

A Gospel Shaped Memory

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[0 : 0 0] Father, some of us you have blessed with really, really, really fine minds, and some of our minds aren't as fine. Some of our minds are still developing. Some of our minds are maybe moving in a less developed direction.

Father, all of us have memories. All of us have imaginations. And Father, we confess before you, we often don't think very much about what's forming our mind. But we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would move very deeply in the very center of who we are.

And that you would make us a people where it is the gospel that shapes our mind, that it is the gospel that shapes our memory, that it is the gospel that shapes our imagination. And Father, we ask that you would begin to do and continue to do this wonderful work in us this morning.

And we ask all of this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

So, I don't know how many of you struggle with depression. I don't know how many of you struggle with different types of addictive behavior. I don't know how many of you, in fact, could maybe be described as an alcoholic or have, as I said, some other well-diagnosed problem like that.

[1 : 1 5] And as you know, some of the things like some forms of depression are a little bit, they might be a chemical basis that's connected to your depression. There might even be, in some cases, with certain types of addiction, some type of chemical basis.

And there's no question that all of these things help to shape the chemical structure of our body. But often what goes along with a lot of addictive behavior are certain types of core beliefs, certain types of things that those who struggle with depression or addiction, they say to themselves.

Because we all talk to ourselves all of the time, right? And often the things that we say to ourselves are very different than the things that we say outside to others. But we all have an inner voice that speaks.

Some of our inner voice speaks time and time and time again. We can't even shut it up hardly. And if you were to somehow be able to listen to the inner voice of a person struggling with depression or the inner voice of a person struggling with alcoholism or some type of addiction, there are several types of things that you would probably hear them say to themselves on a regular basis.

One of the things is that if people got, the more people get to know me, the less they'll like me. That if people were just to be able to see what I was really like, what I'm like when nobody's around, what's going on inside of me, as they get to know me more and more and more, they will like me less and less and less and less.

[2 : 4 5] And another thing that often addicts and alcoholics say to themselves or those struggling with depression is that people don't really care about me and won't help me.

I'm basically all on my own. Because if I share what I really need, if I share what I really, really, really need or long for, people won't care for that at all.

In fact, they're liable to do the exact opposite because it goes along with that third. There's more than three, obviously, core types of beliefs or self-talk of those who struggle with addiction or those of us who struggle with depression.

And the third one is that there's something just wrong with me that means that there's just something wrong with me. It's as if I'm cursed.

It's as if I'm doomed. It's as if there's something faded about me that things won't work out well for me. They'll work out well for other people. Like, I can well understand that that person will get the promotion.

[3 : 46] I can well understand that that person will have the family. That person will have the relationship. And I know I might get in one for right now, but it's just the fact of the matter is, is if you hang out for me for a while, you'll see that it's going to all come to ruins.

Because there's something about me that is just faded. It's doomed to have things not work out and bad things will happen to me. And that's just the way I am.

It's just the way I am. Those of you who are guests this morning might not know that we've been going through the book of Esther. And the book of Esther actually has, especially as it comes to a conclusion, this is the last sermon on the book of Esther.

It actually has some very, very powerful things to say for those of us who struggle with that sense of a type of a doom or a fate that is hanging over us. So it'd be very helpful if you open your Bibles to the book of Esther.

We'll be looking at chapter 9 and 10. 10 is only three verses long. And it's our final sermon in the series. The sermon series is called The Hidden God in a Broken World.

[4 : 53] And so what's going to be happening? The words of the text are going to be on the screen for those of you who don't have the Bible. Because about half of the sermon, a little bit more than half of the sermon, we're just going to read the story.

Because why? Well, because my great hope every week is that you'll remember the Bible more than you'll remember what I say. Because my words are just my words. And the Bible is the word of God.

But where we come to in the story, as the story is winding to its conclusion, is that genocide has been planned against the Jewish people. And the architect of that genocide was a man by the name of Haman.

And the story is set in the peak years, the pinnacle years of the Persian Empire. Xerxes is the emperor. It's generally regarded in history as sort of the peak years of the empire, him and sort of the emperor on either side of them.

