

God's Empire Prevails

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[0 : 00] and chapter 8. If somebody's got a page number, please shout it out and I will announce it from the front. 414, page 414, that's the chapter 8.

We're covering Colorado grounds this afternoon, like last week. So what we're going to do is read a chapter and then think about that and then read the next chapter, spend a bit of time thinking about it and then read the final one.

So we're going to move quite quickly, but as it's been all the way through Esther, it's traumatic stuff, so hopefully we can stick with it. But we're going to start with chapter 8, and just as you're turning up, I'm going to pray and then we'll get going.

So let me pray. Blessed Lord, who has caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning, grant that we may hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of your holy word, we may embrace and hold fast the blessed hope of eternal life, which you have given us in our Savior, Jesus Christ.

So help us now, we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, at this point in the story, a key battle has been won. We saw that last week.

[1 : 29] But the bigger war is still unresolved. We've wonderfully seen, haven't we, the defeat of the great enemy of God's people, Haman, the one who only a couple of days earlier had seemed so powerful, so in control.

And suddenly, it all came crashing down for him, as the invisible hand of God brought about his downfall. A great reversal has taken place at the very heart of the Persian government.

And Mordecai, the Jew, he now finds himself in the position that Haman once occupied. You see that at the very start of chapter 8. Haman is gone. Mordecai has been given his house.

It's a staggering reversal of fortunes. But as the camera zooms out from that small conflict between Mordecai and Haman, as the camera zooms out, we remember that there's a whole empire of Jews whose days are numbered.

The edict that Haman had issued, that still stands. It's still valid. There's still that date in the diary. The 13th of Adar. When they will be destroyed, killed, annihilated.

[2 : 45] Men and women. All the Jews in the Persian Empire. So yes, a key battle's been won, but the war still rages. And so we see in this final section of the book that God's people, once under an unjust sentence of death, they end up safe.

Whilst they're bitter and determined enemies, those who are determined to annihilate them, they are justly punished. So we're going to look at this in three sections.

And we'll look at them chapter by chapter. So point one, the first big thing. The rescue of God's people is declared. So we're going to read from chapter 8, verse 3.

The rescue of God's people declared. Then Esther spoke again to the king. She fell at his feet and wept and pleaded with him to avert the evil plan of Haman, the Agite, and the plot that he had devised against the Jews.

When the king held out the golden scepter to Esther, Esther rose and stood before the king. And she said, If it pleased the king, And if I have found favor in his sight, and if the thing seems right before the king, and I am pleasing in his eyes, let an order be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman the Agagite, the son of Hamadathah, which he wrote to destroy the Jews, who are in all the provinces of the king.

[4 : 20] For how can I bear to see the calamity that is coming to my people? Or how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred? Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, Behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows, because he intended to lay hands on the Jews.

But you may write as you please with regard to the Jews, in the name of the king, and seal it with the king's ring, for an edict written in the name of the king, and sealed with the king's ring, cannot be revoked.

The king's scribes were summoned at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan on the 23rd day, and an edict was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded concerning the Jews, to the satraps, and the governors, and the officials of the provinces, from India to Ethiopia, 127 promises, to each province in its own script, and to each people in its own language, and also to the Jews in their script, and their language.

And he wrote, in the name of King Ahasuerus, and sealed it with the king's signet ring. Then he sent the letters by mounted couriers, riding on swift horses that were used in the king's service, bred from the royal stud, saying that the king allowed the Jews, who were in every city, to gather, and defend their lives, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate, any armed force, of any people or province, that might attack them, children and women included, and to plunder their goods, on one day, throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.

A copy of what was written, was to be issued as a decree, in every province, being publicly displayed, to all peoples. And the Jews, were to be ready on that day, to take vengeance, on their enemies.

[6 : 22] So the couriers, mounted on their swift horses, that were used in the king's service, rode out hurriedly, urged by the king's command, and the decree was issued, in Susa the citadel. Then Mordecai, went out from the presence of the king, in royal robes of blue and white, with a great golden crown, and a robe of fine linen, and purple.

And the city of Susa, shouted, and rejoiced. The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honor. And in every province, and in every city, wherever the king's command, and his edict reached, there was gladness, and joy among the Jews, a feast, and a holiday.

