

Esther 9 and 10

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Date: 04 June 2023

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[0:00] Morning, everybody. Get those coughs out now. Yeah, well done. That was a real invitation.! It's wonderful to see you this morning, here in person or watching at home.

! We're finishing our series in Esther today. I hope you've enjoyed it as much as I have. If not, come and tell me afterwards and why. That would be great. Hopefully, if you're sort of teenage, then you will have noticed that there's a sheet, because there's no grid today. There's a sheet that you can use to follow along and fill in.

Some of you guys have indicated that you'd love to meet after the service, maybe on your own, to just chat through what you've heard and what that means for you. So the lounge has been set aside for you guys to do that, if you want to do that after the service. And we'll try and make sure that none of the little ones gatecrash the party. So feel free to do that afterwards.

Why don't we turn to Esther 9 and 10? We're going to hear it read in just a minute. You can have your Bibles ready at page 507. There's a saying, isn't there? You are what you do, not what you say you'll do. Have you come across that? I was thinking about that, and it made me think of this. Do you know where that is? That's a sign on Upper Hale Road, which says no lorries. The sign's been up a while, but I haven't noticed any changes.

You see, it's one thing to put a sign up, and it's another thing to actually make it happen. So the lorries continue to trundle down Upper Hale Road, making all the houses wobble on their foundations. See? Because you are what you do, not what you say you'll do.

[1:48] I wonder which of our leaders or celebrities or whoever else you follow, who would you, of them, who would you trust to do exactly what they say? And nothing's big enough to get in their way. How many election promises do you think get turned into policies that actually achieve the effect that they're supposed to? How many managers have you had at work who are able to do exactly what they say they will do and never get foiled by corporate policy? Which of your teachers has never gone off sick just the minute you wanted to talk to them? Which person can say to you, I will never leave you. Never. And follow through. And the trouble is, we're all a bit like this, aren't we? How many of you are in friendships where you've said to the other person, yep, don't worry, I'll sort that out? And sort of still haven't a few weeks, a few months later.

What about parents? This is a common experience for me. I'll say, yes, I will play with you. Don't worry. This week, I will definitely play with you. Or that toy that you brought me about three months ago. Yeah, I will fix it. I will. Still haven't.

We're finite, aren't we? And we're fallible. It's just the way human beings are. And we do it even in our relationship with God. I said I was going to spend more time in his presence, but I haven't.

I said I was going to be more regular at church, serving there, coming to community group. But I'm not. I said I would let God into every part of my life. Yes, even that one.

But I haven't. I said I'd let him into that relationship. But I didn't. I said I would stop that sin. But I'm still doing it.

[3:59] And we've been seeing in Esther, haven't we, as we've been learning to trust the unseen God, that that book speaks into the situation where we feel God is absent because we can't see him.

So it's the same question we're asking him, really. God, you said you would do this. But where are you? Is there no one who does what they say they will do?

Always, without exception. Esther 9 and 10 shows us that there is one person who does what they say they will do, and that's today's message.

What God says, God does. And that's good for everyone. Let's hear it read. Esther chapters 9 and 10.

Esther 9 and 10, which you will find on page 507 of the church Bible. Esther 9. Chapter 9. On the 13th day of the 12th month, the month of Adar, the edict commanded by the king was to be carried out.

[5:21] On this day, the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them. But now the tables were turned, and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them.

The Jews assembled in their cities, in all the provinces of King Xerxes, to attack those determined to destroy them. No one could stand against them, because the people of all the other nationalities were afraid of them.

And all the nobles of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and the king's administrators, helped the Jews, because fear of Mordecai had seized them.

Mordecai was prominent in the palace. His reputation spread throughout the provinces, and he became more and more powerful. The Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and they did what they pleased to those that hated them.

In the citadel of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed 500 men. They also killed Parshandata, Dalphon, Aspata, Purata, Adalia, Aradata, Parmashata, Arisai, Aridai, and Vesata, the ten sons of Haman, the sons of Hamandata, the enemy of the Jews.

[6:54] But they did not lay their hands on the plunder. The number of those killed in the citadel of Susa was reported to the king that same day.

The king said to Queen Esther, The Jews have killed and destroyed 500 men and the ten sons of Haman in the citadel of Susa. What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces?

Now what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? It will also be granted. If it pleases the king, Esther answered, Give the Jews in Susa permission to carry out this day's edict tomorrow also and let Haman's ten sons be impaled on poles.

So the king commanded that this be done. An edict was issued in Susa and they impaled the ten sons of Haman. The Jews in Susa came together on the 14th day of the month of Adar and they put to death in Susa 300 men but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

Meanwhile, the remainder of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also assembled to protect themselves and get relief from their enemies. They killed 75,000 of them but did not lay their hands on the plunder.