Absolute peak. And at the peak of this, the Persian Empire, genocide has been planned for the Jewish people. The mechanisms of the state were mobilized.

[5 : 57] There was an attempt to inflame public sentiment against the Jewish people, that they would join in to this one day when every Jewish person, whether the oldest man, a military-aged man, whether a woman, an elderly woman, a young woman, whether the youngest child, that they would all be killed on the same day.

And as we saw in how that story develops throughout the book of Esther, and as we saw last week, the part which is just before this is by God's providence, by God's providence, the king's heart is changed.

Haman, the architect of the genocide, is killed. And the king gives Mordecai and Esther, a Jewish man, and Esther is one of the king's queens, and she's Jewish.

And Mordecai is her uncle and adopted father. And they sort of now, the king says, well, you come up with a plan to stop this. And the plan that they come up with, we talked about it at length last week, because on one level it was very bloodthirsty.

But basically their plan was that on the day that genocide is planned, they send out a directive and say that all of the Jewish people can gather, they can organize, and they can defend themselves, so that the day when everybody is going to attack them is the day that they're able to defend themselves.

[7 : 21] And so now as the book comes to an end, we find out what happens. Like, what happens if they're able to defend themselves? Will they all die? Will it be a bloodbath? Like, what happens? Well, this is what we find out today.

So verse 1 starts like this. Now in the 12th month, which is the month of Adar, on the 13th day of the Seiv, when the king's command and edict were about to be carried out, on the very day when the enemies of the Jewish people hoped to gain the mastery over them, the reverse occurred.

Verse 1 is in some ways a summary of the whole end of the book on one level. Sorry, the reverse occurred. The Jews, the Jewish people, gained mastery over those who hated them.

The Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Xerxes. I'm just going to use Xerxes. It's a hisirus, but I'm going to say Xerxes.

It's two names for the same man. He's better known to history as Xerxes. That's what I will say. To King Xerxes, to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could stand against them.

[8 : 28] That could stand against the Jewish people. For the fear of them had fallen on all the 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. Now just sort of pause there. This is very important to the story. But the events that I was describing happening just before this in chapters 7 and 8.

There's about eight and a half months between those events when Mordecai is given a promotion to very, very, very high up in the empire. And the letter that goes from Mordecai and Esther is sent to all of the officials, all of the nobles, the agents in the empire, and the citizens.

It's also proclaimed to the citizens. And that's about eight and a half months earlier. And it's a very interesting example here of a modern phenomenon.

[9 : 34] And we're in fact living through it right now. And the modern phenomenon that we're living through, which is sort of talked about here, which is very interesting, is... Well, like, 20 years ago, 20 years ago, no question, the House of Commons would have voted probably 95% against same-sex marriage.

Just 20 years ago. And probably 20 years ago, the House of Commons would have voted 100% against doctor-assisted suicide. And maybe even 10 years ago, there would have been unanimous belief that transgender people shouldn't be given a sort of a privileged position.

Now, I'm not making any type of political comment about any of these things. And if you're a guest here this morning and you're in favor of those things, I'm not making any particular political comment about any of these things at this point in time.

And I just want to point out how... And many people... Many people... You know, many of us, we just live from day to day to day. We live like a cork, bobbing around on water.

We might think that we're free, that we're independent, and all of that type of stuff. But the fact of the matter is, is that for many of us, we just bob along on the current, whatever current is going on, and we bob along on the current in such a way that we don't even realize that there is a current.

[11 : 00] But it's actually been quite remarkable, this huge turn in the culture. It's as if there's this huge tidal wave, or this... You know, if you go to the Bay of Fundy, and there's this very, very powerful tide in the Bay of Fundy, and it's as if there's this whole just drift or move or powerful movement in our culture, and all of a sudden, things that 20 years ago would have been just...

Nobody would have believed... Very few people other than activists would have believed it. And now everybody believes it. Everybody's in favor of it. And to not to believe it means that, I don't know, you're some type of knuckle-dragging, cousin-marrying Neanderthal with an IQ of a turnip.

And it's just this huge cultural shift, and many of us don't even recognize it, but we see these things going on in our own culture. And it's interesting, I don't know if you noticed it, but that same thing happens here.

