

Esther 9:5-17 'Our Immutable God. And Beware The Plunder Of The World!'

Last time we looked at the book of Esther chapter 8:17b-9:4 'The Fear Of God', I entitled the sermon. Verse 17b: "And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them. I suggested that it was not a "fear of the Jews" so much, as it was a "fear" of the God of the Jews! And I said that through two people, God had turned the whole of the Persian Empire upside down. He did this basically by them simply doing one thing, even as the old hymn calls us to do: "Stand up, stand up" (for Jesus!) They stood up boldly, yes, for their people, but ultimately for the God whom they worshipped. They had in effect "Put on the full armour of God" as described in Ephesians 6. Esther and Mordecai feared: they stood in awe and reverence of God and how He had changed that world through them, cause many pagans throughout the kingdom to do the same. The evidence was irrefutable. The Queen is a Jew, Haman is dead, Mordecai the Jew is Grand Vizier, and now that day for the slaughter of the Jewish nation, had been turned into a holy war! They had been given permission to fight and fight they would. Yes many became Jews. Now whether they were genuine converts or fair weather Jews, it matters not. The world had been turned upside down by the "Fear of God."

Indeed, Proverbs 9:10 says "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One, this is understanding." But of course the writer of Proverbs doesn't simply mean "the fear of God" is simply the beginning, but the make-up and direction of one's whole life. And I explained that God can do the same in Australia today. But His people also need to stand up like Esther and Mordecai. Not fearing the world and what they might say or do to us, but "fearing" Him who created it and holds it and us in the palm of His Hand!

That is how God is seen today. When His people stand up to be counted, and as we unashamedly hold to all that the Bible teaches. That is how revival comes, as we are seen to be different and we testify that Christ alone Lord. And if need be, call falsehood out as Jesus did. "White washed tombs," "blind guides," "children of their father the devil," "snakes," "Vipers, and hypocrites" many times over.

Yes the whole world had changed. The ruling elite no longer mocked, but "were seized with fear of Mordecai." The Jews' mourning had been turned into joy, and all of it brought about through "The fear of God." Acts 9:31: "The church was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit. It grew in numbers living in the fear of the Lord."

Which is where we pick up the narrative this morning. Esther 9:5-17 'Our Immutable God. And Beware Of The Plunder Of The World!'

Verse 5 "The Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and they did what they pleased to those who hated them." Now firstly brothers and sisters, before we even consider the text this morning I want to make one thing very clear, because the waters of such accounts throughout the Bible have been somewhat muddied in recent decades. Perhaps even by some well-meaning preachers, but also by outright deceivers who are actually children of Satan. And the point is simply that which I have made many times over the years. God cannot, (for want of a better description) no God cannot change! And for the proof of this point, Malachi 3:6 "For I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob are not destroyed." Yes if God were changeable, then our sin would cause Him to wipe humanity from existence. But He does not change, and therefore continues to be merciful.

And James 1:17 "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the father of the heavenly lights who does not change like shifting shadows." And finally Hebrews 13:8 "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever." You've heard me mention many times over the years, that there are those (for whatever reason or agenda) have wanted to almost draw a line between the Old and New testaments. Even as though the God of the Old Testament is that God of judgement and wrath (you know the *scary* God) while the God of the New Testament, who of course is embodied in the Lord Jesus Christ, is all and only about love, love, love, love and love! And may I suggest that the reason they seek to do this is because they believe that the New Testament God of love is a far easier sell! You know, gentle Jesus meek and mild. And as many will sing this coming Christmas, 'away in a manger no crib for a bed, the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head'.

Now without meaning to be disrespectful and make light of these things, the unsaved world just loves this kind of stuff. Yes they love to keep Jesus either as a baby in a barn with His head on some straw in a feeding trough somewhere, or as meek and mild, and come into the world (even God become man no less) so that he could run throughout the ancient world like some kind of hippy, throwing flowers and bliss bombs around to make everyone's lives smell of roses. Well I'm sorry to shock you but no, that's not why He came. He came to deal with a situation that could not be dealt with any other way, than by dying a violent, brutal, horrendous and unjust death. Now God has not, does not and cannot change!

So that reckoning, (that day of paying the account) was foretold, and now it had come. And friends we need to understand that this day before us, (while yes being a day of deliverance for the Jewish nation and judgement upon their enemies) this day also has far more ancient origins. Around 1000 years before, when God had brought His people up out of Egypt and they were weary from marching, the Amalekites attacked the people, so God ordered what the commentator calls a holy war, against them perpetually, until they were no more. Yes He had even ordained the annihilation of that nation because of their actions against His chosen ones, even His "treasured possession" He calls them. So in Deuteronomy 25:17 God says, "Remember what the Amalekites did." And in v19 "You shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget."

