

The Tables Turned

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[0 : 00] You see on the screen there the title of this evening's sermon as the table's turned and we'll see the relevance of that heading as we consider more fully what we read in these first 19 verses.

And in these first 19 verses, the three points that I want to focus with on this evening, deliverance from death as we read of the safety that the Jews had against their enemies.

And then secondly, what we might call denial of self-glory when we read that the Jews who were involved in the fighting, they refused to take the possessions of those whom they had put to death. And then thirdly, as we read at the end of that reading, the demonstration of gladness, the feasting, the gladness, the joy that the Jews celebrated after their victory.

Indeed, we continue to do so even to this day. Let's turn then more fully to what we read in that section of Esther chapter 9.

[1 : 08] And as we read in that section, the Jewish people had been under a sentence of death. The Jewish people across the entire Persian Empire, literally from India to the east and to Africa in the west, including, of course, the territories in Israel.

All the Jewish people under a sentence of death. And at one time there appeared anyway, from a human perspective, there appeared to be no escape from that sentence.

It was a sentence, remember, that had been determined by the wicked Haman. Haman, Haman, who hated the Lord's people, who hated Mordecai, who hated God, the one true God.

And that law that Haman had ensured to be passed, that law had been passed for the destruction of the entire Jewish people. And it was a law that couldn't be altered.

But under God's sovereign provision, Queen Esther and her cousin Mordecai, these faithful servants of the Lord, these faithful servants whom God had placed in positions of authority, Esther and Mordecai had ensured that another law was passed to allow the Jewish people to protect themselves, to defend themselves against those who had intended their complete destruction.

[2 : 41] And as we read, even at the start of the chapter there, the tables were turned. The Jewish people were able to defend themselves and to gain that victory over their enemies.

So what had seemed impossible was made possible. The death sentence had been lifted. God's people had been saved from destruction. And we do obviously have to consider what we are to learn from this passage.

It's a difficult passage in many ways. I'm sure as we were reading it, you thought, well, isn't this rather difficult to interpret? So much destruction, so much death.

The figures are enormous. But we have to ask ourselves, what does God teach us? What is God teaching us in this passage? And I pray that as we look more closely at the passage, we'll see that in fact, this passage teaches us about God and his covenant faithfulness towards his people.

This passage teaches us about the responsibilities of God's people to deny ourselves. And this passage teaches us about the importance of showing gratitude to God for his great salvation.

[4 : 01] So as we said, the three headings that we're going to look at, deliverance from death, denial of self-glory, and demonstration of gladness. So first of all, deliverance from death.

And as we read at the beginning of the chapter there, the enemies of the Jews, they were prepared to attack. They really did want to end the lives of every Jew in the empire.

But by the grace of God, God's hand was on Esther, Queen Esther, to persuade the king to pass a law that would enable the Jewish people to protect themselves, to defend themselves.

And to do it on the very day that had been earmarked for their destruction. So death and destruction that had been intended on the Jews, but that evil intention against them, overcome by the good hand of God and his sovereign care over his people.

God protecting his people by an act of grace, an act of grace, an act of mercy, so that his people would be delivered from death. And you see that, especially in verse 1 of chapter 19, where we read that on the very day, the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain mastery over their enemies, over the Jewish people, the opposite occurred.

[5 : 30] The Jews gained mastery over those who hated them. Let's seek to apply this even for our own purposes. Because isn't this the gospel?

Isn't this the message of the cross? The very day when the enemies of Jesus hoped to overpower him, the very day when the enemies of Jesus hoped to silence him and destroy him, what do we find?

We find the reverse happened. The tables were turned. And Jesus triumphed over all who hated him. When Jesus conquered sin, when he conquered Satan, and three days later conquered death itself when he rose from the grave.

In the very day, the very time when the enemies of Jesus hoped to silence him. They hoped to silence his message of salvation through Jesus alone.

The very day when they hoped to be rid of that message of deliverance was the very day when these enemies were silenced. And deliverance from the power of sin achieved through the once for all sacrifice that Jesus did for our sakes.

[6 : 46] You might say that the tables were turned. That great reversal on that day, that very day, the very day that Satan himself had thought was the day of his victory.

It was the very day of his defeat and the victory of Jesus on the cross. Jesus, we might say, lifted the sentence of death on us.

He rescued us from the enemy of our souls. And so we have to say this, surely, of what we might call this great reversal. That God who rescued you, God rescued you who are his from that sentence of death.

The very point when you were utterly unable to rescue yourself. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2, You were dead in the trespasses and sins.

But God, but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

[7 : 53] By grace, you've been saved. And that's the great gospel truth that the great reformer Martin Luther rediscovered, or the great gospel truth that was rediscovered when Martin Luther, some over 500 years ago, in that the great reformation of the church, that reformation that, well, today is Reformation Sunday, across the world when so many are giving thanks to God for that reformation of the church begun, we might say, by God's providence, when Martin Luther set out to reform the church.