That, you know, eight and a half months previously, probably if you had polled the officials, they'd say, well, you know, the king said they were to kill the Jews on this day, we're going to kill the Jews. And probably you said to most of the people in the culture, if you could go back and there could be a Pew research team to go back and do a really high-quality survey of people's attitudes, they'd say, yeah, on this date, we're going to kill Jewish people.

And somehow or another, in that eight and a half months, the force of the culture changes. And they describe it as the fear of the Jews come upon them.

[12 : 23] And those of us who have been reading the book, we know that it's part of God's providence, that everybody, it's not as if somehow or another God overwhelms people's wills. If we could send a Pew research team back nine months prior to this, and then a day just before these events, they would just remark that everybody, by their own free will, has somehow or another changed their view dramatically.

Not everybody, as we're going to see, because they're still fighting. But there's been this huge cultural shift. And it has this great power. And it's very interesting. And this book, set in the year 480s, bears witness to something that we've seen throughout history, of these big cultural shifts.

And so there's this great cultural shift that happens in the nation, the empire of Persia. And people become pro-Jewish.

And in fact, it says that the authorities go from maybe being anti-Jewish to neutral, to in fact being pro-Jewish. And it's really important that we notice this, because the very next verse often troubles many people, because it sounds as if great cruelty is happening.

But if you don't sort of just notice this cultural shift and what it just says about the officials, then this next verse is going to be very troubling. Read verse 5 along with me, because what it says in verse 5 is, the Jews struck all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and did as they pleased to those who hated them.

[14 : 01] Now, it's that did as they pleased, which is, I mean, the whole verse is a bit troubling to very modern people. And it's especially troubling to us, because we sort of, many Christians are very troubled, because for many of us Christians, we no longer believe the Bible, but we believe a hallmark spirituality of positive thoughts.

In fact, sorry, what the heck, I'll say it. Like, our Christian radio station in Ottawa doesn't call itself a Christian radio station. It calls itself a family radio station with family-friendly messages.

And if you have a religion that is all family-friendly with family-friendly messages, and on our Christian radio station on Sunday afternoons, all you hear is encouragement, and today you will mainly hear secular Christmas music on it, and of positive, uplifting messages, and verses like this go, it's like nails on a chalkboard.

But the problem is that the faith has drifted from the Bible. Now, I'm going to talk a little bit more. I talked about this more last week, and we're going to talk about it a little bit more in a moment, but mainly I talked about this last week.

If you're very curious about it, you should listen to last week's sermon online. But the thing here, though they pleased and did as they pleased to those who hated them, the part of that message, for many of us, we hear this, and what we think of is cruelty, that they are unhinged and untethered.

[15 : 37] They are unhinged, untethered to any type of morality, and they did as they pleased. And what they pleased is cruel. It's violent. It's merciless. And that's not what the text means at all. In context, what it means is that if you were to read the book at the end of chapter 3, you'd know that every noble, every soldier, every judge, every official, every agent was going to come to kill you.

Now they're on the side of the Jews. There's no external thing to stop them from defending themselves. That's what it means. They did as they pleased. They didn't have to worry about the police showing up to join the side of their enemies.

They didn't have to worry about the noble showing up with his army to help their enemies. They did as they pleased. That's all that the text means. Now, it's still a bit troubling for us.

And those of you who were here last week or who've been hunting around as I've spoken to look at what they say before or after this particular text, you'll know that I talked a little bit last week about how the direction that Mordecai gave, the directive that Mordecai and Esther gave to the Jewish people included that they could kill women and children and included that they could plunder.

And on one level, well, let's see what happens. Let's see what happens. Verses 6 to 10 of chapter 9. In Susa, the citadel itself, the Jews killed and destroyed 500 men and also killed, just pardon these with the names, Parshandatha and Dalfon and Aspartha and Poratha and Adalia and Araditha and Parmeshatha and Arasai and Aradai and Vesatha, the ten sons of Haman, the sons of Hamadatha, the enemy of the Jews, but they laid no hand on the plunder.