[8:30] This happened on the 13th day of the month of Adar and on the 14th day they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy.

The Jews in Susa, however, assembled on the 13th and 14th and then on the 15th they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy.

That is why rural Jews, those living in villages, observed the 14th of the month of Adar as a day of joy and feasting, a day for giving presents to each other.

Mordecai recorded these events and he sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Xerxes near and far that they should celebrate annually the 14th and 15th days of the month of Adar as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies and as the month when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration.

He wrote to them to observe the days as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor. So the Jews agreed to continue the celebration they had begun doing what Mordecai had written to them.

[9:58] For Haman, the son of Hamadatta, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them and had cast the purr, that is the lot, for their ruin and destruction.

But when the plot came to the king's attention, he issued written orders that the evil scheme Haman had devised against the Jews should come back on his own head and that he and his sons should be impaled on poles.

Therefore, these days are called Purim from the word poor. Because of everything written in this letter and because of what they had seen and what had happened to them, the Jews took it on themselves to establish the custom that they and their descendants and all who join them should without fail observe these two days every year in the way prescribed and at the time appointed. These days should be remembered and observed in every generation by every family and in every province and in every city.

And these days of Purim should never fail to be celebrated by the Jews nor should the memory of these days die out among their descendants. So Queen Esther daughter of Abihel along with

Mordecai the Jew wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter concerning Purim and Mordecai sent letters to all the Jews in the 127 provinces of Xerxes kingdom words of goodwill and assurance to establish these days of Purim at their designated times as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had decreed for them and as they had established for themselves and their descendants in regard to their times of fasting and lamentation.

[11:49] Esther's decree confirmed these regulations about Purim and it was written down in the records. King Xerxes imposed tribute throughout the empire to its distant shores and all his acts of power and might together with a full account of the greatness of Mordecai whom the king had promoted are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Media and Persia Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Xerxes preeminent among the Jews and held in high esteem by his many fellow Jews because he worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the welfare of all the Jews.

Thank you John and Carolyn. Have you seen this before? Started off as a line in a film the Hunger Games series and it's kind of seeped into our cultural language hasn't it?

May the odds be ever in your favour it's kind of a way of saying you know best wishes good luck hope it works out well and in the films if you know them the powers that be actually make sure that the odds are stacked they were already in someone's favour and this is Haman isn't it?

Stacks the odds in his favour and then he rolls the dice remember from the previous chapters he casts the lot he's so certain of his victory that the only thing he's willing to roll the dice on is which day which day is it going to happen but can he control how the dice land?

And the answer is no because the first thing that we see in our passage here is that God the unseen God turns the tables you remember where we've got to in the story?

[13:40] The Jews had their victory with the defeat of Haman and they had their freedom with the publishing of the law that said they could defend themselves against anybody who attacks them and now the day has dawned because God has acted through his representatives you remember Mordecai and Esther the representatives of his people and because God acts through them verse 1 here the tables are turned see Haman is so sure of himself that he rolls the dice and they land on the table but what does God do?

Hands under the table table turned over so verse 2 the day dawns and God's people use their freedom to defend themselves and to destroy their enemies and no one can stand against them it all sounds pretty bloodthirsty doesn't it this passage but we need to notice a couple of things we notice that they destroy only those who hate them and those determined to destroy them that's how they're described in this passage and even though the edict that Mordecai sent out which had to match the one of Haman completely even though that edict allows them to destroy women and children and take plunder there is no mention of women and children being killed there is no mention of plunder being taken in fact specifically it says three times they didn't touch the plunder which is a phrase that probably actually included the women and the children in those times so who is being destroyed here it is only the men who don't join

God's people because of course that is loud it is only those who refuse to remain neutral despite all of the months of warning that they've had but who still insist on attacking God's people who hated them and on those men their own evil comes back on their own heads on those people the unseen God turns the tables and what we've seen what we've been seeing all along here sort of comes to a climax God's people are transformed aren't they do you remember the beginning of the book they're afraid to say his name in public afraid to say God's name in public here at the end of the book we find them openly defeating evil in God's name Esther who goes from being a scared girl to being a real queen continues to intercede for her people doesn't she why does she go back and ask for more time to finish the job that her ancestor

