

Celebration of God's relief from the enemy

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[0 : 00] Oh Lord, we thank you for revealing yourself to us through your word. As we open your book today, your word, your Bible.

! We pray that we would hear your holy voice. We ask that your Holy Spirit would be at work, opening our ears to hear. And may our hearts be open to receive you, Lord. Lord, we ask that by this work that we be transformed into your likeness. We pray there would be much joy amongst us as we do this. Pray that you would help me and protect me, Lord, and the human things of myself would drop away. And your word would be proclaimed true and properly, Lord. Be with me now. Be with us now, Lord, I ask. In Jesus' name. Amen. Okay. It's very strange being in front of everybody like this again.

[1 : 06] It's not Zoom. It's like Zoom, but real life. So today's talk is called Celebrating Victory. So as a church, as I've said a few times, we're going through the book of Esther.

And today we reach its conclusion. This isn't a picture of the England football team. It is a picture. It is a picture of the England football team. I don't know what happened there. So this is, does anybody know when this was? Young man. How about a round of applause for that guy? 1966. So this is a picture of the England football team after winning the World Cup in 1966. Do anybody know? Can anybody tell me?

What are these people doing? The young man at the back. They're holding the trophy. That's wonderful. A round of applause for that young man.

[2 : 08] And what would we call this joyful thing that they're doing? What are they doing as they lift up their fellow Edom Rose? Big round of applause for that young lady.

Celebration. They're celebrating. Clue's on the page. It is. A clue is on the page. Well spotted. Thanks for that.

So celebrating is a natural response to victory, isn't it? When we win, when we feel that we have a victory, we celebrate.

It's built into us. And particularly in football. Not that I know this. I don't really follow football. But in football, when victory happens, people clap their hands and they sing.

And they jump up and down. They hug each other. Some people even go as far as crying, don't they? I've seen it on the TV. Tears streaming down their face. Probably the only time you'd see me crying at a football game is if I couldn't find the exit.

[3 : 09] But there we go. Different strokes for different folks. So England won the World Cup in 1966. So let me ask you a question. Have we, have people forgotten about this victory?

Have they forgotten? No, no. People still remember. Apparently, there are people that still remember. Three lions on their shirts.

Jules Rimet, still gleaming. Remember, no singing. COVID restrictions. Here are some more things remembered in the famous song.

The tackle by Moore. And when Lineker scored. Anybody know the next line? Bobby belting the ball.

And Nobby dancing. I don't know who Nobby is. I'm sure he was a wonderful chap. He's a wonderful chap, baby. So if anybody is unfamiliar with this vocabulary in the term Jules Rimet, still gleaming, the adjective gleaming means to shine brightly.

[4 : 30] And this line is referenced in that moment where Bobby Moore lifted up the trophy, which was gleaming or shining. Interestingly, this trophy, which was called the Jules Rimet trophy, was originally known as the victory trophy, before being renamed the Jules Rimet trophy after the French man.

Très bien. So 55 years later, people are still singing this football anthem, aren't they? I hear it just this year, all the time. And this is exactly what our text is about today.

It's about an anthem of victory. It's about celebrating God's victory. And you can tell I haven't had to click forward slides in a little while.

So here's a roadmap of the text tonight. So we're looking, like I say, at the last section of the book of Esther, which closes our window into the story of Esther and Mordecai.

As we see these joyful celebrations known as Purim being celebrated by God's people and established as a regular event.

[5 : 45] Now there's three things that I think are the nucleus of what God has to say in this text.

And these are outlined in verses 20 to 22. And these three points are, when do God's people celebrate? What do God's people celebrate?

And how do God's people celebrate? So we're going to be focusing and looking at these things primarily. Verses 29, sorry, verses 20.

That should be 29 to 32. No? 23 to 28. Oh, yeah. I've missed a section on my notes.

I do apologize. So these three points are given more detail in verses 23 to 28. So we see the fine details of the when, the what, and the who.

[6 : 50] The text gives us some additions to these points. Verses 29 to 32, we get the Queen's stamp of approval on the celebrations.