[17 : 42] Now, I just sort of want to pause here for a second. The first thing, I didn't talk about this last week very much, but at the heart of what the Mordecai's letter and Esther's letter was, was basically all they did was take what Haman had wanted to do, the enemies of the Jews.

They just took all of the things that said that the enemies of the Jews could do. They're, in a sense, moral universe. And it said, okay, all of these things that it says, that those who are racists and want genocide, all of those things that they said, the Jewish people can now do.

On one level, it's completely and utterly fair if you think about it, isn't it? It's actually, on one level, irrefutably fair. As a bit of an aside, it gives a bit of a window about how God judges us, just a bit of a window.

If you read Romans chapter 2, and it talks about how it is that God will judge people who don't know the Bible, and basically, if you look through the language, it can be a little bit technical at times.

It basically just says, well, you know, at the end of the day, all God has to do is just follow anybody around and just see what their moral rules and observations and standards of judgments are.

[18 : 58] And all he has to do then is say that at the end of the day, I will just use, well, use me, we'll just use George's rules, and we're going to judge George by George's rules. And every single human being on the planet, if they're judged just by their own rules, will fail.

And nobody will be able to say that that's unfair. Nobody. Nobody. And on one level, then, what Mordecai and Esther did was very fair because what the enemies of the Jews, what those who want to genocide said is kill all the women, kill all the children, kill the youngest children, kill everybody, and plunder them.

And all they do on one level is say, just do all of the same things. But it's a very, very interesting thing, and this is part of the, this is part of how to learn how to read the Bible.

Because what the Jewish people do is they don't listen to what the people who believe in genocide say is the way to live. What they end up doing is they listen to what the Bible says you should do in terms of living.

And you only notice it if you read it very, very carefully. Because what the text says is it says only men are killed. Only, in a sense, military-aged men are killed.

[20 : 17] No women are killed. No children are killed. And it also says here that no plunder is taken. In fact, the no plunder is taken is very important. It's repeated twice later on.

It's said three times within a couple of verses that no plunder is taken. And it's at the level of the original language of the Hebrew. There's some languages here which shows that the Jewish people understood from what we call the Old Testament, those books of the Bible written before Jesus and our Jewish friends call it the Tanakh.

And what they did is they're aware of what it says in Genesis. They're aware of what it says in the book of Joshua. They're aware of what it says in the book of Exodus. They're aware of what it says in the book of Deuteronomy. And they're aware of all of these texts and they're aware of what the text says in 1 Samuel.

And in all of these texts there's a set of rules that when this is not just any old battle but this is a battle where the Lord is going to deliver his people and when the Lord is going to deliver his people using his own people but it's still the Lord who is delivering his people they are to take no plunder nor are they to kill women and children.

And so they do not listen to Mordecai and Esther's letter on one level. They do in the sense that they arm themselves and fight but they actually are governed by what the Tanakh says what the Old Testament says.

[21 : 36] which is profoundly counter-cultural and would have shocked all the Persians and all of the pagans all of the Zoroastrians and all of the pagans who had observed that no plunder was taken and the women and children were not killed.

But the military aged males are modern language is how we would put it. And it's very very counter-cultural but that's actually what goes on here in the text.

Because you see on one level not on one level on every level this is why you know people say you can prove anything in the Bible well that's not true. Like you can prove anything in the Bible if you ignore context and if you ignore how things fit together.

And so you're right if you take a letter of a genocidal evil genocidal genius and say well that's in the Bible we can do that.

but the Bible here shows that's not who you're supposed to listen to. And what we see actually happening is on one level both just but also a showing of mercy.

[22 : 46] And we see in here the beginning of how most Western people think most secular people would say that that's the way that you handle something like this even though they don't know that it does not come from a study of evolution but it comes from the Bible.

They have amnesia. about the source of their belief. So well the story isn't over we've got up to verse 10 but what about the king of Persia?

You know I haven't talked about it very much. The king of Persia was a Zoroastrian. He wasn't a pagan he was a Zoroastrian. But at the same time within their whole world view he was a virtual god.

It was like divine right of kings and steroids. And in their culture basically whatever he said was the law. There was no law on one level that he had to obey.

