

Esther 8:12-17 It Is God Who Brings The Storms Of Life!

Last time we looked at Esther 8:9-11 'The Urgency Of The Gospel', I entitled the sermon, as we continue to see God's Sovereign hand of delivering His people through Esther and Mordecai. In this chapter we have been seeing the fervency and the passion of both of these people for the lives of their brethren. Esther "fell before the king weeping" and "begging" for her people, and when given the king's authority, v9, Mordecai acted "At once." He summoned all the crew to take down his orders. I explained that what struck me about these verses was the urgency with which he acted. He didn't mess around, because his people's lives were on the line!

I said that this was a tremendous challenge for me personally, because this fervency, this passion and urgency for his brothers and sisters, is often not what I find at work in my own life for my unsaved family and friends, and my Christian brethren in general. There should be an urgency to what we do as Christians, because Jesus is coming back, and "He is coming soon," (Revelation 22:20) and then the door of Mercy and Grace will be closed for all eternity!

And in Mordecai's words I explained, that we can see the gospel. We see the "two edged sword" of God. The message was one of Rescue and Redemption for His people, but one of Judgement and Retribution for Israel's enemies! We saw that "the dispatches were sealed with the king's signet ring" without which they would have been worthless and worse still, a deliberate attempt to deceive the people. Many are doing today in the Name of Jesus, I explained. But they come not in our King's Name, because they have not His royal seal. Ephesians 1:13-14 "The seal of the promised Holy Spirit." And we will know the true messengers of Christ "by their fruit" the scriptures tell us. Because they will speak only of His Life, of His Death, of His Resurrection and His victorious Ascension into heaven! Yes the true messengers of the King are on their King's business bringing the King's message of "Come, Believe, Repent and be Saved!"

The decree gave the Jews the right to "assemble," prepare and defend themselves from their enemies, as we also as Christians must do. As we saw from Ephesians 6:10-20 we are to "Put on the full armour of God." "Faith." "The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." And "Pray." Yes pray, pray, pray, and pray Paul says. And we do this knowing that those who come against God's people will pay dearly (Matthew 25:41-46), because ultimately, they come against God Himself!

And so we pick up the narrative in Esther 8:12-17 'It Is God Who Brings The Storms Of Life!'

Verse 12 "The day appointed for the Jews to do this in all the provinces of king Xerxes was the 13th day of the 12th month, the month of Adar." So what is the very first thing which we are told about this date? Well, it is the exact same date which had been set for Haman's evil attack upon the Jews. So the date of their genocide had now become the day of their deliverance. Even in the same way that Satan and all of God's enemies believed, that the day that they put His Son to death that the war was won. Little did they know, that this was the beginning of the end for them. Yes Satan would "Bruise His heel," as Genesis 3 tells us. But Jesus would rise in victory and "Crush the head of the serpent" and all of his legions of darkness! As we saw last time, the Jews had been given permission to gather together and "assemble" which was extremely important, because unauthorised gatherings were seen as a sign of insurrection and sedition, and a threat upon the crown. So to "assemble" in large numbers publicly gave the Jews in all of those "127 provinces" providence from God to prepare for battle. Without which, they would have in effect been a ripe and plump vineyard ready to be harvested!

But the question that came up at Bible study was why didn't the king just countermand the original decree? Surely that would have been far easier. And yet he himself has given us the answer, in the second part of v8: "For no document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring can be revoked."

Friends, you know it struck me, (as someone who like this king has been blessed with foot and mouth disease) that how much better off we would all be if we made just such a covenant with our mouths. What I mean is, that if we had the freedom of the discipline of choosing our words carefully, because we know what we say cannot be revoked! We've seen it James 1:19-20 many times over the years: "My dear brothers take note of this: (put this one up under the magnet on your fridge, James is saying) Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. For man's anger does not produce the righteous life that God desires." Yes if only our words were so precious to us because we valued the outcome of them so highly. Because we want to glorify God with every part of our life, so that we choose our words carefully! As we have been seeing, this whole situation is all of the king's making.

Now although certainly, Xerxes didn't choose Haman's words, but he was responsible for them, because they went out in his name. But yes how much better off would we all be, if we were constantly aware of the weight and the impact that we know our words can carry. Both for good and for evil. Yes both for the building up, and the tearing down! That we sought to use James' words for ourselves to make a covenant with our mouths. That we would be "Quick to listen." Not like a horse at the starting gate ready to jump, because we know that what we have to say is all important, and we have to make our point to win the day, no!

We need to be there, for one another. Jesus said "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples. If you have love one for another." Yes "Quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry," because every situation that we find ourselves in, can be used as a ministry for God. If we would but have our hearts and minds open, and even our mouths closed when needs be! So like our own words and actions, Xerxes' careless decree could not be revoked, and now Mordecai's words, have become the new decree of the king. And this would all fall on the same day as the original decree, and even with some of the same words as the original. "Destroy, kill, annihilate." Some would have nine months to prepare, while others would have less time as the decree would take many weeks to reach them. Yes, the 13th day of the 12th month the month of Adar. Today it would be the 13th of December.