And then chapter 10 gives us a final observation of Mordecai. Since we heard from Mark last week, the Jews had begun a celebration of remembrance because they had been saved from death.

Here's a short reminder of where we are in the story. God's people are situated in the Persian Empire, controlled by King Xerxes.

The king's former prime minister, Haman, are plotted to kill all the Jews, all of God's people throughout the provinces of King Xerxes, which range from Ethiopia through Egypt and all the way to India.

That's a massive, massive area. But God raised up opposition to Haman from God's people, the Jews. We have Esther, who became King Xerxes' queen.

[8 : 01] And Mordecai, Esther's cousin, who was an official to the king and in a spectacular role reversal, has now taken Haman's place as prime minister.

And Haman was executed. However, Haman's decree, authorized by King Xerxes, stating that God's people were still to be executed, was still to go forward because the king could not cancel it. The king was powerless to cancel the decree that he himself authorized. So the king authorized another decree by Mordecai. It said that God's people may now lawfully defend themselves against their enemies and against death.

The state was with them. Haman had failed. God had intervened and he used Esther and Mordecai to bring about salvation for his people.

And now begins the time of victory celebration. And this brings us to verse 20 in chapter 9.

[9 : 16] So if you do have Bibles with you, please open them up to Esther chapter 9. So if you've been following the story so far, if you know the book of Esther well, you'll know that the king had his people record every significant event that happened in books known as the Chronicles.

As we open our text in verse 20, we see Mordecai was doing this very same thing. He was recording these current events. In this case, it was probably these celebrations that were being taken place by the Jews.

If you remember back to chapter 6, we observed King Xerxes as he had things from this book of Chronicles read back to him when he couldn't sleep. In my last sermon, I liken this to a Facebook activity, updating his status on Facebook.

But there was no such privacy for the Chronicles. There was no careful crafting of the Chronicles. This was to be a public declaration of truth.

Mordecai, as he was documenting the victory celebrations for God's people, he would have been doing so knowing full well that many people who follow him will be reading this truth.

[10 : 42] In many ways, this book of the Chronicles was a testimony to God's love for his people and his power in overcoming his enemies.

We've read of many battles and many unpleasant things in the way that this has happened.

And I have to say that I don't think we should be afraid of admitting that God has overcome his enemies in the way that he did. God is the creator of all life.

He is the creator of heavens and the earth. And our God is a perfectly righteous judge who strategically protected his people from genocide.

There was war. It wasn't nice. God used the sinful human capacity for war to bring about peace and joy for his people.

[11:39] I think that's something we can celebrate. Verses 21 to 22. Mordecai, after recording the events of these celebrations, sent letters to all of God's people throughout the king's empire with instructions.

These instructions were to continue the celebrations annually. But several things must be observed in doing this. Now, as we said earlier, there's three main aspects to our text.

And they are outlined, all outlined in the first two verses, verses 21, 22. As a quick reminder, they are when do God's people celebrate?

what do they celebrate? And how do they celebrate? So firstly, when are we to celebrate? So it's to happen on the 14th and 15th days of the month of Adar.

That might sound a bit confusing. I was a bit confused by that at first. This period is to be the anniversary of their redemption. And Adar is simply a month in the Jewish calendar.

[12:58] In terms we are more used to, it's to happen once a year by our regular Gregorian calendars that will fall around February or March. So Mordecai is instructing the Jews, plural, together.

He's saying, remember remember regularly that they all together have been saved from destruction. So why would he be saying this?

Why would he be needing to tell people remember regularly? Humans forget, don't we? Our minds are small. My mind is small. And they wander very easily.

Sometimes your mind will wander for five minutes. Other times it will be for months on end. If I'm at my computer and I'm trying to work and there's a window and there's trees outside, forget about it. My mind's out there running up and down the trees with the squirrels. I have a very short attention span. So there is human weakness, isn't there, when it comes to remembering.

[14:09] But we can take steps. This is what's being said. We can take steps to encourage not just ourselves, but each other and be active in the process of remembering together.

