

WELCOME 28th August 2022 – 12 Pentecost '22 C

Esther 8, 9 & 10

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! Today we continue exploring God's word to us through the book of Esther as a family of disciples... **Bible Study Qs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & so you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups** on Friday @ 1p.m.

As we move into this week... Every sports team knows...a victory in the Grand Final is not just ONE victory. It is the culmination of a series of victories. It's the end result of discipline, hard work & even disappointment along the way. That's why victory celebrations are so awesome & unrestrained.

In our lives as God's people, we know we've been given the ultimate victory. *Christ is risen...He is risen indeed.* We live w/ certainty about the end of our story. But there are still challenges to face, obstacles to overcome & trials that test us in the every day journey we travel. There are victories still to be won.

Until the end though, God calls us to remember what's already ours, to live faithfully w/ discipline & hard work; to celebrate the little victories, & to share the good news of God often silently at work in every ordinary moment in the lives of **his** people.

"Mordecai the Jew became the prime minister, with authority next to that of King Xerxes himself. He was very great among the Jews, who held him in high esteem, because he continued to work for the good of his people & to speak up for the welfare of all their descendants."

Against the backdrop of God's redeeming saving love...Esther reminds us... Memories matter. Victory takes work. The work isn't finished until everybody is included. Remembering God's saving purpose & life-giving plan is marked by joy & celebration at every step until the end is reached in joy & celebration that never end.

We'll explore & experience that together...Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O Lord, our God, by the work of the Spirit alive in us, open our eyes to behold the power of your word, illuminate our understanding, & above all...quicken our lives in obedience...that those around us in your wonderful wider world would see in us the glorious life of your Son Jesus & fall freely into his saving love...In Jesus' Name...Amen.

Let's hear the story of Esther again today...

FAITH CHAT:

1. What "victory" have you had to work hardest to achieve?
2. What "victory" are you still working to maintain?
What are you doing to make it happen?

12 PENTECOST '22 C – GOD'S SILENT SOVEREIGNTY: WHEN GOD SAVES HIS PEOPLE

British author incredible XN intellect GK Chesterton "Every high civilization decays by forgetting obvious things." & obvious = crucial critical must-know. He's right. Memories matter. To forget...or think you can move/grow beyond/do w/o those things is crippling. So...What are some "obvious things" you believe should be remembered? *Pls share.* Why that? How do you ensure that stays fixed in your memory? What do you do to remember?

Memories matter. I've been reading the Psalms again as part of my daily devotions. Psalm 106 retells the history of God's people Israel. Starts w/ praise but quickly moves to the retelling of God at work among his people Exodus & the psalmist sees the history of God's people written in the language of forgetfulness.

106:6-7 *Like our ancestors, we have sinned. We have done wrong! We have acted wickedly! Our ancestors...were not impressed by the Lord's miraculous deeds. They soon forgot his many acts of kindness to them. Instead, they rebelled against him at the Red Sea.*

Forgetfulness of God → you trapped in cycle sin wickedness wrongdoing rebellion. To forget who you are by God's claim upon you (live contrary to that claim promise) is to become trapped in this rolling repeating cycle of brokenness. You keep making the same bad decisions mistakes catastrophes over & over again. *Like our ancestors...*

(Red Sea rescue then) *Yet how quickly they forgot what he had done! They wouldn't wait for his counsel! In the wilderness their desires ran wild, testing God's patience in that dry wasteland. So he gave them what they asked for, but he sent a plague along w/ it. – 106:13-15* Forgetfulness → Impatient unrestrained pursuit of desire & is met w/ punishment...Rom 1

Just one more...*The people made a calf at Mount Sinai; they bowed before an image made of gold. They traded their glorious God for a statue of a grass-eating bull. They forgot God, their saviour, who had done such great things in Egypt – 106:19-21* Old saying: When people stop believing in God they don't believe in nothing, they'll believe in anything. COMPLETELY TRUE. Look at the ridiculous things that pass for "true" in 2022 & we're just supposed to go along as if...On the dry saved side of the Red Sea see the fire & smoke & hear the voice thunder from Mt Sinai they craft a bull statue & worship it. Willful forgetfulness makes you PRE/AY to worthless things. *Ps 115:18*

As we wrap up the Esther narrative...God's people are delivered from certain destruction. God silently but surely engages in their lives through Mordecai, Esther & the nutty Xerxes to preserve their lives as his people. In thanksgiving, they craft a 2-day festival of remembrance, Purim, that joyfully celebrates & commemorates the thwarting of Haman's planned genocide. It's named after the dice thrown to choose the date for their destruction. It's a festival of laughter, mirth, merrymaking, mockery of enemies, generosity & great joy. (Luther said that's what Halloween should be...mock the devil his defeat – pass wind in the devil's face)

