

## Esther 9:11-17 'The Sanctity Of Life. And Cursed By God!'

Last week in the book of Esther, we looked at v5-17 of Chapter 9 in a sermon I called 'The Immutable God, And Beware The Plunder Of The World'. If you remember, before even looking at the text and this holy war, which was going to be fought between Israel and her enemies throughout the Persian Empire, I discounted the idea that the God of the New Testament and the God of the Old Testament were in any way different. Malachi 3:6 says "For I the LORD do not change." If God were to change or change His Mind, because of our iniquity, we would be all be lost! James 1:17 "God does not change like shifting shadows." And Hebrews 13:8 "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever." No, the Old Testament God is not the scary God of judgement and wrath, and the New Testament God all about love, no. God is Immutable. By His very eternal nature being God, He cannot and does not change!

After almost 1000 years, the destruction of the Amalekite nation due to their attack upon the people of God when they came up out of Egypt, had finally come. God had not forgotten and He had not changed His mind. 2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." So God cannot and does not change!

Esther 9:5 and following: "The Jews struck down all their enemies who hated them"; "500 men in Susa," and "75,000 throughout the other provinces." I explained that, just as it is today, this hatred of God's people made no sense and continues to make no sense, because it has its origins even in the fall of man! Genesis 3:15, as God speaks to Satan: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and hers (Jesus). He (Jesus) will crush your head and you will bruise his heel." No, the world's hatred of us makes no sense. Only in the light of John 15:18 does it add up. Jesus Himself said, "If the world hates you keep in mind that it hated me first." Yes this is a spiritual enmity.

And finally we saw that though given permission to take the spoils of the conflict, Israel, "did not lay their hands on the plunder." 1 Corinthians 10:23 says, "All things are permissible, but not all things are beneficial." God had delivered them from their enemies, what more did they need? And as Alan said at Bible study, 'Why would we want that which belonged to the enemies of our king?' So whatever form those things may take, we must beware of those "30 pieces of silver" that Satan holds out to us. Because they come with an eternal sting!

And so we pick up the text this morning in Esther 9:11-22 under the heading, 'The Sanctity Of Life. And Cursed By God!'

We come to the strange account of this discourse between king Xerxes and Queen Esther, as the reports of the war are brought to the king and he almost excitedly, brings them to Esther. V11 "The number of those slain in the citadel of Susa was reported to the king that same day." And the way it all unfolds, I do find interesting. Although as we've seen, the details actually written upon the edict mattered very little to the king, it does appear that he had a very keen interest in the battles themselves. And again the way it comes across, I do find astonishing. Because we must not forget that these people were actually the King's own subjects, and living in the capital city no less. Yes 500 are dead, and it's as though Xerxes is saying, 'Oh yeah, do tell me more.' And friends, may I suggest, that it does give us yet another insight into the man himself!

Now perhaps I'm reading too much into this here, but it does seem to me, that he has an absolutely callous indifference toward this loss of life. Even in our heartless world today, were 500 people put to death in war or by any other means, it would make headlines around the world. And it does seem that he is very keen to share this information with the Queen. Look at v12 "The Jews have killed and destroyed 500 men and the ten sons of Haman In the citadel of Susa. What have they done in the rest of the king`s provinces?"

Now friends, perhaps it's just me, and this may well have not been, and most likely wasn't what the writer chiefly intended to draw out here. And again perhaps it's just me, and maybe because of my brother-in-law Raymond's shockingly sudden death last week at the age of 59. And perhaps also what is happening in the Ukraine and many other places around the world. For example, with the Uighurs in China, and atrocities in Myanmar, and many similar things around the world at this time, but I was just struck by the King's callous indifference to the sanctity of life! Don't get me wrong, I know it shouldn't have surprised me. 'That's just how things were,' Tom would most likely say. He was a military man and a conqueror of much of the ancient world. And I guess in all reality Xerxes` callous indifference didn't surprise me so much, and yet my reaction to this situation did.

You know how sometimes things really hit home with us. And you know, I have no doubt that this is who this man was at the very core of his being. Just like Putin, Xi Jinping, Adolf Hitler, and every other evil dictator that has ever been, Xerxes` was simply another murderous individual who saw all life, (including that of humanity) almost as some kind of plaything, to be used and abused as he saw fit!

