

# Sorrow Into Joy

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     During World War II, in the concentration camps, the book of Esther was treasured by the Jewish prisoners.

It was treasured uniquely because of the hope that it offered, a kind of unparalleled hope to people in such a predicament.

If you look at the book of Esther, it shows us one of the major themes, that even though we cannot see or hear or touch God, God is always here and that He's always with us.

More than that, though, the book of Esther shows us that God is uniquely able to turn sorrow into joy. He's the kind of God who can take weeping and mourning and turn it into laughter and singing.

And so it offered tremendous hope to people who looked around and all they knew was weeping and mourning. It gave hope that one day that might give way to something much more beautiful.

[ 1 : 1 4 ]     And this is a promise that is repeated all throughout Scripture in different ways, that God is the kind of God who can turn sorrow into joy. Which, if you're anything like me, if that's true, you realize that's a really big deal.

If we're dealing with a God who can actually turn sorrow into joy, if we're dealing with a kind of God who plans to do that in our lives and in this world, that one day all sorrow will give way to joy, that all weeping and mourning will one day give way to laughter and singing, that as the Psalms say, one day even the trees themselves will clap their hands, and the rivers and the mountains will sing with joy.

If we're dealing with that kind of God, that's a pretty big deal, because it means that there is nothing in this world that this God cannot handle.

That there is no evil or suffering that is outside of this God's ability to bring redemption and renewal. And it means that we, knowing that, can face anything.

It means that we can even face death, knowing that one day that sorrow will be turned into joy. So, of course, the very crucial question is, is this actually true? Are we dealing with such a God?

[ 2 : 3 0 ]     And that's why we've been looking at the book of Esther in more detail over the last few weeks. We've been asking this question of what kind of God are we dealing with? And is this really true, what the Psalms say, what Scripture says about sorrow and joy?

And so we're going to look this morning at the last few chapters of Esther. We're going to look at chapters 8, 9, and 10. Obviously, for the sake of time, we couldn't read all of it aloud, so we read a selection from this section.

But really what we're going to do is we're going to draw some of the themes that we've seen throughout the book of Esther here together, so that hopefully when we leave, we have a strong sense of what Esther is really trying to tell us about God.

And what we're going to see is this. How do we know that God can turn sorrow into joy? Because we see here that God can do three things. Our God is the kind of God who can sustain all things.

He's intimately involved. He's the kind of God who can use anyone, the most unlikely people. And then number three, He's the kind of God who can repurpose evil.

[ 3 : 39 ] So let's unpack that, but first let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word. And I thank you for the prayer that we prayed a little while ago, that we would be able to not only open your word and read it, but that we would mark it and that we would learn it and that ultimately we would inwardly digest it so that it becomes a part of our bones and our marrow and our DNA so that we breathe it out, Lord, even as we take it in.

And so we pray this not only that we might know it better, but that we might be changed by it. We know that your word is your means of doing your work in us, your spiritual surgery in us.

And so I pray that you would meet us where we are with your word this morning, that we would become more like the image of your son, Jesus Christ. And it's in His name that we pray. Amen. So the first thing that we see in Esther, and particularly coming to a head in these three chapters, is that God is the kind of God who can sustain all things.

You know, I think when people think about the concept of divine intervention, often we think that the natural world is sort of going along like a clock. It's sort of ticking along, following all of the physical laws that govern it, and God is kind of up in the sky somewhere.

It's like He has a kind of heavenly observation deck, and He's just sort of sitting there on the rail, just kind of watching us, you know, watching the world play out. And then something bad happens, and people pray.

[ 5 : 10 ] And every now and then God just kind of says, you know, okay, I think I'll intervene here. And so God sort of dives over the rail, and He kind of swoops in like Superman, and He suspends the physical laws of the universe, and He miraculously stops the bad thing from happening.

And then when all is well, He kind of flies back up to His heavenly observation deck, and continues to keep an eye on the world. And I think that maybe we don't articulate it that way, but when we think about divine intervention, I think a lot of us think that way, that things are cruising along, and every now and then God kind of steps in.

But what the book of Esther does is essentially blow that whole idea apart. What's the crisis in Esther? If you're just joining us for the first time this morning, just a brief recap.

The crisis in the book of Esther is this. The Jews are facing annihilation. At this point in history, some of the Jews are returning from exile in Babylon.