And many, from the peoples, of the country, declared themselves Jews, for the fear of the Jews, had fallen on them. Well, we see here in this chapter, that the rescue, of God's people, is announced.

And it's never really in doubt, is it from this point on. And also many, across the whole empire, side with God's people, for fear of what is to come. Now, Esther's request, which she made in chapter 7, we saw that last week, that request, has only been partially, addressed by the king.

Yes, the one who's responsible, for the terrible edict, he's gone. Haman is no longer, impaled on his own gallows. But the edict, is still intact, still remains.

[7 : 54] And that must now, be dealt with. And so, Esther goes again, to the king there, in chapter 8, verse 3. And then in verse 5, she asks the king, let an order be written, to revoke, the letters devised, by Haman the Agagite.

And the king agrees, look at verse 8. You may write as you please, with regard to the Jews, in the name of the king, seal it, with the ring. But notice, this is not, an edict, that permitted, unrestrained violence, on anyone, that the Jews, took a disliking to.

No, that is not what this is. Look at verse 11. The king is, through this edict, allowing the Jews, to gather, and defend themselves. They are permitted, to defend themselves, against attackers.

It's an edict, of self-defense. Mordecai, this decree, it seeks to neutralize, doesn't it, Haman's edict. And therefore, it turns that promise, of destruction, back, on the enemies of the Jews, who are seeking, to destroy them.

And notice the total contrast, in response to Mordecai's edict, compared to Haman's. Haman's edict, all the way back there, in chapter 3. Total contrast, in response.

[9 : 18] After Haman, issued his edict, Mordecai, what did he wear? Sackcloth, and ashes. The Jews, they were in mourning.

And the city of Susa, we're told, was thrown into, absolute confusion. But look at the response, to Mordecai's edict. Look at verse 15. This time, he's wearing, royal robes.

The city of Susa, no longer confused. It shouts and rejoices. And the Jews, verse 16, they had light, and gladness, and joy.

Total contrast, total reversal, to these two edicts. Look at verse 17. In every province, every city, wherever the king's command, and his edict reached, there was gladness, and joy, among the Jews.

There was great joy, isn't there, amongst the people of God, as a decisive victory, has been won, at the very heart, of the empire. With the death, of the great enemy, Haman.

[10 : 20] And this great joy, of this pronouncement, this edict, that's gone out, across the whole empire. It promises, doesn't it, a final deliverance, from their enemies. But this edict, is not only, bringing comfort, to the Jews.

It does do that. It brings great reassurance, great comfort. But it also serves, to provide an opportunity, for many others, to choose their side. Look at the second half, of verse 17.

And many, from the peoples, of the country, declared themselves Jews. For fear of the Jews, had fallen on them. Now remember, at this point, when this edict, of Mordecai, when that is issued, the 13th of Adar, is still a long way off.

It's a few months, down the road. There was still time, to distance yourself, from the Agagite clan. To no longer, describe yourself, as an enemy of the Jews.

But rather, to join with them. To side, we're the Jews. And many do that. So verse 17, tells us. Many, see that the victory, of God's people, over their enemies, is inevitable.

[11 : 34] The writing, is on the wall. Just remember, how it went, for Haman. And for almost, nine months, the citizens, of the empire, knew about, both of these decrees.

They knew about, Haman's edict, and they knew about, Mordecai's. They could choose, their side. Will they side, with, the Agagite enemies, of the Jews, or, will they choose, to side, with God's people?

As Christopher, Ash puts it, there are nine months, of gospel proclamation, before, judgment is enacted. Nine months, before the 13th, of Adar, judgment day.

What would people do? Which side, would they go with? And the fact, that many, declare themselves, Jews. That seems, very sensible indeed, doesn't it?

Their leader, Haman, he's met, a very grisly end. And the people of God, now seem to have, the upper hand. And wisely, many, choose to side, with God's people.

[12 : 42] And this, situation here, very much, mirrors, our own time. Just think about, where we stand. Decisive victory, accomplished.

Peace terms, announced. A judgment day, coming. A very sensible, thing to do, is to side, with God's people. In fact, it's more than being sensible, isn't it?