There was no constitution as we talked about a couple of weeks ago. There was no property rights to protect people. Basically he said it and that's it. And so what is the king going to think of the fact that all these people have been killed?

[23 : 50] Is he going to be happy with it? Is he going to be sad? Is he going to be worried? Want to distance himself from Esther one of his queens that told them that this is what he should do? Well what happens?

Verse 11 and 12 we see how the king reacts. And it is just so typical of people with that type of power. Look at verse 11 and 12. 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 10 sons of Haman. 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. He's delighted. You know what?

It makes me mindful of a famous quote by Stalin. That horrendous dictator. And it is so well here's how it is.

[24 : 51] The death of one person is a tragedy. The death of a thousand is a statistic. So he's the king is completely and utterly unmoved.

In fact he actually seems to like it. So he says in a sense okay girl okay Esther what do you want to do now? And here's a very very very you know many one of the things about one of the things that people think about the Bible people who and unfortunately this stereotype is maintained by many Christians unfortunately but people think that if you read the Bible the Bible is going to tell women that they have to be weak they have to be stupid they have to just you know blah blah blah but it's all weak they're all nice they're all kind they're all gentle that it's all full a whole pile of stereotypes but that's actually not how the Bible describes women.

Like look what Esther suggests. What is it she wants to do in verses 13 and 14 and Esther said if it pleased the king let the Jews who are in Susa be allowed tomorrow also to do according to this day's edict.

In other words king for those in greater Susa let the fighting continue and let the ten sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows. What she says is king what I think we should do says Esther let's let the fighting keep going for another day but just in the capital we can't get the news to the whole kingdom but just here and by the way the ten sons of Haman impale them publicly.

That's how Esther behaves. Like don't cross her. Don't cross her.

[26 : 41] So verse 14 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 were in Susa also gathered on the fourteenth day of the month of Edar.

They killed three hundred men in Susa but they laid no hands on the plunder. They laid no hands on the plunder. So now by the way remember I said how Mordecai and Esther had this directive but the Jewish people actually didn't follow it completely.

You know once again one of the things you can talk about over coffee is do you agree with what Esther said or not? And you can disagree with it because it's just her view. A very interesting thing over coffee if you had been Esther's advisor would you say you go girl that's exactly the advice we want impale those guys and let the fighting go.

Is that what you'd say is the good thing or would you say come on Esther like show some mercy like like ooh do you really want men like anyway whatever like it's an interesting point of conversation.

the Bible doesn't say this is the right thing to do it says what Esther did. But the important thing in the rest of the text is what's happening amongst the Jewish people as a result of this.

[27 : 53] Is this day amongst the Jewish people is it causing them a sense of horror about what they've done as they think about it the next day? Is it encouraging them to violence?

Is it encouraging them like what happens? Well you find out in verses 16 and 19 now the rest of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also gathered to 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.

Just a pause in the Old Testament generally speaking you don't know whether it was 75,000 or not 75,000 means lots and lots and lots and lots just the way that it's a literary thing anyway but it means there's a lot who died verse 17 this was on the 13th day of the month of Adar and on the 14th day they rested and made that day a day of feasting and gladness but the Jews who were in Susa gathered on the 13th day and rested on the 15th day making that a day of feasting and gladness therefore the Jews of the villages who live in 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 in which they send gifts of food to one another so we see what they do is they don't they're not horrified by what they've done they don't have second thoughts they don't celebrate the death of 75,000 people but they celebrate the debt that they have been delivered from their enemies and that they are alive and they celebrate it with feasting and with the giving of gifts but you know it's by the way they don't tell how many Jewish people died obviously Jewish people died in this in this in this whole day but that's what happened immediately the day after we can understand that but what what happens now as you think about it like the week or the month or the year afterwards and you think back on that day like now what are the

Jewish people thinking like one thing which they could be thinking is you know part of our problem with all of this is that we're too different from the Persians maybe what we should do is become more Persian like if we become more Persian if we worship more similar to them and if we dress more similar to them and if we just sort of add some of their religious practices and their views of how the world works and if we bring all of that into our life and become more Persian then maybe things like this won't ever have to happen to us again that would be a very reasonable response you know maybe they would do like often goes on in much of our culture today amongst the knowledge class is to start to be ashamed of what they've done which of course describes what happens in much of our culture is a lack of shame about what they themselves are doing which is wrong but a shame about their past and their tradition is that what's going to happen well the rest of the Bible the rest of the story helps to communicate whether they choose the path of trying to fit in or they choose a very very different path and they choose a very very well let's just see verse 20 and 22 and Mordecai recorded these things and sent letters to all the

