

Saints in Caesar's Household

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[0 : 00] Written authority confirming the second letter about Purim. So what are we reading here? We're reading that the Jews were to celebrate their deliverance, and they were to do it according to this festival.

This festival called Purim. It's the Persian name for lots, the plural word. It's this name, as we said, that referred to the lots that were cast by this wicked man Haman, lots that were cast to determine the day of the Jews' destruction and the deliverance of the Jews.

The Jews who were intended for destruction, the deliverance, of course, first and foremost, was under the sovereign rule of God, under the ruling sovereignty of God.

And, of course, God using his servants, Esther and Morton, Mordecai, these chosen instruments, chosen individuals to effect that deliverance.

And throughout the crisis, Esther and Mordecai working together, working shoulder to shoulder. We see that in the planning and the implementation of the salvation of the Jewish people.

[1 : 17] And we see that throughout the book. And now, as this book comes to an end, as it comes to its conclusion, one more time, we see this partnership confirmed and Esther and Mordecai working together to write this letter with royal authority to ensure that the Jewish people across all the empire comply with instructions to remember their deliverance.

You see, neither Esther nor Mordecai alone had the power to effect that deliverance of the Lord's people at that crucial time.

None of them, neither of them alone had the, if you like, had the power or the ability to ensure that this letter was written and sent by authority.

It was only by cooperating together. It was only by trusting one another, only by relying on one another, only in their exercising, their respective gifts in producing this particular letter is what enabled the Jewish people to be saved and encouraged to remember their deliverance.

And that's a principle. That's a biblical principle that the church must continue to remember the work of the kingdom is to prosper because partnership is vital.

[2 : 47] Think of the structure of a church. Think of church leadership. That leadership involves leaders. It involves office bearers to rule well, to manage well, to oversee the work of a congregation in the name of the Lord.

There's that mutual support one to another. You who love the Lord, support one another in the work of the kingdom. It's absolutely crucial in building up the church.

We're here to build the church in God's strength, to encourage one another, and to do it in prayerful support, one for another.

Even as we see right at the beginning of the Bible, when God said to Adam, it wasn't good for man to be alone. So we can see in the work of the gospel, it's a general truth, a general truth, that two are better than one.

Partnership in the work of the gospel. It's what God has given to his people to work in his name and for his glory as we give glory to God, even in support one with another.

[3 : 59] Of course, there are instances in Scripture, there are instances in the Christian life when there is a solitary work for the believer to carry out. Think of the apostle John, John in his solitude in the island of Patmos, John there on his own receiving the vision of the end times.

I think even in the work of ministry, the minister in his study, as he works alone, as he prepares alone, as he prays alone, as he prepares even for the Lord's Day each and every week.

Think of the believer on our knees in our room, praying alone to our Lord and Savior. Even then, we have to say that the work that you and I are given, that work isn't done alone.

There's this prayer support, one for another, and truly we do pray one for another. There's that fellowship that we enjoy through the various means of communication that we send one to another in encouragement.

There's the conversations that we have even after the Lord's Day service. There's the blessing of true support and encouragement in strengthening one another.

[5 : 13] that is a wonderful gift that God gives to us. And even in this difficult time of lockdown, then surely we might even see the more we're to encourage one another as partners in the work of the gospel.

Esther and Mordecai, they were partners. They were partners at a particular time that God had placed them in to give them a particular work that God had given them to do.

And as partners, they weren't just partners, they were participants. They were participants in that particular location that God had sent them for such a time as, well, as such a time as that, as such a time as this, as such a time that was required to be of influence in that pagan environment, to be there at the very centre of the Persian Empire.

And so we see, secondly then, participation in God's work. See that, as we read the last chapter of Esther 10, just three verses.

Let's read them again. King Ahasuerus imposed tax on the land and the coastlands of the sea, and all the acts of his power and might and the full account of the high honour of Mordecai, which the king advanced him.

[6 : 35] Are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? For Mordecai, the Jew, was second in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brothers, for he sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his people.

You know, there's a, a fascinating verse in one of Paul's letters, in fact, Paul's letter to the Philippians. And as Paul's concluding that epistle, he tells the believers there in that Roman colony of Philippi, he says to them, all the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

Read that in Philippians 4.22. And really, what Paul's saying here is at the very high levels of government and even, even there in Philippi, there were obviously Christians.