It's an absolute imperative. Eternal destinies are at stake. Christ's return, it is a foregone conclusion. His victory, is a foregone conclusion.

The rescue, of God's people, has been declared. That is the task, of God's people today, isn't it? Declaring, the gospel, declaring, that the judgment day, is coming. Now, is the time, of gospel proclamation, before judgment, is enacted.

And so, God's people today, as well as rejoicing, as well as rejoicing, at what Christ accomplished, we have a task, to get on with. We are to go about, declaring, peace terms.

[13 : 49] Many, many currently stand, as enemies of God. And it's not too late. We are to call people, all people, to appeal to them.

Appeal to them, to hear, and heed the warning, of the gospel. To hear the peace terms, declared by Jesus, to join his side. It's just what happens here, in Esther.

Nine months, which side? We're going to side, with God's people, or stick, with their enemies? Well, there we have, the first, of our chapters, rescue is declared.

Let's look on, to the start of chapter nine, where we see, the rescue of God's people, delivered. I'll read from verse one, of chapter nine. Now, in the twelfth month, which is the month, of Adar, on the thirteenth, day of the same, when the king's command, and edict, were about to be carried, out, on the very day, when the enemies, of the Jews, hoped to gain, the mastery over them, the reverse, occurred.

The Jews, gained mastery, over those, who hated them. The Jews, gathered in their cities, throughout all the provinces, of King Ahasuerus, to lay hands, on those, who sought to harm them.

[15 : 10] And no one, could stand against them. For the fear of them, had fallen on all peoples. All the officials, of the provinces, and the satraps, and the governors, and the royal agents, also, helped the Jews.

For the fear of Mordecai, had fallen on them. For Mordecai, was great, in the king's house. And his fame, spread throughout, all the provinces. For the man, Mordecai, grew more, and more powerful.

The Jews, struck, all their enemies, with the sword, killing, and destroying them. And did as they pleased, to those who hated them. In Susa, the citadel itself, the Jews killed, and destroyed 500 men.

And also killed, Parshander, and Daphon, and Asphah, and Porath, and Adaliah, and Aradatha, and Parmashtar, and Arizai, and Aradatha, and Vashtai, the ten sons of Haman, the Jew, Haman, the son of Hamadatha, the enemy, of the Jews.

But they laid no hand, on the plunder. That very day, the number of those killed, in Susa, the citadel, was reported to the king. And the king, said to Queen Esther, in Susa, the citadel, the Jews have killed, and destroyed 500 men, and also the ten sons of Haman.

[16 : 28] What then have they done, in the rest of the king's provinces? Now what is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what further is your request? It shall be fulfilled.

And Esther said, If it please the king, let the Jews who are in Susa, be allowed to do tomorrow, also according to today's edict. And let the ten sons of Haman, be hanged on the gallows.

So the king commanded this to be done. A decree was issued in Susa, and the ten sons of Haman, were hanged. The Jews who are in Susa, gathered also on the 14th day, of the month of Adar.

And they killed 300 men in Susa, but they laid no hands on the plunder. Now the rest of the Jews, who were in the king's provinces, also gathered to defend themselves, defend their lives, and got relief from their enemies, and killed 75,000 of those who hated them.

But they laid no hands on the plunder. This was on the 13th day of the month of Adar. And on the 14th day, they rested, and made that a day of feasting and gladness.

[17 : 40] But the Jews who were in Susa, gathered on the 13th day, and on the 14th, and rested on the 15th day, making that a day of feasting and gladness. Therefore, the Jews, or the villagers, who live in the rural towns, hold the 14th day of the month of Adar, as a day for gladness and feasting, as a holiday, and as a day, on which they send gifts, of food, to one another.

We'll pause there. So the start of chapter 9, we fast forward nine months, and we find ourselves on that fateful day, the 13th of Adar.

And that day, which once held such fear for the people of God, it turns out to be a very different sort of day, doesn't it? Look at verse 1, which gives us the headline of all that follows.

On the very day, when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain mastery over them, the reverse occurred. The Jews gain mastery over those who hated them. The victory over their enemies, having been announced and declared, is now delivered.