And some of the Jews have gone back to try to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, but many other Jews have stayed in Persia, and they've stayed, some of them, at Susa, which is the capital where the citadel was, where the Persian royalty lived.

[ 6 : 21 ] And so this is a story that focuses on those Jews in Susa. And there's a man there named Haman, who is the vizier. He's the second most powerful man in the Persian Empire.

And Haman has this ancestral hatred of the Jews. And so Haman manipulates the king into setting a day through a royal edict, setting a day on which it will be legal to kill and plunder all Jewish households.

And the way they determine this day is by casting lots or a die, like rolling dice, and the word for that is poor. And that's very important. We'll come back to that.

So they roll the dice, and they determine the day. On the 13th of the month of Adar, it will be legal to exterminate the Jews and plunder their homes. That's the crisis.

So how does divine intervention happen? In the book of Esther. Is there a moment where God gets angry about this and hurls a lightning bolt at Haman, and he's just a smoking crater in the ground?

[ 7 : 28 ] Right? No. And if you're anything like me, there are times when you've probably prayed that about a certain situation. Right? God, would you just hurl a lightning bolt and make my life easier? Right? Or maybe I'm just an awful person.

I don't know. But that's not what God does. Here's what divine intervention looks like in Esther. Years ago, a young Jewish girl named Esther just happened to win a beauty contest and become queen.

Years earlier, Mordecai, her adoptive father, just happened to uncover an assassination plot and save the king's life, giving him favor, which ultimately led to Mordecai displacing Haman as the new vizier and taking over Haman's house and taking over Haman's title and all of his wealth.

This just happens to have occurred. So here we are looking at the Jews. They're facing annihilation, and yet we have two Jews who just happen to be in positions of tremendous power and influence, and so they're in a position to actually do something about it.

And so as we come into chapters 8 and 9, we have a predicament. Right? You have Esther, you have Mordecai, they come to the king, they say, please revoke the edict. The king says, well, there's a problem.

[ 8 : 50 ] Persian law states that once a royal decree has gone out, it cannot be revoked, even by the king. It's irrevocable. And so they're stuck with the decree. The 13th of Adar and the annihilation of the Jews stands.

Well, Esther and Mordecai enact a brilliant solution. They issue a counter-decree. And the counter-decree goes out not only to all of the Persians in their languages, but also to the Jews in their language.

And here's what the counter-decree says. On the 13th of Adar, if anybody attacks you, you are legally empowered to defend yourself. You can attack back. And events play out.

And along the way, a terrible fear falls on the Persians. And a lot of times when a terrible fear falls on the enemies of God's people, that's a sense that God is at work in the hearts of their enemies.

And then many of the Persians, in advance of the 13th, convert to Judaism because they fear for their lives. Right? It's kind of a self-preservation conversion.

[ 9 : 55 ] And then when the day comes, the Jews win a massive victory. They just happen to be victorious. And so the question is, at what point does God intervene in the story?

And of course, the answer is, there is not a single moment in the entire story when God is not intervening. He is present in every detail.

Every seeming coincidence. Every twist and turn, God is there intervening. And so what we see is that God's deliverance in Esther is the result of this long sequence of improbable events and morally questionable events, to be totally honest.

I mean, Esther has random coincidence. It has lots of misguided motives. It has outright war. And yet somehow through all of that, through all of that ambiguity and all of the evil and all of the death and all of the stuff, somehow God's deliverance comes.

And it's as though it had always been planned that way. Right? So I don't know how many of you play chess. I love to play chess, and my son, Maddox, is now getting into chess, and it's really fun to play him.

[ 11 : 14 ] And I'm not very good, and I think it's probably pretty soon he's going to be able to beat me. But if you've ever played chess against a really good chess player, like a master chess player, and I don't know if you've ever done this, but you sit down at the chess board, and you have all of your pieces, and you are free to make whatever move you want.

Right? But it really doesn't matter, because you're going to move your pieces, and no matter what you do, no matter what you throw at your opponent, if you're dealing with a true master, your moves are going to be folded in to a sequence of events that will lead to checkmate.

And it will feel like you were causing your own defeat. Right? It will feel like you were contributing, helping your opponent to defeat you. That's what it feels like. Right?

Man, I'm so glad you moved there. Thank you. Whoosh. Right? And that's what it feels like. And what we're meant to take from Esther is that with God, it is much the same way. We as human beings can throw whatever evil, whatever rebellion, whatever suffering.