Now friends, I guess you are most likely thinking, OK Roy, where are you going with all of this? Well I think I just felt the need, (while remaining faithful to the account) to point out the obvious. And that is that life, (all life and particularly human life) is sacred and a gift from God! And also that I do feel, and particularly in our modern world context. What with being bombarded by all manner of graphically detailed violent movies, and almost daily reports of the latest murderous rage in America of some lunatic who has gunned down tens of people, even children. While others around the world blow people up, including themselves. And with a myriad of other examples, but yes I do feel, that it is very easy for us to become blasé, hardened or even indifferent without meaning to, concerning the sanctity of life.

Beloved, we must not ever allow ourselves even begin to think, that God feels that way. As if God is indifferent to human life because He permits such things to happen! Psalm 139:13-16 "For you created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made, your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." And in Genesis 1:26 we read: "And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'"

And it was Jesus himself who said in Matthew 10:29-31 "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And yet not one of them will not fall to the ground apart from the will of your father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not be afraid, you are worth more than many sparrows." And finally, and of course ultimately the greatest example and evidence of God's love toward His humanity and the sanctity of life. Jesus` Own words from the cross. "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." And, "It is finished." So in spite of all of the things that are currently going on around the world which may trouble us. Things that we have such immediate visual access to, as

never before in history. And with us being ignorant of God's plan, as to why specifically these things are taking place. No we should never allow ourselves to begin to believe, that like man, God is indifferent to the preservation, the loss, and the sanctity of life. On the contrary, as is clear from all of the passages that we have just read, we know the opposite to be true. Life, and particularly human life, is sacred to God. If this were not so, why then did He send His Own Son to die for us?

So Beloved, I really do feel that perhaps we even need to be prayerfully on guard, against becoming hardened and indifferent, to the loss of human life around us! Jesus' own words, Matthew 23:37: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who killed the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing." Yes, life is sacred to God!

From v12 of Esther 9: "The king said to Queen Esther, "The Jews have killed and destroyed 500 men in the citadel of Susa. What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces?" Now again, it does appear of him being so excited, (for want of the better description) yes it does appear that he is so excited that he doesn't even wait for an answer. He just blurts out this unsolicited favour upon the Queen. 12c "Now what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? It will be granted." And if you remember, the first two reasons of these words of the king being put to Esther, had been in response to her solicitations by laying her life on the line, which then resulted in the king pointing the golden sceptre at her, giving her permission to approach him. Without which would have meant certain death. And with Esther the second time, again if you remember, falling at his feet. Weeping, begging and pleading with him for the lives of her people. But this time, he is almost falling all over himself to appease her!

Brethren clearly, we again are shown the invisible Hand of the Sovereignty of the Almighty. Let us try to never lose sight of this. Although it is true that we are certainly not privy to the intricate details of the plans and purposes of God, let us never lose sight of the fact, that we see it in all things! The storms, the floods, the fires. The wars, the famines and the droughts. In the moving of the hands of those in positions of power. Presidents, Prime ministers, despots, dictators, Queens and kings. Yes in all things, (as we will also see when we come to the book of Habakkuk) God is at work! V13 "If it pleases the king' Esther answered, 'give the Jews in Susa permission to carry out this days edict tomorrow also, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows." No she did not mince her words. Beloved, as we saw at the start of this series, and as the commentator explained, Esther was no wallflower. She had actively "won the favour," of Hegai the chief eunuch of the harem with her compliant, humble disposition. As did she also the rest of the other women in the harem. The king to, was won over not only by her beauty, but her manner. And though reluctant at first, she'd accepted Mordecai's counsel of the grave situation in which providentially, her people found themselves, due to Haman's evil hatred. She placed her life on the line more than once, acting on their behalf.

And here again before us, she proves herself to be the true Queen, of God's people. She again asks nothing for herself, it's all about her people! And it does appear that somehow or other, she knew that the job was not yet finished in Susa. Perhaps she was aware that the number of "500" was inadequate or incomplete. Perhaps Mordecai had counselled her as such. I'm not sure and we are not told. All we do know, is that as per her request, permission is given to the Jews in Susa to continue the battle the following day. And a further "300 men" would be put to death. And "Haman's ten sons were hanged on the gallows." And as we have come to understand, this means that either literally they were impaled, and then while still being alive lifted up on poles. Or killed, then publicly displayed by the lifting of the bodies up somehow, for all to see as a public warning. Yes, slight the king, and this could be you!