Anniversaries are a very helpful way to do that. So, hands up if you've had a birthday or are going to have a birthday at some point this year. That should be everybody.

anyway. See, Corian was very quick to put a hand on. Exactly. So anniversaries are a common thing, aren't they? They're a good and easy thing to remember.

They should be. They should be. So verse 28 tells us that these celebrations were to continue in every generation.

that there should never be failure in celebrating this time and that the memory of these days should not die out.

[15:16] In other words, don't forget what God has done for you and keep celebrating it. Keep remembering.

So that's the when. That's my first point. When were the Jews to celebrate? My second point is what?

What are the Jews to celebrate? As we said, God had allowed his people to lawfully protect themselves so that they may strike preemptively.

I love that word. And defensively to gain the victory. That sounds wonderful when you put it in those terms, doesn't it?

They strike preemptively. They gain the victory. You know, war is still war. And death is still death. And it's really important that we make the distinction over these events.

[16:26] This distinction that this suddenly, it didn't suddenly turn killing into a happy thing that can be glorified and celebrated and done over and over again.

I've been blessed in my life knowing a number of people who have had experiences with war. I can tell you, if you ask any veteran soldier about their experiences, nine times out of ten, they won't even want to talk about it, let alone celebrate it.

I have a particularly good friend who's quite a bit older than me and he served in Vietnam. He had only this to say about his experience.

I'm paraphrasing things here to keep things a little bit more appropriate. He said, I don't know what's going on with my slides. He said, it was intensely horrible and a waste of life.

I ask you, does that sound like something worth celebrating? No, that doesn't sound like something I want to celebrate.

[17 : 43] So if the battle is not what the people are celebrating, what God's people are celebrating, what are they remembering here? Well, beginning of verse 22 gives us the answer.

Relief from their enemies, the rest from their enemies. God's people are remembering the result, the rest, the end of the fight.

This was a celebration of being free from the enemy and free from the sentence of death. Verses 24 to 25 issue a reminder of the events that led to these celebrations taking place.

the enemy who had planned total ruin and destruction for God's people was defeated. His plans had come back on him and he reaped the very thing that he was sowing.

Galatians 6 says this, do not be deceived. God is not to be mocked. Whatever a man sows, he will reap in return.

[18 : 57] The one who sows to please his flesh from the flesh will reap destruction. But the one who sows to please the spirit from the spirit will reap eternal life.

And so the text goes on. Verses 24-26 remind us that Haman had decided the day of destruction for the Jews by casting lots.

It's not known exactly what this looked like. But we can think of it like rolling a dice. Or drawing straws. When people pulled a short straw, it's that kind of idea.

It's a random thing to happen to determine an outcome. Same principle. The lot being the thing that was to be cast or thrown was known as pur.

The plural would be purim. So many pur would be purim. And so this holiday of celebration was named purim.

[20 : 10] For Haman had cast a lot for his own destruction by plotting against God and his people. So what else was there to be remembered?

What else would they celebrate him? The day sorrow was turned to joy and mourning to celebration. It's interesting that we have two very similar terms right next to each other.

You could almost mistake them for the same thing. This is my personal opinion. I'm going to say that there seems to be two very slightly different thoughts here.

sorrow and joy. Sorrow and joy are something deeply personal, aren't they?

Sorrow is so intense and such a personal thing for us to experience. And the same with joy. It's a very personal, intense thing. mourning and celebration also are as intense but they tend to be more communal.

[21 : 24] You experience sorrow. We mourn together. You experience joy.

We celebrate together. together. This is how it is for God's people. Romans 12 15 says this, rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn.

So if we come to the end of the second point, we ask what are the Jews celebrating? And celebrating personally the day every one of every one of God's people had their sorrow turned to joy.

Communally, God's people had their time of mourning turned to rejoicing. But these were the days that God gave his people victory over death.

Brings us to our third point this morning. How are the Jews to celebrate? So we know that when God's people are to remember, we know what God's people are to remember.