It's that great gospel truth of salvation in Christ alone, by faith alone, by grace alone. And you who faced that sentence of death, you who were dead in sin, you were made alive with Christ, your Savior, done so by his finished work on the cross, as we said, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

You delivered from death, delivered from the punishment that sin deserves, delivered through that great work of the Lord Jesus, who did what was impossible for you to do, achieved in what was possible because of the love of God in Christ.

What about the details then in the passage about the victory that we find here, the victory carried out by the Jews because of the work of Mordecai and Esther?

That victory that we have to say points forward to the victory of the Lord Jesus over his and our enemies. Well, what we read, of course, in the passage in many ways is violent, violent language.

[9 : 48] I mean, we read, for example, in verse 5 that the Jews struck all their enemies with the sword. And you see in verses 6 to 16, we may almost see the very graphic details of that killing time, we might say.

We read of day one of that time of self-defense, that time of resistance. You see, in verse 6, we're told that 500 men were killed in the city of Susa, plus the ten named sons of wicked Haman.

And, of course, not even counting the killings happening in the rest of the empire. Then we're told that it was a day two of the killing fields, if you like.

Esther has asked for a further day of action taken by the Jewish people. The ten sons of Haman, their corpses to be hung in a kind of public spectacle.

And then a further 75,000 recorded to have died at the hands of the Jews that we read off in verse 16. This is death on a large scale.

[10:56] This is even going beyond day one of the original wording of the law. Now, some will say, in fact, some do say, read some commentaries, and you'll see that many are saying that Esther, in fact, overstepped her mark and asking for a second day of killing.

Some argue that she was somehow drunk with power and revenge. Is that the case? Because if you consider the bigger picture, then we'd really have to see the reality of the enmity of the enemies of God's enemies against God's people.

Because when we look at the figures that we find in this chapter, we see just the extent, the number of those who hated the Lord's people and, by influence, hated the Lord.

I mean, Esther truly was justified in asking for the second day of action by the Jewish people. I mean, the very fact that we have 75,000 people killed on that day two, if you like, of action.

Surely that figure alone tells us of the scale of opposition against the Lord's people. And if there hadn't been that day two of the Jews in their self-defense, that that number would have remained and further troubled to the Jewish people.

[12:31] And so we have to say that Esther carried out what she did faithfully and according to the will of God. And, you know, what we read in Scripture elsewhere tells us of the necessity of that full destruction of those who are the enemies of God's people.

You see that in Israel's history, the earlier aspects of Israel's history. The Israelites were faced with their enemies in the promised land, the Amalekites, for example.

And God's people were ordered to destroy completely those people. But we find in earlier passages, the earlier passages that Israel disobeyed God.

King Saul, for example, he wouldn't completely destroy the enemy. And he carried out disobedience against God because of his actions or inaction.

And so hundreds of years later, the enemy of God's people, the enemies, are being dealt with fully and completely.

[13:45] And there are a number of things, I think, to say here on this. First of all, think of the cross of Christ. Think of the actions of the Lord Jesus on the cross when sin and evil were fully dealt with, completely dealt with.

And it was our divine warrior, the Lord Jesus, who carried out fully the Father's instructions. Jesus defeated the enemy of God's people.

He defeated them fully, wholly, completely in his war against sin and evil. He defeated the enemy. He defeated the power of the enemy.

And he did so on our behalf. Now, yes, there's still a battle to be fought. There's still that battle that's fought against Satan and his forces of evil.

Remember, in that battle, we fight with the weapons that God has given to us. Weapons that we use in the power of the Holy Spirit.

[14:47] In that spiritual warfare that the Lord's people are engaged in, we're given spiritual weapons. We're given the word of God to use. We're given the gospel of truth.

We're told to exercise faith, righteousness, salvation. You read in Ephesians 6 of the equipment that the Lord gives to his people as Christian soldiers.

And you who are in the Lord's army, you are even now involved in that spiritual warfare against the forces of evil. You're waging war against all who are against the Lord and his people.

You're going to use the spiritual weapons that God gives you. Use the weapon of love. Use the weapon of faith. Use the weapon of grace. Speak the truth and love to those who are against our Savior.

Yes, love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. And live in the presence of God in Christ by the Spirit's power.

[15:55] I think we also have to say this in relation to the passage that we read. We read there of a great scale of destruction. But there's a day of eternal destruction.

That eternal destruction against all who've refused in this life to surrender to the Lord Jesus. And the scale of destruction that we read there in Esther 9, we have to say, is as nothing compared to the full scale of destruction that we read of in the book of Revelation.