So unlike in our times, there were indeed consequences for one's own actions in those days. And in this exhibition, (this public displaying of the bodies of the ten sons of Haman, hanging upon poles for all to see) the descendants of Agag are dead. God's proclamation of the destruction of the Amalekite nation fulfilled. No "God is not slow in keeping his promise as some understand slowness." And "Vengeance is mine says the Lord, I will repay." And for the Israelites in those days, those 10 dead sons of their would be destroyer Haman, would have been a crystal clear sign of the victory of God. Nearly 1000 years before God Himself had declared in Deuteronomy 21:22-23b "If a man guilty of a capital offence is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree, bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse."

Matthew Henry explains the deep spiritual significance of this "hanging on a tree," as it was perceived by the Jewish people. And it is that symbolically, that person, was perceived to be under the curse of God as they were suspended as it were, between the earth, and heaven. And as long as they were hanging there, the curse of God was being poured out upon them! And it was deemed that for even the vilest offenders, the worst of the worse, to have the "curse of God" poured out upon them for more than one day, was too much to even imagine. And of course this is what had been prescribed by God in the law! But this also has a far greater spiritual significance. Because almost 1500 years later, the Saviour of the world would be suspended between earth and heaven, upon that Cross of suffering and shame, even between heaven and hell, for the sake of His people. And with the full curse of God's fury and wrath, being poured out upon Him for their redemption!

Galatians 3:10-13 "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law. Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, the righteous will live by faith. The law is not based on faith, on the contrary, the man who does these things will live by them. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

O friends, how clearly the Sovereign Hand of God is in it all. Yes all these things in Deuteronomy and Esther, were prescribed by God the Holy Spirit, (the sole author of the 66 books of the Bible) to point us to how Jesus would pay the price for our rebellion, so that we would again be able to dwell, in the presence and favour of God! Yes within the words of Esther's punishment, we have "the ten sons of Haman pointing us to Jesus. Amazing isn't it. Not chance, not circumstance, but the Sovereign plan and hand of the Lord. Him working through all things to redeem His people. Praise God! I never cease to be amazed at the wonders that God has revealed of Himself and His plan in the scriptures, that we can find, as long as we are prepared to dig! v14-15 "So the king commanded that this be done. An edict was issued in Susa, and they hanged that ten sons of Haman. The Jews in Susa came together on the 14th day of the month of Adar, and they put to death in Susa 300 men, but they did not lay their hands on the plunder." No "God is not slow in keeping his promise." Judgement declared, and judgement fulfilled! v16-17 "Meanwhile, the remainder of the Jews who were in the King's provinces also assembled to protect themselves and get relief from their enemies. They killed 75,000 of them but did not lay their hands on the plunder." So all the Jews in Susa were defending themselves, against those who had it in their hearts to eradicate them from the face of the earth. Putting to death "500" of their would be assassins, as the war raged throughout the 50 million strong Persian Empire. And "in every province!" And "75,000 people were put to the sword" that day. And if we were to divide that number up amongst the other 126 provinces, that would add up to almost 600 people dead in every province.

Death was everywhere, there would have been no escaping it! To put this into some kind of perspective, the greatest loss of life in modern history in any war, on a single day, was during the

battle of the Somme. On the 1st of July in 1916. When 57,470 men died! Yes death was everywhere. And yet in the midst of that judgement, mercy for God's people was found! And so it is for us brothers and sisters. If we were to take it from Peter Marshall's sermon from a few weeks ago, the reality is, that there is a battle that is raging, (and as in Esther's day) it is being fought on all fronts. The question is I guess, Are we being seen as the enemy? Yes as the saying goes, Is there enough evidence for us to be convicted of the crime (the heinous crime) of being Christian? Because we are clearly aligned with Christ!

Yes the battle for the souls of the Saints is being fought on all fronts. And although life is indeed sacred to God, as I said last time, He will not tolerate sin forever. Jesus' call is simply to "Come." He wore God's Curse so that we could come. Yes "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Yes in the midst of this Holy war which is being fought today, between Christians and their enemies, because of Jesus, mercy is found! And in the midst of this daily struggle again because of Jesus, in the power of His Word through the Holy Spirit, we too (as in v16 of Esther 9) "can get relief from our enemies." Because He has placed His Spirit within us, and He continues to give us comfort within the power of His Word the Bible! Yes Beloved Christ wore God's Curse so that we would come.

I guess if there is one thing that I have had thrust so powerfully upon me by Raymond's death, it is that we do not own tomorrow. So we must come today! Amen!

Let's pray!