Saul failed to finish and what about Mordecai Mordecai goes from being the fly in Haman's pie to being transfigured as we saw last time and in this passage twice it's mentioned that he goes on to greater and greater glory does it remind you of anybody from despised sitting outside the gate rejected to glory and power at the right hand of majesty and authority it's Jesus isn't it God is turning the tables he's transforming his people and when God turns the tables it's not for revenge or profit that's not what God's people are about we've been seeing all along God wins the spiritual battle which of course has consequences for people here on earth but he does that so that all can be free so the law of freedom was proclaimed and anybody was welcome to join

God's people to become a Jew so that they too can be free how do we fight that battle today then it's an important question isn't it which lots of people have got wrong in history if you look at Ephesians 6 where we went to before to explain what's going on in this struggle it's not against flesh and blood but against rulers and authorities the powers of this dark world and spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms so what are we called to do put on the full armour of God what is that armour the belt of truth the breastplate of righteousness feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace taking up the shield of faith which is to put out fire not start it the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God that's how we fight this battle how do we know it's a spiritual battle well in this passage the clue is in the name of Haman's ten sons and what the commentators tell us the ancient near eastern scholars tell us is that these ten names were actually demonic titles so what had

[18:47] Haman done he'd recognised his allegiance to the dark forces by naming his sons after them spiritual battle and when God turns the tables we're saying very clearly this is not a justification for hatred and humiliation of people because they are people it is a foretaste of the final judgment which Jesus will enact not us and why are we given that foretaste to inspire us to trust Jesus to trust God not to incite violence so what we're saying is this is good news for all people the fact that evil will be totally rooted out is good news for us all because it means we have hope that wrongs will be righted won't they and good will be rewarded and best of all everybody's invited verse 27 chapter 9 this celebration is for the

Jews and all who will join them every good story has twist doesn't it a reversal satisfying comeuppance why do we love that so much why do we go for that in a story it's because it reflects something real and universal something that is true on a deeper level than just story there is a great reversal in history Jesus' resurrection is the great reversal of the law of death isn't it that is the day that Satan thought he had won by having Jesus killed and God turns the tables by raising Jesus to life once more and glorifying him and so Jesus' death becomes the very thing that gives us life and freedom and you can be a part of that story can you imagine how wonderful it will feel on the last day when Jesus the judge returns

Jesus the saviour returns and the tables are turned on everything that is wrong and evil God is in the business of turning over tables no matter how hopeless it looks how unlikely it seems in that situation in your life that good will come and that God will prevail he's in the business of turning tables and our trouble is of course that we're looking at the table instead of looking at him we need to look at him see there are no random results in our lives there are only results the significance of which we cannot see which are part of the plan that we are too small to detect but God has told us about in scripture see because the unseen God can turn the tables we as Christians can say not may the odds be ever in your favour but that the odds are already and ever in our favour the unseen God turns the tables but secondly what God says God does now when we read a book this is generally what we're interested in isn't it the end because that's where the excitement happens the very last page but in Esther did you notice it's not really like that did you feel that this last sort of chapter in a bit of an anti-climax maybe a little bit boring after the high drama of the chapter before did you notice that style becomes a little bit more official log entry and a bit less thriller kind of repeats itself doesn't it on this date the Jews were delivered and then they celebrated and they established these dates for the celebration of their deliverance because on these dates they were delivered and Esther and Mordecai recorded that on these dates they were delivered and established these dates for the celebration of their deliverance see where

I'm going here it kind of repeats a bit we get it already it's not exactly page turner but the bible authors inspired by the holy spirit were not boring they did this on purpose because this just records that what god says would happen happened simple as that that is the point what god has decided will happen and when god has decided it the results are really just a matter of a file entry they're just detail when he says it it is done that popular podcast the rest is history it's only half the story because the full truth is that when god has spoken the rest is history when he promises it happens signed sealed delivered done deal no doubt nailed on have you got it what god says god does so when he says in chapter 4 verse 14 deliverance will arise for god's people it does and when in the last chapter that we were dealing with god proclaims the law of freedom to his people and anybody who will join them they are free the whole point of that stylistic term is to drum home that what god says god does simple it's not an election promise that never happens it is a reality that god brings about when he undertakes to change mordecai and esther which we've seen happening in the book

when he promises to change you and me he will because god does what he says now he couldn't do this if he was human could he and one way that god is comfortingly different from us is illustrated in this diagram haven't had a diagram from me for a while so i thought it's time here we go this is me there's what i say i'll do and there's what i do and there is some overlap isn't there give me some credit i sometimes do what i say and this is god saying and doing intention and action they are one for god so what the theologians call the actus puris it is part of his nature it is the way he is and he cannot deny himself what god says god does and it's been that way since the beginning hasn't it think about genesis before creation god speaks and it is and so jesus is the word see he's the word that god speaks to us and he is the word made flesh at the same time because his being stands behind his promises what he does flow out of who he is so we're talking about not contingency to use a big word we're talking about certainty what does that mean well it means simply this whether i can do what i say i will do depends doesn't it depends on a whole lot of things my health circumstances whether i decide to change my mind but whether god can do something that he says he will do does not depend god does what he says and this is incredibly freeing if we take a minute to think about it here's how i