When we're told that the enemies of the Lord, they're going to even call on the mountains and the rocks to fall on them, to hide them from the, as we're told, from the face of him who sits on the

throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.

So the warnings are there in Scripture. The warning clearly set out. Any who resist God, who remain against him, as an enemy of our Lord and Savior and his people, well, the consequences are eternal destruction.

And God's judgment is real. And if we're going to be in any way sort of hung up about the scale of destruction carried out on two days in the Persian Empire against God's people, what then is your reaction to be in relation to the eternal punishment for all who refuse to turn to the Lord Jesus?

[17 : 25] We thank God that there is deliverance from eternal death. There is deliverance for those who receive salvation. There is deliverance through the grace of the Lord Jesus.

We have to say there's no deliverance, no deliverance from God's punishment for all who refuse to come to him by faith. But there's other things that we can see in relation to this chapter.

We have to say this, that we have to see the faithfulness of God in saving his people. Remember that God has a covenant relationship with his people.

And it's not just a message for Esther chapter 9, that's a message that runs through Scripture. God doesn't leave his people to face the consequences of eternal punishment for sin.

You who are in Christ, you who have given your life to the Lord Jesus, you're safe in him. You have that saving relationship with God through that new covenant in Christ's blood.

[18 : 35] And God's promise to you of salvation, eternal life in him is a sure promise because he is a faithful God.

Think again of that deliverance, that salvation. While we were yet sinners, as we've already mentioned, we have to mention again, made possible by the death of the Lord Jesus for our sins.

And remember, there's nothing else can save. It's only the blood of Jesus shed for you that covers your sins. So give thanks that you have that blessing of salvation.

You who know the joy of the Lord that's found only through that saving relationship with him. Yes, give thanks.

Give thanks for that great salvation. Give thanks that you were unable to draw to the Father, to draw near to him through faith in Christ, by the enabling of the Holy Spirit.

[19 : 40] You've been rescued, delivered, saved from death. And that you show that salvation by the works that God has given you to do. Even in your denying of yourself and taking up your cross to follow Jesus.

And this is really our third point from the passage. We mentioned just a moment ago about denying of self. And you see that self-denial even there in the actions of the Jewish people in their victory.

Because three times in this passage, we actually see this referred to verse 10, verse 15, verse 16. We're told that the Jews didn't lay their hands on the plunder.

Now, anything that's repeated three times in the space of a few verses, there's obvious significance, obvious importance. And there is importance in this.

Because, well, we have to understand what we're reading here. Plunder. Well, plunder was the spoils of war, if you like. The valuables, the riches, the possessions of those who were defeated.

[20 : 50] And, well, if you remember in chapter 8, verse 11, the edict that was passed on behalf of the Jews actually allowed the Jews to plunder the property of their enemies.

And you say, well, how do we then reconcile that with the fact that they didn't plunder in their victory? Well, the decree that was passed on Mordecai's word, it was just to be a mirror image of Haman's earlier decree against the Jews.

Mordecai's law was just a reversal of Haman's law. So the wording had to be identical. So the letter of the law allowed for plunder.

But the spirit of the law was very, very different. You see, the Jews understood that their war against their enemies was actually a holy war, was God's war.

And the glory in their victory was to be his glory and not their own glory. And they knew the ancient prohibitions against taking plunder in victory.

[21 : 56] We read earlier, or we mentioned earlier, of Saul disobeying that law when he took the plunder and God punished Saul as a result.

See, plunder wasn't to be taken. Because the purpose of the battle wasn't for the people to enrich themselves. The purpose of the battle wasn't for them to grow rich in defeating their enemies.

The battle was the Lord's and for his sake and for his glory. So any taking of the enemy's possessions, any taking the plunder would have just been a travesty of that purpose.

Any taking of plunder would be for self-glory and not for God's glory. And then we can apply that for ourselves. Because as we mentioned again, we're engaged in spiritual warfare.

We're in that warfare against the evil one. We're in warfare against evil itself. And let's never, ever in that warfare seek to enrich ourselves.

[23 : 04] By that I mean, you know, any sort of temptation to bring glory in ourselves in the battle. Anything that's going to bring any kind of attention to ourselves.

Whether popularity or fame or, you know, somehow being the centre of attention, even church attention. You know, it's a great temptation when we're involved in spiritual warfare to expect some kind of recognition, some kind of reward, some kind of popularity even from others.

Remember, always remember that the battle is the Lord's. He's equipped you for that fight. None of us have any claim to any reward for participating in that spiritual warfare and that holy war, if you like.

But there is a reward. And that reward, surely, in the battle that you're engaged in is a spiritual reward. The joy of knowing the Lord, the joy of knowing the Lord's presence with you, the joy of knowing his protection upon you.