Jews who were in the provinces of King Xerxes 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 had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday and that they should make them days of feasting and gladness days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor so we see that actually rather than accommodating to Persian culture Mordecai has this plan that it's in fact they are to become more Jewish they are to become in a sense more the covenant people that they are to in fact not just have this as a one-off but it's to become something that every year they will remember that the Lord delivered them they will remember this and set the day aside as a holiday and they'll remember it by feasting and they'll remember it by sending of gifts and they'll remember it by remembering the poor and giving food to the poor and they do more than just that they also remember it in a very very particular way that sets the

[32 : 36] Lord at the center but in a sort of an ironic hidden way but they put the Lord at the center of their remembrance and it's seen in verses 23 through 26 here's where it comes so the Jews accepted what they had started to do and what Mordecai had written to them for Haman the Haggagite 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 to destroy them but when it came before the king he gave orders in writing that his evil plan that he had devised against the Jews should return on his own head that's Haman's head and that he and his son should be hanged on the gallows or impaled on the stake therefore they called these days Purim after the term pure therefore because of all that was written in this letter and of what they had faced in this matter and 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 and at that time appointed every year that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation and every clan and 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 now here's the thing which they do in a very very interesting way basically what they say we're going to name the day fate because that's what pure means so what it means is they're remembering the fact that the might of the

Persian empire had all been organized at every level all of the bureaucracy all of the military all of the nobility all of the police the judges everything had been organized and well planned and the citizens themselves so that the Jews would be killed on one level from a purely secular point of view everything had been organized so that their fate was sealed they were doomed but more than that and there's more there's more than that they also wanted to make sure that the gods were on their side that the gods themselves wanted to kill all of the Jewish people and that's why they cast the pure they cast the lots they spent a day making sure that they would figure out the day they cast the lot they cast the lot they cast the lot it's called divination and the purpose of it was to find the day and when the day came they said aha this is the day the gods themselves have told us that on this day the gods themselves will bless our efforts to kill every single

Jewish person the gods have decreed it the virtual god will decree it the bureaucracy the nobility the intelligentsia the army everybody all have decreed it from the gods to all of the officials have decreed the fate and the doom of the Jews and we Jewish people will remember from all eternity until the Messiah returns this word of doom and fate set by empires set by the gods was rubbish rubbish a delusion a fantasy an illusion a lie and they remember it in the name they remember it in the name I'll show you an image in a moment it's a long time

I'm just going to say we're going to go now to our other points I just want to say two little things in the end just before we get into the to try to wrap it all up one of the things which is very interesting if you go back and read the rest of the verses it's not as obvious in English but in the original language it's very obvious what really makes the day a day for remembrance for the rest of time for the Jewish people isn't that Mordecai says it but Esther says it this is a holiday for the Jewish people forever and ever and ever because it was finally the seal that made it permanent was the decision by the queen not by men that's what the text says and the other thing which is very interesting and this is very important for all of you is that Mordecai continues in secular work he continues his work in the bureaucracy for the good of the city and the good of the nation Andrew if you could put up the slide that I said about fate and everything there you go that's what Purim means in a sense when Jewish people celebrate