Friends, I guess the question could be asked and actually has been asked: Why did God make His people have to go through all this? The first decree, and now the second decree. And instead of getting the king to overturn his own words, (which I'm sure he would have found a way if God had of so moved him) but no the people must stand, defend, and fight for their freedom and their lives! Well there is no black and white answer to this question, because God doesn't give us one. As we now know, that Esther is the one book in the Bible where it appears as though God is silent. We do know that all of this is His plan and His will because it has all taken place.

But the intricate workings of God's mind here we do not know! Job 11:7 "Can you fathom the mysteries of God?" Psalm 145:3 "Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise, his greatness no one can fathom." And finally, "Ecclesiastes 3:11 "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men, yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end."

Beloved as I have said before, it is the same for you and I. If you are anything like me, you will often ask the questions, Why Lord? Why me Lord? Why now Lord? I don't understand Lord! I heard a sermon recently when I was struggling about certain things myself, and I was asking these same questions. And just as Xerxes' second decree Penned by Mordecai, God's messenger found me at just the right time. His time! The message was about Jesus calming the storm. After Him teaching the people that day in the area of Galilee, Jesus says to the disciples, "Let's go over to the other side of the lake." I'm sure you all know the account. Halfway across the lake from where He would encounter the man possessed by the legion of demons, a tremendous storm blows in. The storm was so violent and out of control that these seasoned fishermen, believed that the boat was about to sink. But meanwhile, marvellously, Jesus was asleep in the back of the boat with his head on a pillow, we are told. In Mark 4:38, the disciples wake Jesus up basically saying, "*Master, don't you care? We are about to drown.*" *You have little faith. What were you so afraid?* Jesus says.

The preacher Alastair Begg made some very profound points which really spoke to me. Firstly, he said, 'If there is one question that we should never ask of God, it is Lord don't you care? Because we need only look to the Cross to find our answer to that question. Yes of course God cares, He sent His Son to die that we might live. Remember His words? "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." And secondly, Far from being in any danger, the disciples were in the safest place in the entire universe. And why? Because the Creator of that universe was with them in the boat! And the final thing, (which I must admit I had never heard before but of course knew to be true) is that Jesus didn't just calm the storm, Jesus actually brought the storm! And with the point being; That Jesus didn't bring the disciples halfway across the lake only to have them drown, no. He said, "Let's go over to the other side of the lake."

Now yes He was showing them that He is the Ruler and has Authority over all of creation, but also, that in those storms of life in which we find ourselves, that they come from Him, to draw us closer to himself, so that we don't ever fall into the labyrinth of self-sufficiency, believing that we can do it all on our own! And such things happen so that we would always remember that He is always with us. That He does care for us. That He does love us. Yes in those storms of life Jesus is always with us in the boat, and He will never let our boat sink. He will carry us safely all the way to heaven and glory. Amen! Yes Jesus brings those storms into our lives, to bring us closer to Himself. Because that's the place of safety. That's the place of comfort. That's the place of peace!

Do you remember His words to the storm? "Peace, be still." And the words of the disciples? "Who is this? That even the wind and the waves obey him." Yes God brings those storms of life to us to bring us closer to Himself! And I have no doubt, that this is what He is doing throughout the whole of this book. Beginning with Mordecai and Esther, and now with the whole nation of Israel! V13 "A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.

And as I said last time, we see the gospel here. As Christ's message must go into all of the world before He returns, Mordecai's edict in the King's name also, must go to the people of "every nationality, in their own language" For the 50 million people of the Persian Empire, there would be no excuse, not to have that date marked on their calendars so to speak, and burned into their minds. So too Romans 1:20 tells us, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." Yes as there would have been "no excuse" for all of the people of Xerxes' empire, not to be ready for that day, so too will there be "no excuse" for all of humanity on the day of reckoning, when we stand before the True King!

Notice, as I explained last time, they weren't permitted to attack, but to defend, or "avenge themselves." And yet what we as Christians need to understand, is that this idea of paying back measure for measure, and then plundering out enemies, (though at times I'm sure we would all love it to be true) a licence for this we do not have. Rather God tells us Deuteronomy 32:35 "Vengeance is mine says the Lord. I will repay." And Paul elaborates upon this in Romans 12:17-21: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written. 'It is mine to avenge, I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary. If your enemy is hungry, feed him, if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Yes although we don't like it and it's very difficult at times, it is our testimony of what God has done and continues to do in our lives, that is all important. We must leave Retribution to Him! And in Deuteronomy God doesn't say I might repay, He says "I will repay." So we must rest in that. "Turn the other cheek" Jesus said. Not that we be fools for others to beat upon, no. It means that we be prepared to take a hit so to speak, if needs be, for the Name of the one whom we serve who died for us. And the rest by faith, we leave to Him! Remember it is God who brings the storms of life, so that He carries us through them, as He reaffirms in our perseverance who we are, while always bringing us to Himself.

