

“The Reversal”

Esther 8-9

We are finishing our series in Esther today. What an incredible book. The drama last week was rich wasn't it? Today we are going to see the finish to the story. And it is going to be marked by the idea of REVERSAL. Really the whole book is marked by it isn't it? I was torn between a couple of themes in this book so we just titled the series ESTHER so that when you search our sermon archives it's easy to find. But one big theme is reversal. And the power in Esther is showing you how your life can reverse course. We saw it last week in individuals

- Haman was trying to build his own life...he was trying to gain as much power and authority and accolade as he could. He was feeding that shadow monster called pride that lurks in every heart. And what happened? Pride lifted up really high...only to bring him down to his death. Reversal. He went up by himself only to be brought low by God.
- Esther and Mordecai had a different story. They went low. They sacrificed themselves. Were ready to lose their lives for the sake of rescuing God's people. And what happened? God lifted them up. He reversed their course. He exalted the ones who humbled themselves. Reversal.

I think the greatest hope of Esther is in these last few chapters as it celebrates that God can rescue anyone. No one is too far gone for God to come in, grab hold of your life, and reverse course. To turn you around from the self-destruction you are staring down and reverse it. He can deliver you...Pick you up & turn you around and point your whole life towards him. Where you will find victory instead of defeat after defeat.

- The pattern in your life of blowing up relationships...he can reverse it.
- The rage you can't stop – God can deliver you. Reverse it and turn it into peace & joy.
- The depression you can't climb out of – God can deliver you. Pick you up and turn you around and give you hope & contentment in all things.
- the loneliness you can't escape – God can deliver you. Pick you up and turn you around and give you a closeness, an intimacy with God where you will always feel loved and known.
- the pain from when you someone hurt you a long time ago - God can deliver you. He can pick you up and turn you around and give you freedom from that pain that has consumed you and set you on a course towards lasting healing.

This is the promise of Esther. See throughout scripture “reversal” is God's vehicle for deliverance. It's how he works. And the last-minute deliverance of Israel in Esther is a reminder that God can deliver you. Nobody is too far gone. No matter how far for how long you've been heading down that dark road, he can deliver you. He can reverse your course. Let's get in to the story and I'll show you how God delivers and how he keeps you from falling back down the wrong road.

[3] Then Esther spoke again to the king. She fell at his feet and wept and pleaded with him to avert the evil plan of Haman the Agagite and the plot that he had devised against the Jews. [4] When the king held out the golden scepter to Esther, Esther rose and stood before the king. Esther 8:3-4

Quick Recap

Esther is a Jewish woman who was living in Persia in the home of her older cousin Mordecai who had adopted her. She kept her Jewish heritage a secret out of fear of her life. That becomes an even bigger deal when the villain of the story, Haman, decides to devise a plot to have all the Jews annihilated.

He does this because Mordecai, who outed himself as Jewish, stood up to Haman when Haman ordered that everyone bow down before him. So in a huge overreaction, Haman does a pretty shady deal where he says to the king "there is a certain people dispersed among all the peoples who disobey the king's laws. It's not good for the king to tolerate them. Let a decree be issued to destroy them." (3.8-15). It was a sly move by an evil guy taking advantage of a lazy king. The king doesn't know it's the Jewish people, just that his trusted advisor said some rebels needed to be taken care of.

You can go back and listen to last week's sermon if you missed it because in there we told the story of how Esther opens herself up to the possibility that God **MIGHT** want to use her as his way of delivering his people from destruction. At first, she hesitates. She's scared. But with a little encouragement from Mordecai reminding her that **SHE** won't save God's people. God will. But he may use her to do it. And isn't it worth it to live for His glory instead of her own safety? So she leaps. And in an awesome turn of events she exposes Haman as a wicked villain who manipulated the king into mandating the Queen's death. The king, to punish Haman for betraying him, has him hanged on the very gallows Haman planned on hanging Mordecai. Esther and Mordecai lived, Haman died. You'd think that was the end. But there is one little problem that is the occasion for these opening verses...While Haman has died, the decree to kill the Jews, which he got the king's signature on...has not been reversed. He only spared Esther & Mordecai.

So now, even though Esther is safe...she decides to go back in. Risk her life again with a king who thinks he has already dealt with this hassle. Yes he listened to her the first time, but will he listen again? He does!

[1] Now in the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's command and edict were about to be carried out, on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, the reverse occurred: the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them. Esther 9.1

Here's the quick details on why this edict is so important: Remember Haman wrote the decree for the Jews to be killed? Well Mordecai writes a new decree. And in the new decree the Jews were granted permission to destroy, kill, and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, children and women included (8.11). It's the reversal of

Haman's decree. Mordecai seals it with the king's seal just like Haman did. See the reversal? Mordecai even lives in Haman's old house!

Chapter 9 is where the author begins to shape the whole story for us. He is starting to put in context what has happened. See on the 13th day of the 12th month...roughly March on our calendar...The Great Reversal Happened. The day when the Jews were to be annihilated, they were not only spared annihilation, they were given victory over those who wanted to kill them!