[22 : 44] We then come to how God's people are to remember. Verse 22, the instruction is to make the days, days of feasting and joy.

prayer. My mind goes to the many, many church lunches we've had right here in this building. Many delicious church lunches.

I only had two bananas for breakfast this morning. I'm really hungry. Now there were some great meals. I was going to tell you about this chicken we have, but I'll pass that.

also remember the many meals we had at Dale's Down together where we go away to be together.

We go away to eat together. There's something very, very special about eating together, isn't there?

In many ways, it's a time of commitment. You agree to a meal with someone and you're committing your time to them, aren't you? It comes with responsibility.

[23 : 52] You can have a meal with someone, you've got responsibility to have conversation. No one wants the awkward silence. Who's ever experienced sitting at a table with someone with a complete awkward silence?

Yeah, that's a lot of people. Painful, isn't it? So there's a certain vulnerability that comes with eating together and being engaged with the others around you.

And why is that? Because we're made that way. That's why every one of us probably had that experience at some point. We're made that way. God made us to share.

God made us to be social. There wasn't a sofa, a TV, and a microwave meal in the Garden of Eden, at least not according to the book of Genesis.

There's another word, a really really good word, that kind of sums up a lot of these thoughts in one go. Does anybody know what it is? It's F, eight more characters, and then a P at the end.

[25 : 02] Brother Mark. Sorry? Fellowship. Fellowship. This is a word that considers all of those elements together. When we eat together, we participate together, and we call this fellowship.

God wants his people to eat together. Jesus eagerly desired to eat with his people at the last supper. And when we have communion together as Christians, this is a slightly different meal. It's not a feast. It's a very measured meal. We have communion together. We participate in Christ. We fellowship with Christ, and we proclaim together, together, the Lord's death.

See 1 Corinthians 10, verse 16 for more information on that. Jews are to give gifts of food.

You know, this still goes on in the Jewish community today. Gift baskets of food are given to each other at this time of Purim. And it's called, where's my water?

[26 : 25] It's called Mishlach Mnot. And this means sending portions. It's also called a Purim basket, which is much easier to say, much easier to remember.

So we have a celebration, and we have everyone bringing food, not simply for themselves, but for each other. This is to be a feast that is marked not with the memories of war, and death, and grim things, but of love.

Love is, or should be, the driving force behind the gift. Here's a question for you.

What's the next word in this sentence? For God so loved the world that he gave. God gives because he loves.

For God so loved the world that he gave, and he gave us the greatest gift of all, his son. Jesus says this in John 15, he said, this is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.

[27 : 37] Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends. And that brings us to our next instruction.

Give gifts to the poor. So I ask you, what good is the celebration of joy if people are going to be left out? I'm sure everybody here has been left out of something at some point in their lives.

It doesn't feel good. It makes you not want to participate. No one of God's people are to be excluded in these celebrations.

Verse 28 says, these days should be remembered and observed in every generation by every family. This is to include the poor. There should be no exceptions.

This means the responsibilities on God's people to have hearts of compassion and a longing to include others even sacrificially.

[28 : 42] God says this about generosity to Corinthians 9 verses 7 to 8 says each of you should give what you've decided in your heart to give not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver God is able to bless you abundantly so that in all things at all times having all that you need you will abound in every good work.

I have to be afraid of giving or sacrificing because God will give us everything that we need to do his work. God promises that in your generosity you will not fall short of your needs but our God is a loving and generous God and God wants us to give it's an expression of love not just of our love for others but for God's love for us.

I get the wrong emoji there. I think that's probably reference in the food. I like food. food. I like food. This brings us to the queen's stamp of approval. So the Purim celebrations are established along with the details of the when, the what and the how they were to be celebrated.

We've covered that now. Verses 29 to 32 show Esther writing a second letter. Mordecai's letter in verse 20 being the first.

[30 : 24] The purpose of that second letter being that this letter would add the weight of Esther's authority to the instructions from Mordecai as she endorses the celebrations.