Purim it says in a sense what it says is fate but they know in the context of the story that any one of those three things can be the way that it's actually saying fate line through it fate not no fate that's what the day reminds so just to try to wrap this remember I began by saying that people who struggle with depression and addictions they often have some very very powerful core beliefs that there's something wrong with them that there's something doomed about them that there's a type of fate about them that it's they can understand how the other person will get the guy or will get the girl the other person will maybe get the promotion the other person will get the job the other person will have the health but you know I might have it right now but there's in fact something fundamentally doomed about me there's something some fate about me which always means that these things are not going to work out and in fact there's many systems of thought that sort of make it even worse like Islam struggles with a high belief in fate and doom and even Hinduism which we often view of and Buddhism as a very positive alternative to Christianity the fact of the matter is that the whole cycle of karma is a cycle of fate that if you are in this particular role if you are the beggar of the beggars of the beggars that is your fault you have brought this upon yourself in your previous life you are trapped in your fate you are doomed to that particular position and even many systems of thought like the cycle of life but throughout human history this cycle of life is actually not seen as something which is life giving it's something which means you are doomed that there is not going to be any progress there is not going to be any development there is not going to be any story which is new and different there is not going to be creativity there is not going to be imagination there is not going to be a second chance why?

[39 : 29] because you are trapped in the iron cage of the circle of life you will die and there is nothing you can do about it and even modern science with its belief of the fact that everything that comes to be is a result of irrational forces and chance with no human purpose no virtue of something good or beautiful or love or knowledge or truth that's what naturalistic science teaches you it's just cause and effect in a sense it's the idea that everything that's happening to you is just a result of things that are going on in you and massive these and you are stuck and to all of these things the gospel says that it says no to fate if you could put up the first point Andrew what is the bible telling us the lord exists providence is true fate is a delusion you are here and I know that just by willpower and just by a story it can't change you and for some of you if you're struggling with depression it might be that there's a chemical imbalance that you need some help medically to help you to deal with that

I am not denying any of that type of stuff but I am saying that the memory that we have of our life the way that we use our imagination the way we structure and talk to ourselves and talking to ourselves in such a way as if we are fundamentally faded and doomed the bible is telling us the lord exists providence is true providence means that the lord is present powerful active even though he is hidden and he always respects our freedom but the end of the day no matter how much we use our freedom in whatever way we use our freedom the lord is moving all things to the end that he has chosen and he does that even though we are completely and utterly free but the lord is present powerful and active in the world and to believe in fate is a delusion it's a delusion and if you come up the second point we Christians we believe we accept you know we in a sense this is our story when we read the book of

Esther because we believe that the lord promised to deliver people in Genesis 3 we believe that it was our spiritual ancestors and for some of us our physical ancestors because there are Jewish people who have been part of our congregation and this is the story of Israel's deliverance from Egypt out of slavery that is our history and the lord's deliverance of the Jewish people in the Persian empire that is our history but we believe in an even greater deliverance and an even greater reversal because we believe that Jesus came and he was born of a virgin he lived a sinless life and he taught many things he predicted and prophesied that he would die as the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world that he would die on a shameful cross that he would be hung on a gallows and a cross not impaled but hung and that we who are cursed he would bear our curse we are sinned he would bear our sin we were ashamed he would bear our shame and he would do all of that not for himself but for you and me and he would offer for us his perfect obedience and intimacy to the father he would offer he would offer to trade our disobedience for his obedience our impurity for his purity our uncleanness for his cleanness and this profound transaction on the cross is a far greater deliverance and we are to proclaim that in a way that we understand that everyone who hears it is invited to receive it the

Lord is risen deliverance is real damnation that's an eternity separate from God at first I was going to use the word tragedy but the problem with tragedy is that there's something noble in the tragic figure and it's not a tragedy it is a calamity there's nothing noble it is just a disaster if we turn our backs on that his risen and his deliverance to choose ourselves as you could wrap the next slide Andrew grace is real repentance is always an option and intransigence is a fantasy I know some of you have to look up what intransigence means it means a complete and utter refusal to change I've just started reading a very very good book by Jackie

Hill Perry it has a very intriguing title it's called Gay Girl Good God Gay Girl Good God by Jackie Hill Perry and one of the opening lines in it is she talks about her experience as a lesbian and she said that part of the core belief for her as a lesbian is that I as a lesbian cannot change therefore God has to change his word has to change his will has to change because I cannot will not change that is intransigence and the very next line she says it's an illusion and a fantasy which is not true God will never change because God is always good and all I can do is change as a result of the goodness and the grace of God and my refusal to bend my knee is intransigence and not something which is impossible and whether it's that whether it's any type of sin that we cling to that we think we cannot live our lives without this idol without this sin that it's impossible and somehow or another everything else has to change that is intransigence it is a fantasy for the fact the matter is that

