

“WISDOM FROM ESTHER.”

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Scripture Texts: Esther 10

Esther 10.

Chapter 10 in some ways feels like an awkward, unnecessary, little conclusion. What purpose do these verses serve? Are they a waste of breath by God in His inspired Scripture? Well, we all know the answer to that question, of course not, nothing is wasted or unimportant in God’s Word. So why these words?

This chapter is a bit of a wake up, a slap in the face, a way of saying that this life is not some panacea, some kind of utopia, some happily ever afterward story. Unhappily life is back to normal, and nothing says life is back to normal more than taxes going up.

King Ahasuerus is still king and is doing the things kings do. He is still acting out of self-interest as he imposes another burdensome tax on all his subjects. When Esther became queen back in chapter 2 the king granted a remission of taxes and gave away lavish gifts. So this taxation is actually a reversal.

Yes, the Jews were granted a great life-saving victory over their enemies but they are still under a king who makes their lives more burdensome. He is still mighty in power and in his own selfish desires.

Everything has been reversed and yet nothing has changed. He is completely unmoved by all the providential events that have gone on around him. God has been mightily, even if silently, present and at work, yet the king is clueless to all the signs of grace and faith and spiritual power.

But there is good news also. Mordecai is second in power and more powerful than ever and has the favor of all his people and he is not acting out of self-interest, he’s looking out for the welfare of his people and seeking peace (shalom).

While we may enjoy seasons of victory or prosperity, we must always know that our true and lasting hope and peace do not come from any human source, whether politics or business. As Chuck Colson used to say, “Salvation and the kingdom of God will not arrive on Air Force One.”

Don’t put your faith or hope or trust in Washington D.C. or Wall Street or Jerusalem or anywhere else on earth. And certainly not in whatever is said in a State of the Union

address. As Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” So don’t look for it to come from this world.

There are no utopias on earth. All the kingdoms of this world will fall and fail and pass away.

Mordecai was a great help to the Jews but he was only second in command and he was just a man and he would soon die. Kings come and kings go, political parties rise and political parties fall.

Our only hope is in the greatest reversal of all great reversals, when the Messiah comes, when Jesus comes in power to rule and reign forever and forever.

The Jewish feast of Purim is a foretaste of that great reversal that is to come for all God’s people. What happens in the book of Esther is only temporary. One greater than Mordecai will come, a true Prince of Peace.

True peace is only found when we find our peace in God. We don’t plead for peace from a king or a president, we plead for peace with the God of peace, with Jesus who sits on the throne at the right hand of God, with the one who seeks our welfare and our peace.

In the Book of Esther we have seen the ups and downs of life in this world of ours. Sometimes the world or even our own lives are ruled by a Haman and we find ourselves in seasons of fasting, weeping, wailing, crying out for mercy and help.

And sometimes the world or even our own lives are ruled by a Mordecai and we find ourselves in seasons of feasting and celebration, life is good, it doesn’t get any better than this.

These ebbs and flows happen on a macro scale and on a micro scale. We experience them in our own lives, our own marriages, our own businesses and in nations.

These seasons expose our hearts and what motivates us and what gives us pleasure. Are we driven by external circumstances, are we driven by what we have and how we are doing?

What makes us happy and what makes us sad or gives us despair or disappointment? What do we rejoice in and what do we get mad about? What shapes and controls our attitudes? What causes anxiety and stress?

Poverty and prosperity both reveal the idols of our hearts. Having little or having much exposes what truly is our hearts desire, what we are living for.

Our trust is in the wrong place if the peaks and valleys are controlled by what team wins or what the Dow is doing or what some other person says or does.

We have a better gift, a better peace, a lasting hope, that cannot be taken away by the shifting fortunes of life. We have reason to celebrate God's goodness every day because of Christ.

We gather every Sunday to celebrate the goodness of God, the peace we have because we have been reconciled to God by the blood of Jesus. Every Sunday is Christmas, Easter and Thanksgiving all in one.

The Providence of God and History.

We have spent several months looking at a small slice of human history written down in Esther. We have looked at what God was doing around the years 484 to 480 BC in a small corner of His vineyard called Persia, events related to a small handful of characters, a king, a couple of queens and a couple of prime ministers, Haman and later Mordecai.

As I repeatedly say, history is His story. History is God's possession, it all belongs to Him. This is true whether we are talking about Babylon, Egypt, Israel, Rome, Germany, America or North Korea. And it's true whether we are talking about Ahasuerus, Pharaoh, Herod, Judas, Augustine, Hitler, Trump, Tom Brady, Robert Woodyard or you. And it's true whether we are talking about politics, wars, earthquakes, volcanos, fires, acts of God or acts of man.

Every event, every nation, every activity, every person belongs to Him who "works all things according to the counsel of his will" (Ephesians 1:11).

History is a big book about God and what He is up to. To study history, if you have the eyes of faith, is to study God, it's a theological exercise.

