the people on earth will be blessed through you.

b. God renewed the covenant with King David of Israel in 2 Samuel 7:

2 Samuel 7:15-16 (CSB) [Slide]: 15 "But my faithful love will never leave him as it did when I removed it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16 Your house and kingdom will endure before me forever, and your throne will be established forever."

c. God had already sealed the outcome of Esther 1000 year prior when He made the covenant with Abraham and gave another reminder through King David 500 years prior. What do we do when it feels

like God has gone off the grid? We remind ourselves that God has sealed us with His promise and God always makes good on His promises. More about that in a bit.

- d. God made good on His promise that He'd set in motion 1000 years before. Even when it felt like God was off the grid, he put Mordecai and Esther in position, and they made the choice to obey. The edict of King Ahasuerus couldn't be revoked but it could be counterbalanced with a new edict in which the king declared his allegiance to the people of God! Think of all the events that transpired over large chunks of time to bring about the preservation of God's people on the 13th day of the 12th month Adar!

4. God's people responded in the only way that's appropriate to do:

[Slide]: Feasting and Rejoicing

- a. They stopped to look back and show God gratitude for all He has done!
- b. How many times have we been at the end of our rope, groping around in the dark, declaring that God is sight unseen and off the grid, and at the 12th hour, or in this case the 12th month, God opens a door in due time? Thanksgiving and worship go hand in hand. We come before God with our requests, but we do so from a posture of reflection on what He's already done. The Jewish people take a day after God shows favor in the battle to show their gratitude.

5. How do we move forward when God is sight unseen and feels like He's off the grid?

[Slide]: Faith for today comes from God's faithfulness in the past!

- a. That's why thanksgiving can't just be an afterthought. Not just the holiday, but the practice of gratitude. When we reflect on God's faithfulness in the past it firms our faith for the future! Sometimes I feel discouraged and inadequate for the task at hand. Has anyone ever felt that way? Then I stop and look back and realize that only God could have gotten me this far. He didn't get me this far to give up on me now.

6. Mordecai decides that the day of feasting and rejoicing doesn't need to be a one and done. He declares an annual feast named the:

[Slide]: Feast of Purim

- a. The Pur, if we recall, was the name for the lot Haman cast to determine the date of the destruction of God's people. It's like Mordecai was sticking it to the idea that we as humans can drive this idea of fate or serendipity. How foolish? Haman thought he had outsmarted God and yet God had the 13th day of the 12th month Adar surrounded on every side and nothing superseded His Sovereignty or providence.

Esther 9:26-28 (CSB) [Slide]: 26 For this reason these days are called Purim, from the word Pur. Because of all the instructions in this letter as well as what they had witnessed and what had happened to them, 27 the Jews bound themselves, their descendants, and all who joined with them to a commitment that they would not fail to celebrate these two days each and every year according to the written instructions and according to the time appointed. 28 These days are remembered and celebrated by every generation, family, province, and city, so that these days of Purim will not lose their significance in Jewish life and their memory will not fade from their descendants.

- B. These events in Esther were perilous times for God's people. No one particularly enjoys seasons of life when it feels like God has gone off the grid. I get that! But through these events and God fulfilling His promise to preserve and protect His people, God gave the Jewish people a story to pass down through the ages! Purim will be celebrated by the Jewish people in just a few months in March, so the story of Esther and God's deliverance continues to go forth. Make a note in your Bible or highlight your Bible app the part of verse 26 that says:

[Slide]: what they had witnessed and what had happened to them,

1. Here around Tab, we say our mission often:

[Slide]: We push through boundaries to share God's story from Norfolk to the nations!

- C. There are two broad components to God's story.

1. One is:

[Slide]: The Gospel.

a. We share the gospel. The good news that Jesus + Nothing = Everything! That God sent His Son to live the life we could not, to pay the price for sin through His death. The grave could not hold Him and 3 days later Jesus arose bringing with Him the victory over sin and death. We share God's story of the gospel!

2. Secondly, we share how the Gospel is transforming us. When we trust Christ, we are sealed through the power of the Holy Spirit and empowered to live a new life. A life marked by faith! As we give witness to God's faithfulness in our life, we share the story with others. That's what our world so desperately needs! We've got Biblical knowledge oozing out our eardrums and yet there are so few who can give witness to the power of God in their lives! Grandparents, parents, aunts, and uncles, what God stories are we passing along to the next generation. That's what the Feast of Purim is all about and why it's so important that we pause and express our joint gratitude as a people. We have to pass the stories along because it's what sees us through when it feels like God is sight unseen.

a. My family has a bit of an Esther story in our past and it's a God story we share often to remind us of our awesome God. My youngest sister is adopted from Guayaquil, Ecuador and she literally faced annihilation at 6 years old. She was aging out of the orphanage system and would have to survive on her own in a 3rd world country at the age of 7. Not a good situation. Through the providence of God my parents became aware of the situation and began to pray and earnestly seek God's direction. My dad is a pastor too and I remember one night my mom and dad coming home from a ministry event and they'd been "randomly" selected to sit by another couple who was on furlough from.... You guessed it! Guayaquil, Ecuador. That's just one example of many how God orchestrated events as only He can. Those are stories of God's faithfulness that we share as a family that reminds us that God is making a way; we obey today.

D. Does it feel like God is off the grid? God hasn't abandoned us. He's a promise keeping God. How do we know that? He's got us this far; just look back and reflect on His faithfulness. Look what He's done for us in Christ! We've got a firm future! In Christ, He has sealed us and claimed us for all eternity.