We can throw whatever we've got, all that we've got at God. And it doesn't matter. At the end of the day, all of those things are going to be folded in to a sequence of events that will ultimately lead to the new Jerusalem.

[ 12 : 30 ] That will ultimately lead to a world that is healed and restored. That will ultimately lead to a world where every tear is wiped away. That will ultimately lead to a world where there is no more sickness or sorrow or suffering or death.

Because those things are no more. Whatever we throw at him, it gets folded in to a sequence of events that leads to the new Jerusalem. And so what this shows us is God is not up there on some heavenly observation deck.

He's not looking over the rail and just every now and then deciding to kind of dip in and do something in the world of the humans. That's actually a very pagan idea of God.

It's the way all the pagans have thought about their gods for centuries. The Bible says something very different. That our God is infinitely more powerful. There's an amazing place in the book of Acts where it says that in Christ, we live and move and have our being.

Now we don't have time to unpack that verse completely. It's incredibly profound. But it's essentially saying that there is not a single molecule anywhere in the universe that is not held by the hand of Christ.

[ 13 : 41 ] There's not a molecule anywhere in the universe that exists outside of the mind of Christ. Our God is sovereign.

Which means he participates in the most mundane details of our lives. And so before we move to the next point, I just want to draw out an implication here. And that is this. That means that everything in your life has meaning.

Everything is significant. There's not a single detail in your life that is not somehow meaningful in God's economy. So what that means is that our most mundane, ordinary details of life, the kind of daily rhythms that define our daily lives as boring, as uninteresting, and as insignificant as they may seem, God is present in them.

If you have the eyes to see it, you can begin to see and witness the miraculous in the mundane. So that's the first thing. The second thing, just to push it a little further, this means that our interactions have significance.

And I'm borrowing this from Marilyn Robinson's Gilead, if you've ever read that. Some of the pastors just re-read it and discussed it this past week. But there's a passage in Gilead that talks about the fact that every interaction with another person creates an opportunity for us to ask, what is the Lord doing in this moment in my life and in this person's life?

[ 15 : 15 ] And, you know, that becomes extremely significant when you have an interaction with a person that's negative. You know, if somebody's rude to you or they're hostile toward you, you know, if you're anything like me, you know, with my lightning bolt reference earlier, you know, if somebody's rude and hostile to me, my first impulse is to be rude and hostile right back.

And I'm ashamed to say sometimes I do it. That's my first impulse. But what if you're starting from the assumption, what if you're starting from the assumption that God is present in this moment and that God has sort of sent this person into your life?

They're a kind of emissary of the Lord. They don't know it. But God is using them. And what if your first question is not, how can I blast this person back the way they just came at me? What if your first question is, how is God intending to use this person in my life at this moment?

If nothing else, maybe this is just an opportunity for me to demonstrate some of the grace that I claim to believe in. Right? But the point is, if you're starting from that assumption and you're believing this is not a random chance encounter, but rather God is in this somehow, it sets you free to make different choices.

It sets you free from the impulse to simply be rude back. It creates new possibilities that weren't there before. So in a way, God's determining, governing presence actually frees you and creates options that you would otherwise not have.

[ 16 : 35 ] So God is the kind of God who sustains everything. He's intimately involved in life. And because of that, this brings us to our second point, because of that truth about God, God is the kind of God who can use anyone.

He can use anyone, which is a great comfort to me. If you look at Esther and Mordecai, one of the great things about them is, they're clearly doing the work of the Lord.

They are clearly God's agents of deliverance. And yet the best thing about them is, they're not clergy. Right? They're not religious professionals. They don't wear collars.

Right? And that's important because I think that even at this day and age, we still tend to divide the world into sacred and secular. And when you think about vocation, you know, you think about there's sort of the sacred work, pastors and missionaries and sort of, you know, Christian nonprofit work.

And then there's sort of the secular work, the secular jobs. And from time to time, I talk to people who want to be ordained, and part of why they want to be ordained is they feel like they're doing kind of meaningless secular work, and they want to do something that is meaningful.

[ 17 : 47 ] They want a sacred job where they'll feel like they're really a part of what God's doing in the world. And again, Esther just kind of blasts that whole idea apart. This point comes from Ray Bakke, but he talks about the fact that there are three books in the Bible that show us people who are participating in the work of urban renewal.

And he says these are his three heroes of urban renewal. You have Esther, I'm sorry, you have Ezra, you have Nehemiah, and then you have Esther. And if you look at them, they're quite different, right?