And that's not self-advancement. That's giving glory to God. And it's the joy of the Lord that surely we look to. And for the Jews there on that very day that the enemy had expected to destroy them, was the very day of their joy and of their gladness.

[24 : 30] Really, our final point in the demonstration of gladness. It's this 12th month of the year in the Jewish calendar, the month of Adar. And it was a month that, well, 11 months before the Jews had anticipated their destruction.

But then, in fact, turned out to be a month in which they expressed their joy and celebrate as the month of deliverance. And we'll read that they spent that day in gladness and feasting.

And again, three times, obviously, in significance. Verse 17, verse 18, and verse 19, we're told of their feasting and gladness. And even today, for the Jewish people today, at the end of February, they remember these events with gladness, with joy.

It's the festival of Purim. We'll actually consider more of that next week, God willing. But, you know, for the Jews today, as for the Jews at the time of Esther, there is feasting and gladness.

And the Jewish people at that time of year, they say these words, when Adar comes, joy is increased. During the month of Adar, we should all strive to feel this happiness.

[25 : 53] It should truly be a month of joy for all and for all time. And yet, when we hear these words, surely, we should grieve.

We should grieve if that's the reaction of the Jewish people. Because if that's all that it is, if that's all that it is, this joy, this happiness, because of the events of its centuries before.

And if that's all that it is, and there's no recognition of the coming of the Lord Jesus as Messiah, of that great deliverance, that great deliverance promise for God's people.

Well, if that's the case, then we grieve for the Jewish people in their forgetting of the Lord Jesus. Of course, in one sense, of course, we do share in their joy in what we read often in the time of Esther. But unless the Jewish people see in that deliverance, a greater deliverance, a greater deliverance from Satan's power, a greater deliverance through the death of the Lord Jesus, then that joy is just a limited time of happiness.

[27 : 11] We've been led to consider the story of the deliverance of the Jewish people from destruction at this time, this particular time when Esther and Mordecai were instrumental under God's providence.

I pray that even as we've been led to consider these events, we do use this as an opportunity to pray for the Jewish people, that they would turn to the Messiah, that they'd receive the Lord Jesus as the promised Messiah, and see him as truly the promised deliverer of Israel.

And now in the quiet of our hearts, even as we come before the Lord in prayer, pray for the Jewish people, pray that they'll turn in their hearts, turn their hearts to gladness, but gladness in response to the Lord Jesus coming, and be a saviour, as Lord.

Because the Lord Jesus came, he was born into, well, into the family line of the survivors of that time in Queen Esther, Queen Esther's time.

Jesus was born in the family line of the survivors, of those who were saved from destruction. Pray then that the Jewish people will know that their only hope of salvation is found in the Messiah, the Christ, the Lord Jesus, and that their hearts will be filled with true joy and true gladness in knowing

Jesus as Lord.

[28 : 48] And, you know, as we pray for the conversion of the Jewish people, at the same time, we can give thanks to God that there are many Jewish people who have turned to the Lord Jesus.

We give thanks that God has rescued so many, so many from that ancient people, and rescued them with the promise of the ingathering of the Jewish people into his kingdom.

And let's have that gratitude of heart that gives continued thanks to God for his rescuing you who are in him, rescuing you from death and destruction.

And that each one of us, each one of you who loves the Lord, don't just utter thanksgiving, but live a life of continual thanksgiving to the Lord for his great salvation upon you.

And let's never stop thanking God for the gift of his Son that's made it possible for you to know him and to know that salvation. But for you who as yet don't know that joy and gratitude in your hearts, for any of you who are watching on, listening, or even to this evening's sermon, if you don't as yet know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, be with you.

[30 : 11] Turn to him. Come before him. Come to him with that true repentance of heart and give your life to the Saviour who promises you eternal life in his name.

Because there is a day, there is a day of judgment coming when the Lord will return and you who are in Christ will come before him with thanksgiving.

But for any who have not given their lives to the Lord Jesus, Jesus will say words to them, to you, and he'll say, depart from me, I never knew you.

I pray there's no one here this evening or no one who's listening to this evening's address or to you. For whom Jesus will say these terrible words, I pray that for all who gathered here this evening, you'll be able to say with joy, he is mine and I am his because he's delivered me from death and has given me new life.

Amen. Let us pray. Our Lord, our God, we truly do give thanks to you for that great salvation and price. We give you thanks, Lord, that the Lord Jesus, you, Lord Jesus, won that victory on the cross and fully, fully disarmed your enemies.

[31 : 38] We pray, Lord, that we will live in the light of that victory and know victory in our own lives, that as we serve you and do your will, that we will truly know the victory that is ours in you.

Hear us, Lord, as we continue in worship before you now. Continue with us, we pray. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. ■■■■ Aye. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. SATA. Amen. Amen. Amen.