Friends as I said some weeks ago, God takes it very personally when His people are abused or set upon in any way. Then in 1 Samuel 15:7-9 king Saul is sent to carry out this holy war of the judgement of God. To wipe everyone and everything out. No person or animal is to be left alive! Well he does put to death every person he encounters, but he spares Agag the king of the day (who if you remember is Haman's ancestor) and also claims all of the animals and plunder for himself. Defying God's holy instruction. That is why his crown would eventually be given to David. And there is this famous scene whereupon Saul's returning in triumph from the battle, Samuel asks the question, 'Have you carried out the Lord's instruction?' 'Oh yes,' Saul says, 'I've been very zealous for the Lord today'. And quite wryly Samuel replies, "Then what is this bleating of sheep in my ears, and this lowing of cattle that I hear?" 'You've blown it, you've done the wrong thing,' Samuel basically says. When Saul eventually grabs a hold of his coat as Samuel turns to leave, and a piece is torn from it. So Samuel says. "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel away from you today and given it to one of your neighbours who is better than you."

So this day that now appears before us here in Esther, is the final word of God's judgement upon the impudence of the Amalekites for their attack upon God's people nearly 1000 years before! So what do we learn from all of this? Well simply that God has a long memory. And there is an account for which we will all have to make for all unrepentant sin. And all of this underlines the fact, that all of these things have been orchestrated by the invisible hand of the Sovereignty of God. Yes all things happening amongst all nations for His plan and His purposes!

We read in 2 Peter 3:9-10: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise as some understand slowness. He's patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare."

But hang on, this is the New Testament not the Old Testament. And yet we read of the Lord's judgement upon all of humanity and even the earth itself. That's not right is it? Isn't the New Testament all about love? Yes love, love, love, love and love? Well Peter continues in v11-12 of 2 Peter 3: "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed it's coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat." So the knowledge of God's past judgments should confirm in us that He does not make idle threats, and that He keeps His word, and yet in His prescribed time! And also that there is still yet a final judgement which is coming up on the earth, and He will keep that promise to!

But what should this truth lead us toward? Well Peter says repentance, and lives lived with a desire for holiness. So clearly there is but One God. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Three persons in one God. And He has not, He does not, and indeed He cannot change! No God cannot cease to be that which He eternally is. Holy. True. Merciful to the unrepentant sinner through Jesus. And yet meeting out punishment upon those who come not to Him through His One and only Son! No God hasn't changed since He first delivered the Israelites out of Egypt, and His vengeance upon the Amalekites had finally come. Even though it has taken almost 1000 years! No the "Lord is not slow in keeping his promise as some understand slowness." And yes "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever."

So again in Esther 9:5 "The Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and they did what they pleased to those who hated them." Brothers and sisters it does appear that no mercy was shown to the enemy of God's people that day. Whoever raised their hand against God, (as that was perceived in the attacking of His people) paid for that with their very lives! So we can see that though God is indeed merciful, He will not tolerate sin forever. Yes He will deal eternally with unrepentant sin. The door to salvation remains open only for a set time, then it will be slammed forever! "The Jews did what they please to those who hated them." Or in other words, they did what their enemies had intended to do to them. They poured wrath back upon the heads of "those who hated them." And it was death to everyone! And we can see that in verses 6-10a, in the capital city alone, "the citadel of Susa" on the 13th day of the 12th month of the 12th year of Xerxes' reign, "500 men were put to the sword." And the commentator Matthew Henry reiterates, that the Jews were not the aggressors. He even suggests, that if it were not for that ancient hatred by the Amalekite's of the Jews, that not a hair of anyone's head would have been harmed that day. And he also adds, that far from the second edict of the king putting paid to their lust for Jewish blood, it does appear that they were inflamed all the more, to put an end to them!

Brothers and sisters, is it not the same today? People's hatred of Christians, Christianity and ultimately Christ Himself, is not steeped in reason. No it makes no sense; it doesn't add up. Even looking from a purely humanistic perspective, it makes no sense why people are so hate filled, against those who simply want to hold to those values upon which our nation was built. And even if we were to take God out of the equation, (and I speak respectfully here Lord) most Christians, simply want to live a life of peace, integrity, morality, truth and justice. And of course all of these things are encapsulated in our God given faith in Jesus! But like this attack upon the Jews in Esther and Mordecai's day, our enemies, (of course driven by the devil himself) will not let us be. Will not let us live in peace within our faith and devotion and values that we are seeking to hold to. Were we

Hindu, or Buddhist, or Zoroastrian, or worshipping the rainbow serpent of the Aboriginal people, or Muslim or even satanist's, we would be afforded our every right to live and conduct our religion as we see fit. Yes as I've mentioned before, you can have any opinion that you like about anything, as long as it is not biblical and Christian! But Beloved this shouldn't surprise us. Because Jesus said in John 15:18-19 "If the world hates you keep in mind it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you."

So it's very clear isn't it. *Don't seek to look for sense and reason in this*, Jesus is saying. *Because the world's hatred of you is not about those things. If you belonged to it, it would wrap its arms around you and perhaps even give you a big sloppy kiss. No 'this is all about Me,'* Jesus is saying. *'And it's hatred of you may well be, that there is even enough evidence in your life to show that you belong to Me, so take heart. Be encouraged, because you are actually in the fight!'* Yes this is a spiritual enmity Jesus would have us know. We belong to His Kingdom. It hated Jesus first, so of course it is going to hate those who follow Him.