She is queen and her weight of authority will go with them. And these last verses show Esther and Mordecai united in their purpose and united in their authority as prime minister and queen.

I just know that there is some, if you're looking down your Bible, there is some debate over verse 31's reference to lamentation and fasting or fasting and lamentation depending on the new version. I'm not going to go into that here. I don't think it alters the main point of the text as a whole but I think what it's simply doing is pointing back to when God's people had observed days of fasting and lamentation and Esther is saying as you observe these days, observe Purim too and don't forget. That's just one explanation. We'll leave that there. verse 32 and this decree of Esther's was written down in the records as we keep seeing as a recurring theme.

[31 : 47] Everything's recorded. So we come towards the end of the chapter. So back in chapter one, the story started with Esther and Mordecai together in a day of oppression and trouble.

Our verses end with Esther and Mordecai together in celebration. Not in the hands of the enemy but having overcome the enemy. And a final note is made on Mordecai in a few verses of chapter 10. The chapter opens highlighting the power of King Xerxes and continues by placing Mordecai right alongside him. So you look on the TV, you see someone standing next to the queen, you know that they have an element of power.

There's something there. This is what the verse is pointing to. This is highlighting Mordecai's eminence or meaning greatness not because of any personal power that Mordecai had or superiority as Christopher Ash said but because Mordecai is a champion of God.

as we come to a close. It would be the natural thing to do having finished the book to discuss some closing thoughts on the book as a whole and reflecting on everything that we've heard.

[33 : 17] But Jerome will be doing that for us next week. That should be very good indeed. but let's make some conclusions on what we've heard so far.

So this is Purim. This is the Jewish celebration of Purim as laid out in the book of Esther and still being celebrated today. But we've seen in this text that God commends things.

God commends having hearts that want to celebrate often. God commends remembering and celebrating God's provision for his people.

God commends giving gifts sacrificially with a heart of love. But does leave us with a crucial question as Christians if you are Christian here today should we be celebrating Purim?

This is a very difficult question. I'm just going to get a drink of water excuse me. I'm going to say my personal opinion is actually I see no evil in celebrating it.

[34 : 51] This is historical fact. God saved his people from being wiped out by a tyrannical tyrannical enemy Haman. And this is what God does.

God saves his people and it should be remembered. it's right here in the text. We're not to ignore that. But this is a big but this is a conjunction on the whole story.

The story doesn't end with the book of Esther does it? So we've got books and books and books and pages and pages and pages of things to go. At this point in God's word there is a greater victory to come.

There is a greater enemy to be defeated for God so loved the world, so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life forever. God didn't just save the Jews from death at the hands of Haman. that was a victory but it was a bigger victory.

[36 : 07] He gave the world his son and saved his people from death forever. forever. Do we see what God's done?

He took all of these portions of grace that he had been giving his people and he gave them to the world in their fullest measure. He gave us the champion of heaven forever.

He gave us freedom from sin forever. forever. And when we enter his kingdom when God calls us home when Jesus comes back all mourning and sorrow will be obliterated and turn to joy.

How long for? Forever. Amen. So I ask you in closing what better victory to celebrate is there than that?

Amen. Pray with me. Lord in heaven magnificent God wonderful counselor mighty mighty savior Lord we are floored by your incredible incredible love and giving your son that we might walk free of the charges of sin walk free of death and walk free of the enemy right into your kingdom.

[37 : 50] We want to thank and celebrate you with every inch of our hearts and our minds and we humbly ask you would help us daily to do that.

Help us now to do that. And Lord please forgive us when we fail. we thank you for this time together for your word which is so rich in instruction and love.

We thank you for those who have come before us. We thank you for people like Esther and Mordecai who you've used mightily. and as we go together in just a short while to do some of these things we go to the park we have that time of fellowship we spend time together.

Help us Lord this very day to live out these things that we've heard today. Generosity celebration of your good world.

And Lord lastly we ask that you be amongst us as we celebrate or be amongst your church be amongst your people. We ask it in your holy name.

[38 : 59] Amen. Thank you.