Furthermore, the plan and purpose of all of human history is redemptive, from start to finish it is moving in a very purposeful direction.

It is not that God rules over just redemptive history. It is that God rules over all history which is all redemptive. There is no such thing as two histories, secular history and redemptive history.

Right after the fall God says in Genesis 3:

Genesis 3:15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

This is the Mother Promise, the promise out of which every other promise flows. This is God announcing His redemptive purpose for history. Everything else that happens from this point on is God moving toward a final victory in the story.

A story that I like to sum up as, “kill the dragon, get the girl.” Jesus defeats Satan, and rescues His bride.

If only this was how history was taught in school, maybe kids wouldn't be so bored and ask why do we have to know this stuff. To study history with the eyes of faith is to make yourself wise.

History is the revelation of how God deals with all people and how He deals with His people. The book of Esther reminds us that we are an exile people and helps us know how to cope with life as sojourners in a foreign land.

God is in control, God is always at work behind the scenes, and there is a better city, a far country that is far better. Until then we can rejoice in our suffering in exile knowing that:

Romans 5:3-5 ... suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame.

And we have the confident hope in God's sovereign providence knowing that:

Romans 8:28 ... for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

And that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

One day we will all see how each of our little stories, our little life histories, all fit in with and play a part in God's grand redemptive story. We will see that who we are and where we are and what we are doing is “for such a time as this.”

And the biggest surprise of all will be when we see which of our stories played a bigger part, it will most likely be our moral failures, our compromises with sin, our sufferings and moments of crisis, all those times and places when we cried out in utter dependence on God and He heard and answered. In our weaknesses we will see the greatest displays of His glory and strength.

Implications and application.

We live in a very broken, sinful, flawed world. It is hard to keep our faith on solid footing.

We say God is good, but this world is filled with so much that is so bad.

We say God is loving, but it seems like hatred is winning the day.

We say God is in control, but everything seems to be spiraling out of control.

We have a God who has made so many promises, but it seems like He isn't making good on them.

This is the tension we live in and this is the tension we have lived through in the book of Esther chapter after chapter.

God took a young unknown exiled Jewish orphan girl and put her on the throne of Persia. Like a stream of water, God moved the heart of a heartless, powerful, self-interested, stubborn godless Gentile king. God turned the evil plan of a wicked proud anti-Semitic prime minister completely upside down and worked it for good. He used another humble exiled despised Jew to change the course of history for an entire Empire, reversing an unchangeable law of the Medes and the Persians.

How could two such flawed and imperfect people become the instruments of God's great deliverance?

They join a long list of murderers, adulterers, liars, blasphemers, (and such were some of you), along with a host of fearful and depressed saints, all flawed people God uses for His redemptive purposes.

Someone has said, "God draws straight with crooked lines."

In Esther we see:

First, God is faithful to all His promises. He guards and keeps His covenant people, He will never cease to be their God and they His people.

Second, God is sovereign over all the affairs of all men, whether they are obedient or rebellious, sinners or saints. God actively intervenes, though His name is never used, His fingerprint is everywhere.

Third, God's timing is always perfect. He is never in a hurry, there is no panic in heaven. Everything is right on time and right on schedule.

What a beautiful message of God's ability to bring glory to Himself and good to His people out of what looked like a great tragedy.

This is meant to strengthen and build up our faith and be a story that we can use to encourage others.

We walk by faith, not by sight. When we are in the middle of our story, that is not a good time to make judgments about God or accusations about what in the world He is doing. Remember how quickly the children of Israel in the wilderness forgot the truth about God and grumbled and complained.

Notice role of laity in God's purposes.

Neither Mordecai nor Esther were ordained or official religious or spiritual leaders. Mordecai was not a priest. In fact there are no priests or elders or scribes in this book. Yet God uses both in redemptive history, and in establishing a great religious feast and festival.

They serve through their secular vocations. Secular roles can be used for eternal significance. This lifts up the understanding of the priesthood of all believers.

Vocation means calling, all work is a divine calling filled with divine significance. And all work glorifies God.

God's redemptive work and purposes in the world are in no way limited to the clergy.

Let us all glorify God by living for Christ as we live out the callings God has given to each of us.

Whatever we do, whatever decisions we make, whatever plans we carry out, whatever mistakes we regret and failures we experience, whatever sins that shame us and mar our journey, God uses every piece of it not only in our lives but also in His greater redemptive work in history. It all fits.

May we all seek God and ask Him to use our lives to further His shalom, for such a time as this. And at the end of our days may we be able to say with Paul:

II Timothy 4:7-8 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Prayer: Holy Father, reminds us again and again of the message of Esther. Give us a confident assurance that our small lives are included in your grand plan. Give us increased faith to trust you even when you seem removed or distant and we can't see what you are doing. Fill us with great hope in the great reversal that is sure to come when Christ the Victor returns. Thank you for this rich revelation from your Word, let it bear good fruit in our hearts and lives. Amen.