Beloved, can't we see the evidence of this being played out more and more in Australia today? Israel Felau. Those preachers in Tasmania who I told you about, being taken to court for simply speaking on what biblical marriage is. Those Christian rugby league players who refused to wear the so called gay pride round special football guernseys, refusing to support homosexuality, and being abused by all and sundry for their stance for Christ. That guy, (who was actually supported those things and actually initiated that round in AFL, supporting homosexuality) lost his job after only one day, being found guilty by association of the heinous crime of holding to biblical truth! And for the Christians of course, there is no recall. And yet the young Muslim woman who refused to wear the gay pride colours, was excused without any fuss. But no not the Christian. And it is clearly getting worse before our very eyes.

This hatred of God's people by the Pagan world has ancient origins. We read in Genesis 3:1 "Did God really say that you must not eat from any tree in the garden?" And v15 as God condemns Satan "And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and hers." In v6-10a, we learn also that all of the "ten sons of Haman are dead."

So now God's judgement upon the Amalekite nation is complete. The descendants of Agag are dead. Yes judgement pronounced, and judgement fulfilled! And then we are told something very significant. V10b of Esther 9 "But they did not lay their hands on the plunder." Now If you remember, "laying his hands on the plunder," is what got the crown torn from king Saul's head. He took what God had commanded him to destroy under the pretence of gaining it for the Lord. And it seems to me that there are many today claiming for themselves, that which belongs to God. And may I suggest, that the crown which Paul speaks of in 2 Timothy 4, which is in store for all of God's true people, has been torn from these deceivers heads also! And as I mentioned earlier, the commentator explains that this was a Holy war. So all of the spoils were an offering to God, and not to be touched.

And yet here in the edict in Esther 9:10a, the people are actually given the right to the plunder. But in v15-16, where 75,500 people fell that very day throughout the empire, there too it is revealed, "but they did not lay their hands on the plunder." The question which must be asked of course is, Why didn't they take that which the edict of the king had given them the permission to lay hands on? In ch8 and the last part of v11 it clearly says, after saying "destroy, kill and annihilate any armed force of any nationality or province that might attack them" yes it clearly says, "and to plunder the property of their enemies." So why didn't they? There even seems to have been this nationwide

decision made to leave all such things alone. But apart from the knowledge that I have just shared with you about Saul's downfall, we really are given no answer or insight into this question.

What we do have though, is the Bible verse which says in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 and 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1, "Everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial." And in both of these cases, he's talking about the freedoms that we as Christians who have been set free from God's judgement because of Jesus have, to live in society, as long as those things don't compromise our faith. Or indeed the Name of Him whom we profess to worship! 1 Corinthians 10:2 " Everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible, but not everything is constructive." And I do feel that we need to view this part of Esther in this way. Because yes they had permission to do this by the king's edict, and yet in light of king Saul's falling away, would this be honouring to God? And would this be constructive toward their rebuilding their nation, and their personal walk with Him? Or as a friend put it as we were talking about these things: God had delivered them out of the hands of their enemies, so surely that should be enough! You know, I think our application here, is that there are many things which legally as citizens, we have a right to, like that plunder to the Israelites in Esther's day. But are they "beneficial and constructive" in our relationship with God? And also are they honouring and glorifying to him? For example, the way we use our time. Where we invest the currency of our eyes. The things we would watch on the Internet and television. The way we use our finances, because Jesus said, "For where your treasure is there will your heart be also."

Yes what we do invest in, reflects where our treasure truly lies! I learned recently of some brethren, who lost everything in a financial fraud. And then were left a substantial inheritance. But the person who left them that money was so vehemently opposed to Jesus while they were alive, that these people gave it all away to missionary appeals. Oh they still had their home and a meagre income, so they would not soil their souls, as it were, with what were in effect the spoils of iniquity! And Alan made a similar point at Bible study on Monday night. Why would we want to own that, which belonged to the enemies of God? Yes "All things are permissible, but not all things are beneficial. All things are permissible, but not all things are constructive." So as we read in Esther " they did not lay their hands on the plunder!"

Beloved, we need to beware of the plunder of the those shining things of the world, which catch our eyes. Whether they be of the flesh or of our finances. Even those things that would lure us away from "the narrow road which leads to life." So as I close this morning, we have two simple things that we can take home and ponder. Firstly, the Immutability of God. He has not changed, He will not change, He cannot change. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever." And from Malachi, "therefore you O Israel are not destroyed." Were God to change, we would all be lost because "our sin is ever before us" as king David writes! And secondly, we must be on guard against the loot, or the plunder of this world. Because although "all things are permissible, not all things are beneficial" to our walk with God! Yes we must beware of the 30 pieces of silver, that Satan might hold out to us. Because as with the Judas, those things glitter with the sting of eternal death.

Let's pray!