And it's more than a mere deliverance, isn't it? This is a total reversal of fortunes. And rather than God's people being mastered by their enemies, they have the mastery over their own enemies, total reversal.

[19 : 09] And this was a victory that was never in doubt. Most of the empire we see was in fear of the Jews now. They had heard what had happened to Haman. They had read or heard the new edict.

And again, you see that in chapter 9, verse 2. All across the empire, people were in fear. No one could stand against them. Look at the end of verse 2.

All the officials of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, they helped the Jews. It wasn't only the Jews, was it? They had the full backing of the Persian government.

Astonishing. And so in light of that, in light of the fear that had fallen on the nation, in light of the fact they had the full backing of the government, you really did have to be a very bitter and determined enemy of God's people to still try and carry out Haman's edict, didn't you?

If you were still determined to go ahead with it, you were going against the whole government, all the people of the whole empire. Your chances did not look good if you were an enemy of the Jews that day.

[20 : 20] The great leader, Haman, he's gone. He's history. The Jews had the full backing of the government. But still, some did.

Some did take up Haman's edict. There was bloodshed. On the 13th of Adar, we see that 500 were killed in Susa the citadel.

The sons of Haman too. Another 300 were killed in Susa the following day, after that request from Esther in verses 13 to 15. And in the provinces across the whole empire, 75,000 were killed.

Now that sounds like an awful lot, doesn't it? And it is. But remember the sheer scale of the empire. The Persian empire filled the entire known world.

It was huge. Many, many millions of people. And these were a relatively small number of very determined enemies of the Jews.

[21 : 25] They had every chance to turn, every chance to side with God's people rather than attack. And this reporting of this victory over enemies, it's good news.

The whole empire of God's people were once under an unjust sentence of death. They're now rescued and safe. And those who were killed that day, they weren't innocent bystanders.

They were determined enemies of God's people. And there's no personal gain in all this for God's people other than preserving their own lives.

Note several points in the passage. It says they did not take the plunder of their enemies. They were operating under the very limited conditions of holy war against the enemies of God's people.

You can see it outlined in the book of Deuteronomy. And it's a holy war that finds its fulfillment in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we may wince at these descriptions of bloodshed here.

[22 : 28] But there's far more to wince about in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus has waged the decisive war against sin and evil on the cross on behalf of the people of God.

And he will deliver his people from the final destruction that is coming. There's a day of far more terror than this coming, I can tell you.

And so for us today as God's people, we still await that final victory when Christ will return, that final destruction of our enemies. We still await the conclusion of all that was promised and guaranteed by Jesus' earthly work.

But it's a sure thing. We know that our victor reigns at the right hand of God. He is disarmed and publicly crushed the head of Satan on the cross.

And so we know how things will play out. And the message for us today from Esther is don't doubt what God has promised to do.

[23 : 35] Don't doubt that he will bring to completion what he has started. We as God's people must take hold of, believe, and know with great certainty the deliverance, the great reversal that's been guaranteed for us.

So we are to live with the same joy that is expressed by God's people here. Light and gladness and joy and honor.

because that day is fixed, certain. So, we've seen in the first half here the rescue of God's people delivered, it's been declared.

And then the third thing we see in this final chapter is the rescue and restoration of God's people is to be remembered. So we see here in this final section that God's people are to purposefully and regularly remember his astonishing acts of deliverance and reversal.

Let's read on from chapter 9, verse 20. And Mordecai recorded these things and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, obliging them to keep the 14th day of the month of Adar and also the 15th day of the same year by year as the days on which the Jews got relief from their enemies and as the month that has been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor.

[25 : 21] So the Jews accepted what they had started to do and what Mordecai had written to them. For Haman the Agagite, the son of Hamadath, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them and had cast pur, that is, cast lots, to crush and destroy them.

But when it came before the king, he gave orders in writing that his evil plan that he devised against the Jews should be returned on his own head and that he and his son should be hanged on the gallows.

Therefore, they called these days Purim after the term Pur. Therefore, because of all that was written in this letter and of what they had faith in this matter and of what had happened to them, the Jews firmly obligated themselves and their offspring and all who joined them that without fail they would keep these two days according to what was written at the time appointed every year that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation in every clan, province and city and that these days of Purim should never fall into disuse among the Jews nor should the commemoration of these days cease among their descendants.