[27:12] think sometimes have i done enough am i safe am i saved i said i would follow jesus till i die but can i do it and the answer is to all of us who think like that yes you are safe yes you are saved because it doesn't depend on your ability and my ability to say something and then do it it depends on god's ability to do what he says he will do and what god says god does and it's also great because it means that we don't need to see him that's the whole thing in esther isn't it god is unseen that's the feeling in our lives sometimes we can't see him but we don't need to because if what god says happens then we just need to know what he has said and here's what he has said and it would help to hear him say it over again maybe and that's where preaching comes in isn't it we don't need to see him maybe best of all it means this isn't down to us again

I think subconsciously a lot of us think well if I don't do it then it won't happen if I don't do this thing in church then it will be undone and then what about god's plan or if I don't do this thing at my work then it won't happen and what about god's plan for my workplace and my workmates then but we don't have to carry that burden if god does what he says he will do yes he may use you and yes like Esther you should take a step forward even if you can't see him working but it doesn't depend on you because it's god's plan and what god says god does what should we do we should remember our rescue the people originally reading Esther lived later on so this book of

Esther was for them a manual of why and how they should celebrate the feast of Purim they're learning how to rejoice how to remember their rescue that's what we should do and the passage actually gives us a number of ways to do that did you notice last week when we started reading chapter 8 verse 15 and he mentioned this as well there's a motif of feasting and rejoicing isn't there right from the announcement in Susa there's feasting and rejoicing and that carries right on through these chapters too we live in a time when Jesus has won the war we saw that last week he has proved incidentally that what God says God does and the battle isn't over but we can still look forward to feasting and joy when he returns how by celebrating the great reversal by celebrating resurrection day what day is resurrection day well of course it's Easter

Sunday but actually it's every Sunday that's why as Christians as God's people we meet on a Sunday because that's the day he was raised Sunday is our day of joy and feasting so how do we remember our rescue come to church and what do we do when we're at church we look back to the victory over death the great reversal in the way that Jesus taught us and the way that Jesus taught us to remember his death and to look forward to joy and feasting in the future is the Lord's supper isn't it and we publicly identify with him by participating in it just like the Jews in Esther that's how we remember our rescue what did they do God's people the Jews during this time of joy and feasting do you notice twice in these verses it says they gave each other gifts and not just to God's family actually the first reference says gifts to one another but the second reference says they gave gifts to one another and all the poor so how do we remember our rescue we give gifts of love and service to one another in the church outside the church and thirdly did you notice as we went through that this feast was set up and every time the feast is mentioned there is a mention of children and families as well this feast was to be for all generations and it was to be celebrated in family and it was to be handed down to descendants verses 27 and 28 if you're looking for it so we remember our rescue very simply by teaching it to our children Deuteronomy 6 20-21 teach these things to your children when your son asks you what is the meaning of these things you say to him

this is about the

[32 : 38] Lord leading us out of Egypt out of slavery saving us and it's happened again hasn't it in Esther you can look back and we can say this is son daughter this is about God saving us and then we can look at the cross and we can say son daughter this is about God saving us so we teach our children that's how we remember our rescue the point of Purim was feasting wasn't it rejoicing in the fact that God controls the roll of the dice and that what he says he does that he's promised eternal justice and safety to everybody who trusts in him if you're not a believer here I just want to ask you do you have any prospect like that is there a fair reckoning that you can rely on at the end where the wrongs get righted and the wounds get healed and justice is served have you got a rescue to remember is there a reason for joy and feasting forever have you got anything like this to pass on to your children anything that goes beyond

I really wish you have a happy life the God who does what he says invites you to join his family invites you to join the feast and he says in the words of Jesus I am the resurrection and the life the one who believes in me will live even though they die and whoever lives by believing in me will never die do you believe this amen let's pray father we thank you that even though you are unseen your word tells us teaches us that you turn the tables on your enemies on evil so that there is hope for us all and we thank you that that's supremely true in the cross the great reversal where you prove that what you say is what you do and we look forward Lord to the time when Jesus returns Lord where wrongs are righted where evil is finally defeated for all time and we pray for your help to trust you until that time even when it seems like you are not there and we ask that in Jesus name amen Thank you.