Ezra, if you read Ezra, Ezra's role was to teach the word of God to the people. So Ezra's doing pastoral work. He's teaching God's word.

He's teaching people how to know God, how to have a relationship with God, how to live what all this is for. And listen, that's crucial work. You cannot have renewal without the proclamation of the word of God.

But then you look at Nehemiah. Nehemiah's not a pastor. He's not clergy. He's not a priest. Nehemiah is essentially a kind of community organizer. He's an urban planner.

[ 18 : 57 ] You know, Nehemiah goes, he gets a government grant. He comes back. He gets everybody in the neighborhood involved. And then he literally begins to lead people in the physical rebuilding of the city from the inside out.

They've moved into the neighborhood, and things are starting to turn around. They're fixing it up, right? They're rebuilding the wall. They're making it a place that is safe and habitable where people can live, and it's going to be a good home for all people.

But he's not a pastor. And then you have Esther, right? Esther is not even in Jerusalem. Esther is in the halls of power. Esther's back in Susa, in the government.

Right? She's working among the elites where culture is formed. She's working in the place where decisions are made that affect the lives of everybody in the entire empire. And that's where God has put Esther.

Right? And she is working against systemic injustice. Esther is working against oppression. Esther is working to improve the lives of the most vulnerable, which at this point in history were the Jews.

[ 20 : 03 ] Right? And so if you step back and you look at how God is working to rebuild, you see all of these people playing all of these different roles, and all of them are equally important.

Right? When it comes to the healing of the world, it is an all-hands-on-deck situation. Everybody plays a part. So we need pastors.

We need missionaries. Absolutely. But we also need business people. And we need medical professionals. And we need realtors. And we need administrators. And we need trash collectors.

And we need waiters. And we need artists. And we need musicians. And we need government workers. And we need parents. We need all of these different people following their vocations. And so this brings with it some good news and some hard news.

Okay? So I'll give you the good news first. The good news is God can and will use everybody. So there should not be a question in your mind of can God use a person like me?

[ 21 : 06 ] The answer is yes. And probably God is already using you. You may not see it. But God can and will use everybody. Right? All hands on deck. Everybody plays a part in the healing of the world.

Here's the hard news. It may not be in the way that you choose. And that's hard. It may not be in the way that you choose. We don't know what Esther's life plan was.

We're not told much about her. Her prior to where the story begins. But we know something about the culture. And we know that probably Esther is a young Jewish girl.

Her aspiration was probably to marry a nice Jewish boy and to have some kids. And to be a mom and raise a family. Because she lived in a culture where motherhood was seen as one of the highest aspirations.

It was seen as evidence of God's blessing in your life. You had a lot of kids. So that's probably what she wanted. And that wasn't her future.

[ 22 : 08 ] That's not what God had for her. You know, she ends up getting taken and forced against her will to go to the Citadel. To participate in a beauty contest that she never would have done otherwise. And then she gets put into this position of power that she never asked for.

You know, it's interesting. God had different plans for Esther. He chose to use her not as a mother. Which, you know, there are many other women in the Bible.

That's how they serve God's purposes. As moms. But for Esther, that wasn't the case. God chose not to use her as a mother, but as a queen. And as a result, she saved countless thousands of lives.

If you live long enough, your life plans will be derailed. In one way or another. So you might as well just accept it now.

It's going to happen. And the longer you live, the more likely it becomes. You know, nobody gets to live out their perfect plan. I think of my friends here in D.C.

[ 23 : 10 ] They're not a part of Church of the Advent. But my friends, their dream, like maybe Esther's was, was to have a bunch of kids. And that didn't happen. And that was brutal.

And it was something that they grieved. It's something that was incredibly confusing to them. And yet when that happened in their lives, they began to ask God, okay, if that's not what you have for us, God, then what do you have for us?

What is the purpose that we're called to play? And so these friends of mine became foster parents. And they became foster parents to a sibling group who came to live in their home. And they were coming out of a very abusive and traumatic situation.

One of the children, when he showed up in the middle of the night, had cigarette burns on his head. And now they're in the process of trying to legally adopt these kids to get full custody so that these kids can grow up in a home that's safe and consistent with parents who can take care of them.

And, you know, I think as I look around the room, there are people here who are suffering currently with miscarriage. And grieving that loss, they're suffering with infertility that they can't explain.

[ 24 : 24 ] Some people have tried everything and nothing seems to work. I know people whose life goal was to go and to get a graduate degree, but they've been rejected from the programs that they want to go to.

I know that there are people here who have lost their jobs and are having to maybe reconsider their entire career path. I know people who have gone through really painful breakups. I know people who have lost friends.

I know people who have struggled through really painful, brutal divorces. All of these are situations where you look and you say, I had this plan and now I'm over here and I have no idea how I got here.

And it's incredibly painful. Right? And on the one hand, you need to grieve those things. They are awful and they're painful and they're hard and you need support and we need to be a community that can grieve and lament with people who are grieving.

Who can weep with those who are weeping. There's a place for that. But somewhere in there, I also encourage you to begin asking God the question, even if you're sort of shaking your fist at God.

[ 25 : 32 ] You know, there are great psalms if you want to rage out at God. Read some psalms, pray those to God, rage out at God. When you're tired of shaking your fist, when you've exhausted some of that anger, God can handle it.

Then say, okay, God, what do you have for me? What purpose do you have for my life? And begin to open yourself up to the fact that God might be doing something unexpected.

Something that you didn't choose. And you know, it may not make sense. You know, I tell the story about my friends. I think they have a strong sense of God's purpose in their life now, adopting these kids.

For you, it may not be that cut and dry. It may not make sense. And it may not make sense until the new creation. Why things played out the way they did. It may not make sense until the other side of new creation. You know, it makes me think of the fact that when a film is being shot or when a high-profile television show is being shot, a lot of times they'll bring in the actors.

And the actors are given their lines. They're given their scenes. And they give their lines. And they do their scenes. And they put all themselves into it. But a lot of times they're doing that. But they don't really understand the larger story or even how their scene fits in.

[ 26 : 41 ] Because a lot of times they'll shoot scenes completely out of order. So you have really no idea. You just kind of play your part. And so a lot of times actors have to wait, like the rest of us, until the series drops.

Or until the film is released. And then they sit down in the audience and they say, Oh, okay, that's the story. And that's how my scene fits in. And I do think that one day, when we're all in the new Jerusalem and the new creation, there will be a moment where we're able to look back.

And you'll be able to say, Hey, there's my scene. That's how I fit into the story. And I think that's going to be true for every single one of us.

Because God is the kind of God who can use anyone. And he chooses to use everyone. So if this is the case, if God sustains all evil, and if God can use anyone, then what about the problem of suffering and evil?

What does God do about that? And what we see is that God is the kind of God who can repurpose evil. Now what do I mean by that? The end of Esther describes how Esther instituted a feast.

[ 27 : 50 ] And this feast was a feast that celebrates the deliverance of the Jews. And they named the feast Purim or Purim. And that's very significant. Because the word Purim is the plural for poor, which means die or dice.

So Purim literally means dice. If you remember when Haman convinces the king to set a day when all of the Jews will be annihilated, they roll dice.

Thirteenth of Adar. That's the day. So the whole story up to this point is hinging on a dice roll. It's hinging on something that seems completely random, completely left to chance.

Until you get to chapter 9. Chapter 9 gives us the ultimate resolution of the whole story. If you want a summary of Esther in a nutshell, here it is. Chapter 9, verse 1.

On the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain mastery over them, the reverse occurred. The Jews gained mastery over those who hated them.

[ 28 : 56 ] That's amazing. And the point that we're meant to draw out of that is this. Life seems random. Life seems like a dice roll. And it can very, very, very, very often seem that all of this is meaningless.

It's all left to chance. It's all just a roll of the dice. But there is a God. And he is in control. And our destiny is not left to chance.

Our future is not left to the roll of the dice. Our future is in God's hands. Which has major implications for how we think about evil and suffering.

Major implications. Johnny Erickson Tada was 17 years old. She was athletic. She was smart. She was on her way to college. She was swimming in the Chesapeake. And she dove into some water.

And she didn't realize how shallow the water was. And she broke her spine. And from that point forward, for the rest of her life, she was paralyzed from the shoulders down. And ever since then, she had to wrestle with that decision to dive into that water at that particular moment in her life.

[ 30 : 08 ] And you can imagine all of the second guessing that would have gone into that. And she outright says that even though she was a Christian at the time, her faith was not strong enough to handle that accident.

And so she was plunged into a time of deep despair and depression like probably any of us in this room would be as well. But then she says she began to dig more deeply into God's Word.

She began to read it and mark it and learn it and inwardly digest it. And her faith began to grow. And then she began to spend years and years thinking and praying about evil and suffering, not only in her own life, but in the world around her.

And she began to realize this, and I'll quote her, Because God reigns over all, nothing happens outside of God's control and plans.



Even if we can't grasp it this side of eternity, our sufferings have a place in God's plans. Which means we don't suffer in vain.

[ 31 : 10 ] Our sufferings have meaning because God uses them for His purposes. Now that may strike some of us as comforting. It may strike many of us as disconcerting or even upsetting.

But what she's trying to say is that suffering is not a dice roll gone bad. It's not like you're just rolling the dice and you've got a bad roll. You've got a bad hand. It's not meaningless and random.

Somehow, mysteriously, our suffering fits into God's purposes. Now that doesn't mean, and she's quick to point out, that doesn't mean that God likes suffering.

As she says, and this is admittedly mysterious, Sometimes God allows what He hates to accomplish what He loves. And you hear this, and the way we receive that kind of thing is going to hinge on this.

It's not going to comfort us as long as we are focused on trying to understand God's motives. Because we never will. We will never understand the why.

[ 32 : 18 ] Here's what Johnny says. She says, real satisfaction comes not in understanding God's motives, but in understanding God's character. What kind of God are we dealing with here?

What is the heart of God? And that's why we have to look to the cross. That's why we have to look to the cross. If you read Acts chapter 4, the early Christians, when they looked at the crucifixion of Jesus, they clearly saw it as part of God's foreordained plan.

In verse 28 it says, They describe Herod and Pilate and all of the people gathering together against Jesus. And here's what they say. All these people are conspiring together against Jesus to do whatever God's hand and God's plan had predestined to take place.

So the thing that happened to Jesus, the crucifixion, it was truly evil. It was awful. It was brutal. It was the greatest victory of evil over God's Son. Right?

It was the greatest act of evil ever committed. And yet simultaneously, it was the greatest victory, the greatest good ever accomplished.

[ 33 : 27 ] God repurposed that evil. And Johnny says in another place, It is as though Satan intends a particular thing in one way and God intends the same event in another direction.

So behind Satan's scheming, you have the sovereign hand of God repurposing that evil for his greater good. So because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the early Christians knew this.

There is no evil that can befall us out of which God cannot bring a greater good. There is no evil that may befall us out of which God cannot bring a greater good.

And if you look at that chapter, that truth is what filled them with boldness to preach the gospel in the face of persecution. Because they knew that whatever they might suffer, it was well within the sovereignty of God.

And God could use it. So this is how we know that our God is the kind of God who can turn sorrow into joy. The kind of God who can fulfill that great promise of scripture.

[ 34 : 36 ] Because he's the kind of God who sustains all things. He's intimately involved in his creation. He's the kind of God who can use anyone. And he's using all of you. Even if you can't see it.

And he's the kind of God who can repurpose evil. No matter how awful some things seems. No matter how random. No matter how meaningless. No matter how far it is beyond our ability to understand or fathom.

When we look to the character of God on the cross, we recognize that somehow it will become part of the renewal of the world. And lead inevitably to the streets of the New Jerusalem.

As I said at the beginning of the time together, you know, the Jews treasured the book of Esther. It gave them incredible hope. And of course the Nazis were bent on extinguishing all hope.

And so when they began to realize that Esther was giving the Jews hope, they began to confiscate all the copies of Esther. And any Jewish prisoner caught with a copy of the book of Esther would be executed on the spot.

[ 35 : 41 ] And so the Nazis confiscated all the copies. But it didn't matter. You want to know why? Because the Jews began to write new copies from memory. Because they knew it by heart.

And that's, I believe, how we're meant to share in this hope. That it becomes so part of our blood and our bone and our marrow and our DNA.

That even if we don't have it in front of us, we breathe it. We emanate it. Let's pray. Lord, I thank you for your word.

And I pray that as we come to your table in a little while, you would take these words and make them flesh. And that we would take that flesh and that blood into our bodies.

And that you would spiritually make real in us the truths that we are contemplating now. That they would become a part of us. That they would strengthen us.

[ 36 : 41 ] That they would deepen our faith. That they would transform the way we see and make sense of our suffering. By looking at the suffering of your son, Jesus Christ.

And it's in his holy name that we pray. Amen.