Then, Queen Esther, the daughter of Abba Hale and Mordecai the Jew gave full written authority confirming this second letter about Purim.

Letters were sent to all the Jews to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus in words of peace and truth that these days of Purim should be observed at their appointed seasons as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther obligated them and as they had obligated themselves and their offspring with regard to their fasts and their lamenting.

[27 : 09] The command of Queen Esther confirmed these practices of Purim and it was recorded in writing. King Ahasuerus imposed tax on the land and on the coastlands of the sea and all the acts of his power and might and the full account of the high honour of Mordecai to which the king advanced him.

are they not written in the books of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? For Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Ahasuerus and he was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brothers for he sought the wealth for his people and spoke peace to all his people.

So in this final section Mordecai and Esther they issue letters commanding that God's people throughout the whole empire remember this remarkable turning of the tables.

God's people have enjoyed a complete reversal. Things have turned for them from sorrow into gladness. What once seemed a day of certain death has turned into abundant life a day of feasting and gladness.

It was a day that they were to remember. And so yes God's people here they were able to celebrate to remember this great reversal a great deliverance a great salvation.

[28 : 41] But remember the bigger picture. They were still at this point they were still scattered across the Persian Empire weren't they? They were still in exile.

A small number had returned back to the promised land in Jerusalem but for many of God's people many of God's promises were just yet to be fulfilled weren't they?

And that is why this act of remembrance was just so important. It would be easy even with the memory of this great reversal to be easy to look around in later generations to be discouraged by all that wasn't yet fulfilled.

And that is the situation for God's people particularly for us in the West isn't it today? We look back on even greater reversals than this. We look back on the greater deliverance that this smaller deliverance made possible.

if God's people had been wiped out here then there would have been no Messiah. But we look back on what these events anticipated but don't we still get discouraged?

[29 : 54] We are waiting for Christ to bring about the final consummation of all that he promised. We're waiting for that. We wait for the glorious new creation when we will live forever with him.

But we don't see that yet do we? Instead what we see is a culture unpicking itself tearing at the very fundamental realities of our existence.

The givens of the Judeo-Christian values are going. Who knows how things will play out in the decades ahead? God in many ways seems absent.

Easy to get discouraged. Which is why it's so vitally important that we remember that we bind ourselves and our offspring and all who join us.

Vitally important that we without fail remember all that God has achieved for us in that great reversal on the cross. It is remembering the past that gives us hope for the future.

[31 : 03] It's forgetting the past which causes us to lose hope isn't it? And so it's so vital that we do meet together and that when we do our focus is on the scriptures God's final word on his finished work.

It reminds us of the work that God has done and points us to what is still to come. We have wonderful promises don't we? But we do need reminders at least I do.

So one key implication from this final section is that we are not to give up meeting together for it's here and on a church on a Sunday it's here that primarily that's how God strengthens his people isn't it?

It's how he equips us for the week ahead. We must not stop meeting remembering all that he's done. Well our time's gone and we need to draw things to a close but Esther it really is a book for our times.

It is a book to lay hold of to read to absorb when the forces arrayed against us seem all powerful when to laugh may be the only way to stay sane.

[32 : 29] We need to grasp its message its message of astonishing reversals great rescues by the invisible God working through the seemingly normal.

And for us to grasp that message it is not as one way to put it it is not to whistle in the dark or to pretend that things are other than they are.

It is rather to clothe ourselves with the truth that God is sovereign and to be reminded that he is always with us even when he seems most absent and that nothing nothing can ultimately thwart his purposes.

that is the great encouragement from the book of Esther. Let me pray and we will finish. Our Father God we do thank you for this book.

We thank you for the great drama it contains. But more than that we thank you for the great reassurance it gives for your people today to know that no matter how awful things may look.

[33 : 45] You are at work. You have been at work decisively to bring about a great reversal for your people. And thank you that we can know with confidence how things will turn out.

And so help us to be a remembering people. A people that constantly look back to that great reversal on the cross. And together we may live with hope and joy of what is surely to come.

So please help us. Help us to be a people that walk not by sight but rather by faith. Help us in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen.