

Final Rest

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, everyone. You'd be grateful to keep your Bibles open there.! Esther's 8 through to 10. If you've just joined us, we've been working our way through this book of Esther,!

particularly realising that it's not just some kind of Cinderella story of some poor orphan Jewish girl who rises to greatness, become the Queen of Persia, but ultimately it's a story about how God brings salvation to his people through silently but sovereignly working through ordinary circumstances of life.

And we come to the end of it today. So if you've got the Sir Paul's app, you'll see an outline for today's message, three points there. And we're kicking off with the temporary victory of Esther.

So having, well, just to sort of summarise where we've been, King Xerxes was convinced by the narcissistic Haman, who was chief of his administration, to issue a decree to the whole entire Persian empire to kill, destroy and annihilate the Jews, something that Haman himself obviously didn't like the Jews very much.

And so last time we met, what we got there was the first stages of glimpses, if you like, of a reversal of fortune in chapter 6, when Xerxes publicly honours Esther's cousin Mordecai, the person who Haman hated the most, publicly honours him just in the nick of time before Haman murders him.

[1 : 4 7] And that moment there marked the reversal of fortunes and the swift downfall of Haman.

Haman was very soon, from that moment, he was executed on the stake that he himself had built in order to impale Mordecai.

And so with Haman's downfall, Mordecai rises to Haman's place of power. And so with Xerxes' original edict to annihilate the Jews, gone out into the empire, and as we've just read, it cannot be reversed, it cannot be repealed.

Instead, what now happens is a counter-edict is drawn up, allowing the Jews to defend themselves when they are now attacked.

What that means is, without this edict, the Jews would have been breaking the law if they attempted to defend themselves in any way.

[3 : 0 1] And the edict, we read, means that not only can they defend themselves, but anyone who attacks them, they can now take possession of all of their property.

Now, you would expect that this counter-edict would have put the whole thing to rest, and people would have gone, OK, look, you know, deal's off. Let's just go home and rethink this.

You'd think it'd be over, but it wasn't. Not in any sense. In fact, quite a number were willing to carry through with the original edict, even in the citadel, which we might remember from the very first message.

The citadel is the seat of power and influence. Even there in the palace, there are more than 500 who wanted to kill the Jews. Verse 16 says that at the end of the day, 75,000 were killed.

75,000 attacked the Jews on that day in order to kill and annihilate them. And the only ones named of those 75,000 are the, well done, Anne, the Haman's sons with names you just can't pronounce.

[4 : 27] Why? Why name his 10 sons? I think for one really important reason. There's a couple, but I'll give you one important reason.

At the end of chapter 5, when Haman's ego was bruised by Mordecai because Mordecai would not bow down and honour him as he thought that he should be doing, he goes home, gathers all of his friends and his family and has a boast fest.

He boasted about three things in chapter 5 to reveal that he was a man worthy to be honoured.

He boasted about his power, he boasted about his wealth and he boasted about his sons, which is another way of boasting about his legacy and about his name going on beyond him.

And in chapter 7, we see the reversal happening. His position is taken away from him and given to Mordecai in chapter 8.

[5 : 35] In chapter 8, his wealth is taken away from him and as we just read, given to Esther. And now his sons, following through with their father's plan to annihilate the Jews, his sons are now taken away from him.

In other words, his name is no longer. His name, his heritage is over. He is finished. His legacy is done. The great reversal of Haman, who set himself up against God's people, is now complete.

Every basis of his boasting has now been removed. All that he built his life on, all that his ego, that pumped up his ego, is gone.

The one who boasted, the one who profoundly proud in heart has now been deeply and completely, totally humbled.

Regardless, having said all of that, in the sense that there is a sense of poetic justice here, regardless of that, in this narrative, many in our society struggle with the Bible portraying God's people like this, executing judgment on others.

[7 : 01] Our citizens of modern Western civilization are a product of a culture that has normalized unconditional self-acceptance.

That is our normal response, unconditional self-acceptance. And so, because we are drilled into us from a very young age, that we must accept ourselves, who we are.

And it's the dominant theme of self-acceptance. When it comes to hearing about God's acceptance of us, that's not so amazing. What else would we expect God to do?

That's his job. His job is to accept me as I have accepted me. In fact, the idea of grace in Western civilization is not so amazing.

It's God's job. That's what we expect him to do, to accept me as I have accepted me. And yet, in our same culture, the idea that God would stand in judgment of humanity and demand from us repentance or obedience of any form at all, and the idea that he will finally condemn all those who proudly reject him and set themselves up against him, as we have a glimpse here of Haman, that concept is shockingly counterintuitive to us, deeply perplexing.

[8 : 47] How can God, who we have created in our own image, a God of love, also hold us accountable? That is perplexing. And so, therefore, in our civilization, our society, there are some aspects of the Christian faith which we want to go, that's absolutely right, of course, because it agrees with our worldview, but there are others, aspects of the Christian faith that we think are fundamentally dangerous and we would despise because it sets itself up against our worldview.

The bigger picture here that's happening here is that God's anger at his enemy is not some kind of cranky explosion.

It's not an act of revenge. God's acts of justice and retribution in the Bible are his settled opposition to the cancer which is eating out the insides of humanity, the cancer of sin, a humanity that is created in his image to enjoy relationship with him, a humanity that he loves with his whole being.

And the Bible says that God's anger flows from his love and his delight in that which he has created to be enjoyed. He is angry at evil and injustice.

He is angry at the pride of humanity that sets itself up against him because it is destroying the peace and the integrity of what he has made.

[10 : 40] God's punishment of evil is not an overreach. It is certainly shocking and it is certainly terrifying.

That's what images of this like Esther is meant to, the conclusion is meant us to be. It is his justice.

In that sense, the punishment fits the crime and it's the kind of justice that we want to live for, we want in society. We want, if someone does wrong to me, we want wrong to be done to them.

We want justice in that moment. We want the punishment to fit the crime. And so the Bible clearly declares that those who proudly set themselves up against God in life will be brought low.

They will be humbled. They will be held accountable. They will be punished. But notice something else in this text.

[11 : 53] A couple of times in these verses, we are told very clearly that the wealth, the Jews did not take the wealth of their attackers.

Even though Xerxes' edict, the law, said that they could. As they acted in self-defence, they were allowed to take the plunder of those who attacked them.

but they didn't. Emphatically, three times, they didn't. In other words, the bloodshed that we read of here was an act of self-defence against tens of thousands of people who wanted them dead for no reason than their race, than their culture, or their religion.

For no other reason than that. In other words, this is not, what we are reading here is not an act of imperial action by which they were enriching themselves and increasing their power.

we are told several times they needed relief from their enemies who were seeking to annihilate them. And chapter 9, verse 17 tells us that that relief from their enemies is exactly what they got.

[13 : 18] They rested and made it a day of feasting and joy. And this particular day became an annual day of celebration for, of salvation and rescue and rest from enemies for the Jewish nation.

However, let me just say as we get to there, this is nothing new. What we're experiencing here at the end of Esther, this is nothing new for God's historic people in the Old Testament.

They have a track record of leaders who give them rest temporarily. Moses gave it to them for a little while. Joshua gave it to them for a little while.

Then there's the judges and there's David and then there's Solomon and now Esther. There's relief but it doesn't last. It's temporary. And we even see it here because tacked on the end of this book rather awkwardly is this little postscript in Esther chapter 10.

King Xerxes imposed tribute throughout the empire to its distant shores and all his acts of power and might together with a full account of the greatness of Mordecai whom the king had promoted.

[14 : 41] Now at first glance, you read those verses and you go, I mean, okay, great. You know, a little postscript. What are they there for? However, in the context of Esther and the great victory that means one here for God's people against people who were seeking to annihilate them, what these little verses show us is that nothing has actually changed at all.

Xerxes, the ruler of Persia, the kingdom that is oppressing God's people is still king.

And his personal interests remain paramount regardless of the cost of his subjects. At least 75,000 of his subjects have just died and it says here that he imposed tribute throughout the empire.

He didn't, there's no day of mourning. A tribute is either a new tax or it's constricting people into forced labour.

That's his response. God's people have received rest from one enemy but they have yet to receive rest from Xerxes himself.

[16 : 11] And so their relief here is temporary and it is fragile as the next day they start paying more taxes and they start getting back into slave labour.

And so it's during this time in the history of God's people that the latter prophets of the Old Testament began to prophesy that there will someday be a Messiah and a Messiah who will come and this Messiah will provide for them ultimate rest.

a final rest a final peace. In fact Daniel chapter 7 who writes during this time of exile talks about this one as being the son of man a powerful figure who will have great authority direct from God who will come and wage war against all evil all injustice and bring about the final rest of those who are God's people.

and that final victory comes in the person of Jesus. Because several hundred years later Jesus of Nazareth suddenly bursts into the scene the first century Palestine and the masses there wondered who is this one who is such authority with such power not just with his teaching but the things that he does and Jesus says I am the son of man and I've come to forgive sins.

That is he's the son of man from God with God's authority waging war against humanity's greatest enemy sin and its consequence eternal death.

[18 : 04] that's our greatest that's our greatest enemy and this is his mission but right from the very beginning Jesus is rejected rejected as the son of man and this is where we see Jesus treating his enemies quite differently.

In Luke chapter 9 there's a place where some people in fact right at the very beginning of his public ministry he's rejected and they show themselves to be an enemy of Jesus and enemies of disciples of Jesus an enemy against the mission of Jesus and the disciples turn to Jesus say to him you know Jesus do you want us to call down fire from heaven and just obliterate this little village here you want us to take them out you know call in nuclear strike the smart bombs in other words what the disciples are saying to Jesus you are the son of man aren't you you are the one Daniel 7 said about so show us your power and defeat your enemy right now and these people here are your enemy and Jesus rebuked them and he says love your enemies forgive your enemies and it wasn't until his main disciples had been with him for three years that they finally got it at the very end and they didn't like it on the night of his crucifixion his enemies in this case not the oppressive rulers the

Romans but it was the Romans and the Jews came in force to arrest him in the garden of Gethsemane and Jesus mate Peter slow on patience and compassion draws his sword because he thinks this is it this is the moment we've been waiting for where finally the son of man will stand up and defeat the occupying Roman forces and he swipes the ear off one of the guys who comes to arrest Jesus and Jesus says put your sword away Peter and Jesus goes with his enemies he allows them to bound him and ultimately to bind him with nails onto a cross to die and he utters incredible words from the cross father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing he forgives his enemies and so what we have on the cross is Jesus

Christ the son of man the son of God loving his enemies forgiving his enemies dying for his enemies and his death is the ultimate judgment of evil and injustice this is Jesus defeating our greatest enemy he is concerned about destroying sin and evil and injustice that he's eating away at the world that he loves Galatians 3 verse 13 says that Jesus was hung on a pole he was put on display as a public spectacle Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us for it is written curse is anyone who's hung on a pole he redeemed us in order that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles through

Christ Jesus so that by faith we might receive the promise of the spirit in other words what Galatians 3 is saying for us is that Jesus trades place with us for all of humanity that's rejected their God he trades place and becomes cursed by God for us in other words we who have rejected God and are the enemies of God Jesus trades place and becomes God's enemy for us he was made a spectacle for our sin and evil and injustice you see what the cross of Jesus reveals to us is that God is not concerned to destroy this particular enemy or that particular enemy as much as he is concerned to destroy enmity the enmity the hostility that divides one person with another person within their own household even that divides groups of people cultures and races against this group and against that group but most of all

[23 : 23] Jesus came to defeat the enmity that exists between humanity and its creator the enmity exists because in our proud state we have rejected God and deep in our hearts we are at war with God you see if Jesus had picked up the sword in the garden of Gethsemane and destroyed the occupying Romans the enemy of the Jewish people in the first century he would have given his people in that moment temporary rest from one enemy but when he died on the cross for our sin he was destroying sin and evil itself death itself eternal death itself the great enemy of all of humanity he become the curse himself he was hung on a pole and turned away the anger of God from us and allowed it to descend on him the cross of Jesus is the ultimate warfare against

God's enemy this is so important for us to grasp because as a general rule if someone hurts our reputation we genuinely conclude that we have an absolute perfect right to tell everyone about what has happened and therefore in the hope that we will ruin their reputation the natural default position of every human heart is to respond to evil force with hurtful force we fight fire with fire in other words to defeat our enemy we must whack our enemy and if we whack our enemy hard enough then we will get rest don't we that's the thinking if we whack them hard enough we will get rest and yet the reality is we don't all we have done is we have made our enemy worse the enmity in other words the relational hostility is still there you don't have an enemy defeat your enemy decisively and they come back at you and go oh I was terribly wrong

I got that entirely you were always you were totally right can we now be best friends tell me when that's ever happened in race relationships any victory in a battle where we fight fire with fire is only temporary when we fight evil with evil we don't beat evil evil wins it wins every time and the only way to defeat evil is with good it's the only way and this is what Jesus achieved for us on the cross the perfectly righteous one took on all of our evil all of our sin all of our unrighteousness and allowed God his father to whack him for it instead his grace is so powerful it's because his grace for us destroys the enmity there is nothing more formidable nothing more violent if I can say that in the most positive terms there is nothing more violent than grace because it ultimately defeats evil it defeats enmity when you give someone grace who does not deserve it when you forgive them when you give them the prospect when you give someone grace when you give them mercy when you give them forgiveness you actually turn an enemy and you give them the prospect of becoming a friend and friendship is in fact the only way to really deal with an enemy it's the only way to destroy an enemy is to make them a friend and that's what Jesus did for us on the cross he was changing us from being

God's enemies deserving of his eternal punishment into his friends deserving of his eternal love instead of whacking us God dealt with his righteous anger at our evil by whacking himself so that we might not just be his friends but that we might be co-heirs with Jesus his much loved children and the minute we grasp hold of that that that message which is the center of Christianity take hold of that it actually changes us from being an enemy to becoming a friend of Jesus and of God and what that does therefore is it sends us out into this world at rest from enemies if we understand the good news of what Jesus has done for us we actually get rest from all of our enemies now so let me show you how this works how do we rest in the victory of Jesus do you believe let me ask a couple questions do you believe that Jesus

Christ had to die for you because for your sin because in fact you are that evil that you are that flawed that you are that much an enemy of God's you were that bad do you secondly believe that you are that sinful that nothing less than God himself the son of God Jesus Christ coming into this world to die in your place nothing less than that is required to rescue you and to bring you back to God if you do that is incredibly humbling to a proud heart and what it does is it vaccinates you against what evil does to keep itself going in the world when someone wrongs us the first thing that happens is we get on our high horse and religious people are very good at this as a general rule we get on our high horse we get angry and so self-righteous

[30 : 47] I would never do that can't believe they did that to me don't they realise who I am and that is how evil just keeps going and the good news of Jesus dying on the cross tells me that when someone wrongs me and it impacts me so hard in my heart my instinct going to Jesus should say oh I am no better I'm a sinner that's saved by sheer grace I'm no better and if that is our place of refuge then evil doesn't have to get a foothold in that moment what I'm saying is that if a Christian hates someone who is attacking them then they have forgotten that they are a sinner saved by God's grace they have forgotten that they are an enemy of God saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus

Christ if a Christian hates anyone you've forgotten the gospel this is so crucial for us as we grasp to grasp this as we look to our future as a church doing ministry here at Chatswood and beyond we exist in a society that has a growing indifference a genuine perplexity and even at some places a very deep hostility to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Christian faith there are those who are ignorant of what it is that we believe there are those who frankly don't care what it is that we believe and there are those who believe that what we believe is fundamentally dangerous for society for the welfare of society whoever they are they're not our enemy they are not our enemies and we do not meet force with force we do not use political power we do not meet force with force we do not whack those who are against us and it starts here with us as a church as a community where a community that loves and forgives and bears with one another across all different stages of culture and of race and of gender and of belief and of social levels we are to stand with those who are oppressed even even if those who are doing the oppressing might be considered traditionally as being our enemies we stand for religious freedom not just for our sake but because of other people of other religions have a right to their beliefs too and from that place for who we are as a community loving each other across different cultures and races and genders and beliefs we then go out into a world and we give them what we got from

Jesus we forgive them we reach out to them we be gracious to them which means on a day like today we don't just love and support the victims of domestic violence we love and support the perpetrators of it as well even as we call them to repentance because as we extend the grace of the Lord Jesus to them we hope and we pray that more of them will become friends that is our vision as we move forward a growing church family saved and at rest in the grace of the Lord Jesus a rest which is total enduring final rest from our greatest enemy in sin and death that's what we need and we can all have it now in fact

Jesus offers it to you today Jesus offers you right now rest for your soul he says in Matthew 11 verse 28 come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest take my yoke upon me and learn from me for I'm gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls rest come to Jesus for rest do you have a deep hunger in life the accumulation of possessions and honour and a legacy pushing it down to try and find satisfaction from all of these things and it's not satisfying there's still a restlessness you still have a love a hunger for love and security and significance and meaning Jesus said I am the bread of life feed on me and you will never hunger again come to me for rest are you walking in darkness and disillusionment and despair

Jesus said I am the light of the world if you follow me you will never walk in darkness instead you'll have the light of life come to Jesus for rest do you fear death your greatest enemy do you fear death and the sting of death sin which means that death will go on for eternity conscious eternity of death Jesus says I am the resurrection and the life he who believes in me will live even though he dies and whoever lives and believes in me will never die come to Jesus and find rest are you burdened are you worried are you anxious are you feared do you have guilt Jesus come to me all of you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest final rest enduring rest come to

[37 : 29] Jesus end the enmity between you and God and find rest for your soul rest from all the sickness and the pain and the disability and the death rest from everything that takes the gloss off this life find rest in him now and with it a foretaste of the final perfect and never ending physical rest of his presence in his new creation forever!

The rest of unspoiled love between you and God and all of his people do