Praise God! V14 "The couriers, riding the royal horses, raced out, spurred on by the king's command. And the edict was also issued in the citadel of Susa. Oh dear friends, if these riders were "spurred on" by their callous and indifferent king's command, how much more then should we be "spurred on," by the command of our King. And by His message of life that He has entrusted to us to bring. Yes that message which carries people from death to life, even life everlasting. Amen! V15 "Mordecai left the king's presence wearing royal garments of blue and white, a large crown of gold and a purple robe of fine linen." Does it sound familiar? Well it should, because we've seen a very similar picture before. Chapter 1:6 "The garden had hangings of white and blue linen fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings on marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother of Pearl and other costly stones." Yes as we saw at the start of this series, there was nothing that the king liked to do more than to parade and flaunt his great wealth. *'I'm the king, and you are not'* he might have boldly said. Remember, this is how God has brought about Esther becoming Queen. At the height of his garden party, (after 180 days of feasting already) he would parade Queen Vashti before a drunken mob to be ogled, envied and lusted after. And now Mordecai, (while yes of course holding the position of honour second only to the king) but yes now Mordecai wherever he goes would be a neon light, bearing witness to the king's enormous wealth!

Brothers and sisters, how very easy it is to be driven and consumed by such things. Much of the modern western world is driven and obsessed by wanting to be seen as some kind of proud peacock. Parents go into debt so they can display their children in the most expensive gear, even before they are of school age. So these kids grow up with their parents mindset. Only the best will do! Humility is a thing of the past. Yes a timelessly beautiful character and disposition, well, is largely worthless today isn't it. And perhaps even seen as weak and demeaning. And Mordecai had had a taste of this honour before, remember? Paraded through the streets wearing one of the king's royal robes, being led on one of the king's own horses. "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honour." But this time it was very different. Because this time, the honour was permanent!

Beloved in Revelation Chapter 7, we read of "a great multitude dressed in white robes. From every nation, tribe and tongue that no one can count. Standing before the throne of God." And Jesus

seated upon that throne and a voice crying out, "salvation belongs to our God." These garments also will be given to us, by our King. And these clothes also will be permanent, even unto eternity! V15b "And the city of Susa held a joyous celebration." Do you remember the reaction of the people to Haman's edict? Chapter 3:15b "The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered." Chapter 4:3 "In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes" But now for the Jews it is a time of a "joyous celebration" V16 "For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honour. 17 In every province and in every city, wherever the edict of the king went, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating."

Beloved can you see? That this is what God does for us. He takes our sadness and emptiness that we experience when we are estranged from Him because of sin, then through Jesus' Blood, and the pouring into our hearts and souls of His Holy Spirit, He turns these things through His great love for us into joy! After His tempting in the wilderness by Satan, and the beginning of His ministry once John had been put in prison by Herod, Jesus began to preach. Matthew 4:17 "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near."

And when He returned to his hometown of Nazareth, He entered the synagogue and took ownership of these words, that foretold of His coming. Isaiah 61:1-3 "The Spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion, to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. That will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour."

Yes, this is what Jesus does for us. He "comforts all who mourn and grieve" over their sin. Matthew 5:4 in His sermon on the mount: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." He bestows on us "a crown of beauty instead of ashes." Yes instead of the ashes of death, judgement, wailing and hell, He gives us a crown of eternal life. He turns our "mourning into joy and it gives us a garment of praise, instead of the spirit of despair." Yes in Mordecai's preferment and exalting, we can see clearly what Jesus does for us. He has taken us from hell's pit of despair, and lifted us into His very presence as King. In Isaiah 61:7 "Instead of disgrace we rejoice. And receive a double portion of our inheritance." "Everlasting joy," will be ours. It cannot be taken away!

Beloved God brings the storms and trials of life to test us, but He will not abandon us half way across the lake of life, no. Jesus has gone to the Cross, victory is assured. Isaiah 61:9b-10b "All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed. I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness." Yes in this lifting up and clothing and crowning of Mordecai by Xerxes, we get an insight into what Christ has done for us. Hallelujah, praise God!

Yes friends it is God who brings the storms of life. Not to sink us, but to carry us through those storms, drawing us to Himself, while confirming our citizenship through our perseverance in those storms by faith, and taking us "to the other side," for the crown of glory, and those garments of heavenly praise that await us!

Again, Praise God!

Let's pray!