There were Christians who were influential, Christians in the civil service, influential in the, in the high echelons of government. These Christians working, working in the, for the highest ranks of Roman society, Roman government.

And of course, these high ranks in the Roman, in Roman government would compose of those who were not believers, would be pagans. And yet, the Lord's people, the saints in Caesar's household, witnessing to those in that secular power and secular authority.

[8 : 10] And roll back to the time of Esther and Mordecai. And you see that same, what we call that, might call that same providential positioning. The positioning of the Lord's people in a, in a hostile environment, a secular environment, there under a pagan king, in an empire, where we would have to conclude that most, if not all, of the, the officials didn't acknowledge God as God.

And yet, Mordecai and Esther placed there as the Lord's witnesses. They were there, yes, to work under the king, the empire, to be loyal to him.

But their loyalty was first and foremost to the Lord of lords and king of kings. And even the, the elevation of Esther and Mordecai, even in the, in the time that we, from the time we begin to read in Esther to the end, we see that elevation, even in that, to pagan, secular environment.

At the start of the book, Esther simply called Esther. The end of the book, she's referred to as Queen Esther. The start of the book, or near the start, is simply Mordecai the Jew.

The end of the book, it's not just Mordecai the Jew, it's Mordecai, with all the honours, the royal honour that's placed on him in being second in rank to the king.

[9 : 39] And you know, even in our present circumstances, even under the providence of God, even in our own land, there are still, and we give thanks to God for this, there are still saints in Caesar's household.

Even at such a time as this, where the influence of the Lord's people, even in these high ranks, even of our governments, these positions of influence, we cannot and must never minimise.

Whether we're talking about in relation to our government at Westminster, our government at Holyrood, or even when we think of those in particular positions of influence in our nation, we plead and we continue to plead before God that God would raise up men and women who love the Lord,

and to be in positions of influence, whether it's influence in our governments, influence in our civil service, whether in public health or national health, in education, in the armed forces, in every walk of life.

You know, Jesus commanded the servants to go out into all the world. And, you know, for Christians, that command remains to make the most of every opportunity to be influences for good and to show the love of the Lord Jesus, to show it by your work ethic, to show it by your reliability, to show it in your gracious dealings with others whom you work with, to show it in your conduct that reflects the Lord Jesus, to show it in love and grace, and mercy, and peace, and to show it in exercising the gifts that God has given to you, even to use in this ever-increasing, challenging world.

Thank God for the saints and these positions of influence and authority, those who testify to the Lord Jesus, those whose first loyalty is to our Lord and Savior.

[11:47] Two years ago, I attended the National Prayer Breakfast at Westminster Hall in London in the Houses of Parliament. And it was a joy.

It was a joy to be there. It was a joy to witness first-hand saints in Caesar's household. There were the politicians. There were the business leaders.

There were the government officials, Christians, whose first loyalty was to the Lord and Savior. And in that loyalty, serving faithfully, God who placed them in these positions of influence, there in that very challenging environment.

And far from withdrawing from the world, these faithful men and women entered into the world, the world where their witness would be sure, yes, in the world, but not of the world.

That surely is the case for every Christian. Every Christian who, when you rub shoulders, as it were, with non-believers, you're in the world. You're not of the world. Esther and Mordecai, they didn't run away from their responsibilities when God in his providence put them into these high positions of influence and authority.

[13:07] And nor did they hide their allegiance. They didn't hide their allegiance to the one true God as Jewish believers. No. They were there to seek the good of others.

And they didn't seek their own good. They were there to seek the good of others. And they participated. They participated fully in the great matters that came before them in the welfare of their people.

and even doing that, working, if you like, within the parameters of pagan government where God had placed them and sent them. And it's really wonderful when we see how God used these two individuals, Esther and Mordecai, to further God's purposes in that pagan land.

What have we seen? We've seen how Esther had become a woman of great power and authority even in that land of a pagan ruler and pagan worship.

Mordecai was the end of the story. We're told that Mordecai wears the same ring given by the king to haman the enemy of the Jews. And that ring that symbolized a position of great authority, a position of power second only to the king himself.

[14:29] This was no accident. This wasn't just by some sort of luck that these individuals, Mordecai and Esther, were promoted. These are two heroes of faith.