Mordecai recorded these events & sent letters to the Jews near & far, throughout all the provinces of King Xerxes, calling on them to celebrate an annual festival on these two days. He told them to celebrate these days with feasting & gladness & by giving gifts of food to each other & presents to the poor. This would commemorate a time when the Jews gained relief from their enemies, when their sorrow was turned into gladness & their mourning into joy. When you live under threat...When what you value & hold dear can be taken away in an instant...The best response is to celebrate your memories of God's great salvation. When the world around you views your faith values beliefs hopes & aspirations w/ suspicion or as a menace...The best response is to unleash your joy & delight in remembering all God has done. *My life constantly hangs in the balance, but I will not stop obeying your instructions. The wicked have set their traps for me, but I will not turn from your commandments. – Ps 119:109-110* then generously share your blessings far/wide Given what we know has happened in the resurrection: What should Easter worship look like? Christmas? Any given Sunday when we gather? Given the victory we've been given in Christ over sin death the devil the world & all its empty promises... How do we not shout "hallelujah" more often than we do...ever? Given that we are "more than conquerors through Christ, who loved us" how do we ever sit here acting like we're at a funeral?

I hope you noticed...Who actually fought for the Jews against their attackers? They did...self-defense. There are no angelic defenders or armies of enemies turning against one another...The Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the king's provinces to attack anyone who tried to harm them. You know this: Victory takes work. Addictions...compulsions...health...spiritual growth...victory takes work. The gov't can't solve every issue we face...make it worse. Sometimes nobody has your back except God at work in/through you w/ the wisdom he provides, strength he gives, & endurance he empowers, & the fellowship of his people cheering you on.

Remember as we've travelled through this narrative...we've come back again & again to assure ourselves: Don't mistake God's silence for his absence. God IS present & working in the world through the lives of his Spirit-filled faithful people. God is completely Sovereign...nothing happens outside his dominion. When the pressure mounts & the outlook is grim God isn't on holiday or taking a long nap. God is completely Sovereign & is present working in the world through the lives of his Spirit-filled faithful people. Given God's unending unbreakable rule over all things WE STILL are accountable for faithful obedient meaningful significant choices in our daily lives. Victory takes work.

But the real challenge...The work isn't finished & the victory isn't complete until everyone is included. This is absolutely crucial...After Esther reveals Haman's plot

to Xerxes & Haman is killed, Mordecai & Esther are basically safe. They're no longer in danger...but the rest of the Jews in Susa & all the provinces are still staring down the barrel of Haman's loaded genocide gun. The decree that allows the slaughter & annihilation & plundering of the Jews still stands irrevocable. Esther & Mordecai cannot rest until all the Jews are safe. The work isn't finished & the victory isn't complete until everyone is included. So the new decree of self-defense is written & enacted in 2 days of self-defense & triumph.

Jennifer Wilkin is an author Leonie's been reading lately...She says: "Personal sin always results in collateral suffering." Haman's unrestrained ego, pride & wrath aimed vengeance at all the Jews in the Empire but killed everyone in his family. Modern examples are too many too easy to note. At the same time: "Personal holiness always results in collateral benefit." Esther & Mordecai cannot rest until all the Jews are safe. In crisis the faithful can find their calling. In fear the faithful can find their faith...all to stand & act in the power of God for others. It's great that you are saved by grace through faith. It's awesome if you claim your identity as a child of God in Jesus Christ. The work isn't finished & the victory isn't complete until everyone is included...until others see hear & are blessed into eternity by the work of Christ through you making his kingdom visible & tangible for others.

Just an aside...Why didn't the Jews take any plunder from the people they killed? The point of their self-defense was not to conquer/subjugate but demonstrate the truth that God's saving purpose & life-giving plan will come to pass. To make it seen & clear that God rescues his people, advances his rule, & ensures that his kingdom will advance until it reaches its climax on the last day.

In our lives as God's people, we know we've been given the ultimate victory. *Christ is risen...He is risen indeed.* We live w/ certainty about the end of our story. But there are still challenges to face, obstacles to overcome & trials that test us in the every day journey we travel. There are victories still to be won. A harvest of souls to be gathered...if not by us then by whom?

Until the end though, God calls us to remember what's already ours, to live faithfully w/ discipline & hard work; to celebrate the little victories, & to share the good news of God often silently at work in every ordinary moment in the lives of his people. Remembering God's saving purpose & life-giving plan is marked by joy & celebration at every step until the end is reached in joy & celebration that never end.

And *I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. - Philippians 1:6*

TAKE IT HOME –

Esther came to her royal position *"for such a time as this."* Mordecai *"continued to work for the good of his people & to speak up for the welfare of all their descendants."*

What is your position & how might it (and you) be used by God in your time?

What do you need to continue to do for the good of God's people?

Especially as a faithful minority in an increasingly pagan world... & If not, why not?

Let's pray...

Heavenly Father...Thank You that there is nothing that can prevent your eternal purposes from being fulfilled. Let me die to my own desires to live for your greater glory. By Your grace use me in the places in which you have placed me at this time, for this time...in Jesus' name, Amen.