[45 : 56] God's unmerited kindness and goodness to human beings through the cross is real and for Jesus for the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit three persons one God forever and ever and ever repentance is not only always an option no matter where you are in your life it is always God's preferred option for you repentance is possible it is possible intransigence is a fantasy you will die you will change to think you won't fantasy if you could put up the next point Andrew here's the big question because you see not only is the book of Esther about the fact that fate is a delusion that God's providence is real it's a book about the fact that deliverance is real it's also a book about how grace and repentance is real

I didn't talk about it much everybody in the empire had eight and a half months to change their views on the Jewish people eight and a half months and 75 thousand men chose to not repent but to have an intransigence around genocide what a calamity that you would be intransigent around the desire of racism and genocide and that's what the book is about intransigence in evil and the book ends with a call to remember and if the gospel is true why have anything other than the gospel shape your memory and your imagination that's the challenge of Esther why choose anything else why choose commercialism why choose money why choose your career why just choose whatever comes out of your subconscious unconscious whatever accusations whatever delusions of how great you are a legend in your own mind why have anything form your memory and your imagination other than the gospel if the gospel is true you see that's why it's the lord's day why out of every seven day there's a lord's day and the heart of the lord's day is that the people of god would gather and every lord's day the gospel is proclaimed to christians and non-christians alike whoever gathers why because there is the desire of the lord that the gospel would start to be that which shapes our memory and our imagination salvation it's why ancient christians came up with the christian year of advent and christmas and easter so that time itself would help us to remember the great acts of salvation it's why churches have small life groups so that you can gather together and you can do life with other people because the fact of the matter is is that our minds and our memories and our imaginations untethered will have all sorts of accusations and all sorts of denunciations and all sorts of ways that the devil speaks into our life to make us feel bad about ourselves or feel like we're completely and utterly proud or as if we can't repent and so we need to live life together with other christians it's why we memorize the bible it's why we read the bible it's why we have the daily offices or daily quiet times it's why we do those things and it should all be done not just that it's a religious duty but we do it with the next prayer if you could put up the final prayer lord please grow in me the habits and disciplines i need so that your gospel shapes my shapes my memory and my imagination and as the gospel shapes our memory and imagination as the gospel grips us we grow in freedom living not out of evil but living for god's glory that's the gospel that's the message of ester it's not the word of george it's the word of the lord please stand just want to say as we as we close i'm going to invite you to all pray that prayer with me here's the wonderful thing you know the wonderful thing about the lord is the lord sometimes can change you like that you really can and you've probably met people who are able to stop drinking or stop drugs or stops or stops you know smoking or or stop you know be able to forgive just like that and that's very true and you can ask the lord to do that ask the lord to do that but for a lot of things in our lives it's a slower process it's it's week by week of the

lord's day in god's people it's it's it's small victories and it might be that over the course of the year it's it is 53 steps back but it's actually been 74 steps forward and that's actually a net gain of 21 steps in the right direction and a lot of times we might not see very much change in a day but you can see a lot of change in a year and so i just want to say that for some of us who struggle with addictions and some of us who struggle with alcoholism and some of us who struggle with depression and some of us who struggle with dark thoughts i'm not saying if you pray that prayer it's going to instantly change you i'm not it might and pray that the lord that it will might and if it does we will all go hip hip hooray yahoo praise god hallelujah that's what god's people should do and um but for many of us the lord hears that prayer he he wants to shape us by the gospel he wants to shape our memory by the gospel and he wants to shape our imagination because you see what's what's anxiety anxiety is a waste of the imagination it's imagining the worst and fate and doom and that's why memory and imagination are so closely connected so i just want to challenge you for some of you this is also maybe a conversion prayer for you that you're asking the lord to be your lord and your savior but i invite you to pray with me and at the end of it it's not says amen up here but if you'll all say uh amen at the end that would be great as well let's pray lord please grow in me the habits and disciplines i need so that your gospel shapes my memory and my imagination and i grow in freedom living for your glory and all god's people said amen everything for right okay and what yeah