These were two heroes who were in such a position of power to be influences for good, even in the midst of so much godlessness. And of course, we read that elsewhere in Scripture of the Lord's people being put in particular positions of influence in pagan, secular environments for the sake of our Lord's name, for the glory of his name.

Nehemiah, we were looking at the story of Nehemiah some time ago. He actually lived about 40 years after Esther, still the same empire under a different king, of course.

We have read of Daniel on another occasion. Daniel, again, in a position of influence, in a position in a pagan empire. But these men who didn't conceal their faith, who weren't ashamed of the one true God, these men who stood for what was true and right, these men who were unashamed in their testimony to the one true God, they liked shining lights in a world of darkness.

And for God's people today, for you who are Christians, Christians, we're living in an essentially non-Christian pagan environment.

[16:06] We still are to be shining lights, shining with the light of the Lord Jesus, shining in this darkness all around. And pray and come before God and pray that God will raise up men and women to be salt of the earth and lights in the world and, of course, in every walk of society, particularly in relation to the highest offices in the land, in Parliament, in education, law and order,

particularly where policies are made, where lives are affected by government change.

Pray that there'll be men and women of Christ, men and women in Christ who will be even in positions of authority and influence, even to pass laws in our land to glorify God, to honour God. Men and women like Mordecai who acknowledge God, who work for the good of those who are the Lord's. Even in this day and age, as we know, we've seen, even recently, we've seen where more and more laws are being passed that seek to erode the gospel, seek to erode our Christian influence, our Christian ethos in the land.

Well, let's be bold, be bold before God and pray that God will raise up men like Mordecai, women like Esther to take their stand for justice and do that which is right in the eyes of God and not allow the forces of evil to abound.

You know, it's such a time as this. When there is so much, it seems, greater spotlight on those who have these positions of authority in our land, well, give thanks.

[17 : 58] Give thanks that we have men and women who take their stand for truth as saints in Caesar's household. Pray for them, pray for Christians who are at the very forefront even of our current crisis, very forefront of policy decisions.

Just pray for individuals like Jason Leach, the National Clinical Director. Pray for Kate Forbes, our Finance Minister, our Christian, for Christian MPs such as Murdo Fraser, Jeremy Balfour, John Mason.

These Christians, they face the most enormous and are facing the most enormous opposition. they're facing the most enormous prejudice against them because of their faith, because of their stance, their standing for issues that seek to remove evil from our land.

They're facing intense opposition. But remember, their Lord is Esther's and Mordecai's Lord. Their Lord, this is your Lord, my Lord, He's the one who raises up servants to serve Him, to place these positions of authority and influence.

Men and women like Esther and Mordecai, Mordecai and Esther, who are not ashamed of their Lord and Saviour, neither must you be. Neither must you be ashamed of your Lord and Saviour as you serve Him where God has placed you.

[19 : 38] For you who love the Lord, to partner in the work of the gospel and participate in that work of the kingdom. Yes, work one with another. Prayer support one with another.

Encouragement one with another. Working using the gifts you have one with another. Letting your light shine as Esther and Mordecai shone for the Lord. And remember this, and know this, that God still has work for you to do.

He's got work for you to do in His name and for His glory. That's for you and for me to serve Him in these difficult and dangerous days. Know this, that His is the victory.

You're on that winning side, you who love Him by faith. and His victory is your victory. You're in Christ.

Follow Him, serve Him, and know that victory. Yes, that victory over sin, over Satan, and know that victory over death itself that Jesus has won for us in His resurrection.

[20 : 49] So, partners in the gospel, participants in the gospel, may that be our motivation in serving God, in serving our Lord and Saviour, and doing it in His strength and for His glory.

Amen. Our Lord and God, You who give us that work to do in Your name, may we do so looking unto You, knowing that we serve first and foremost You who send us.

We pray, Lord, that we do what we do unto the Lord and not to men, and as we do that work, that we do it unashamedly, not hiding our light, but shining.

Lord, help us when we're weak. Help us when we're tempted to hide these lights. Help us, Lord, never to be ashamed of the glorious gospel of the glorious Lord Jesus.

Help us, Lord, to be partners one with another in love for You and for one another, and help us, Lord, in our participation in that work that You give us to do.

[22 : 04] Hear us, Lord, as we continue in worship before You now, and we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.