The story progresses:

[12] And the king said to Queen Esther, "In Susa the citadel the Jews have killed and destroyed 500 men and also the ten sons of Haman. What then have they done in the rest of the king's provinces! Now what is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what further is your request? It shall be fulfilled." [13] And Esther said, "If it please the king, let the Jews who are in Susa be allowed tomorrow also to do according to this day's edict. And let the ten sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows." [14] So the king commanded this to be done. A decree was issued in Susa, and the ten sons of Haman were hanged. Esther 9.12-14

This is pretty intense right? I want to pause for just a second here and talk about what is happening as the Jews get victory over their enemies.

1. First, some people use moments like this to say...see, the OT is filled with celebration of entire people groups getting slaughtered. This becomes a big barrier to why you can't take the bible seriously. Does God condone genocide? If that's you I want to encourage you to take a more meticulous look at Esther 8-10 than I can give today. Here's what you will see: You'll see Mordecai issue the exact reversal of Haman's decree where the Jews are allowed by Persian law to slaughter those ARMED FORCES who hate them. But, you will see the Jews restrain themselves because they are not bound ultimately by Persian law but by God's law. And that's why you see them only take up arms against their enemies and the author says they kill, not murder. And they don't plunder because God had instructed them in wars past that they were never to take the treasure of their enemies for themselves. See Genesis 14 and Joshua 6. Read it for yourself. You will see God take sin seriously, and sometimes bring his wrath on the sins of people as a warning for how serious sin is. But he never condones the murdering of the innocent.

Secondly – The author is showing us that Queen Esther does go a little too far. This second day of killing seems to be, according to one author I read, showing us how Queen Esther takes victory and turns it into vengeance. Again, Esther is one of our greatest heroes in the OT. But even she is tempted to step into God's judgment seat. Which reminds us that even the bible's best heroes fall short in some way or another. I read a fantastic assessment of this this week from Karen Jobes whose commentary on Esther I commend wholeheartedly to you.

"The bible is remarkable in revealing the darker side of God's chosen leaders, often just at their shining moment. King David's adultery for example. – occurs at pinnacle of his military success and prosperity.....Whether or not Esther was justified in extending the killing a second day, the

perennial failure of Israel's greatest leaders to war against moral and spiritual darkness without engaging in sin themselves suggests that no one is worthy to wage true holy war in God's name. God's strategy against sin and evil was awaiting the perfect warrior, who could execute divine justice with clean hands and a pure heart. His name is Jesus."¹

I'm telling you, you gotta read the old testament through the lens of the cross. We'll come back to that here in just a minute but lets see how this whole story wraps:

on to verse 20 where we see the final step and really the reason the book of Esther was written & the reason it is cherished by the Jewish community to this day:

[20] And Mordecai recorded these things and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, [21] obliging them to keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same, year by year, [22] as the days on which the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor.

[23] So the Jews accepted what they had started to do, and what Mordecai had written to them. [24] For Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur (that is, cast lots), to crush and to destroy them. [25] But when it came before the king, he gave orders in writing that his evil plan that he had devised against the Jews should return on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. [26] Therefore they called these days Purim, after the term Pur. Therefore, because of all that was written in this letter, and of what they had faced in this matter, and of what had happened to them, [27] the Jews firmly obligated themselves and their offspring and all who joined them, that without fail they would keep these two days according to what was written and at the time appointed every year, [28] that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, in every clan, province, and city, and that these days of Purim should never fall into disuse among the Jews, nor should the commemoration of these days cease among their descendants. Esther 9.20-28

The jewish community still celebrates this very feast every year. Pur-im next year is Wednesday February 28 – March 1. The book of esther will be read twice on those two days in one sitting. And it supposed to be a party celebrating the reversal...that when destruction seemed certain, instead they not only escaped but won victory over their enemies. When we named our daughter Hadassah I thought...nobody will have that name. Until I started meeting jewish people. It's like the Jessica of jewish names. Erybody is named Hadassah.

¹ Karen Jobes. *Esther* in the NIV application commentary series (Grand Rapids, MI Zondervan 1999) 202.

This is the story of how God delivered Israel. What does it mean for us today? These final chapters paint an incredible picture of how God delivers us. How he changes our story, reverses our course and how we tap into the power to keep from drifting back down that old path.

And you need to lean in right here because you've been looking for deliverance, for something to change in your life and you can't figure it out and I'm telling you the reversal you are looking for is available to you.

How God reverses our course

Ok as I get into this I need to point something out. When we read an awesome story like this, it's easy to read ourselves into the main characters. In fact, that's largely what last week was and that is OK. Those heroes are in here because they model faith for us and we can pass them along. But what we really need to see is that **We are not Esther. We are Israel.** This is massive. We are the helpless people under a death sentence who have no way to protect ourselves from the enemy who has laid his claim on us and is coming to take our lives. We are hopeless & bound for destruction. And when we understand that, we see the first answer to how God reverses our course:

God Sent a Deliverer to rescue you – See Haman was wicked and he was powerful. There was no chance that the Jews had a chance against him. He had his sights set on their annihilation and he could legally kill them all. So God sent one person, Esther, to rescue those who could not rescue themselves. She stepped in between the king and the people and fought for their freedom. It's so obvious of a portrait of Jesus I almost don't have to say anything! If it looks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and walks like a duck...It's probably an OT foreshadowing of Jesus.

[39] You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, [40] yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.
John 5.39-40

You and I are to look at Esther and see an incomplete picture of Jesus. See Jesus says here in John that the amazing thing about us humans is that we can search the scriptures and still miss HIM. We are to come to HIM to have life. Deliverance is in CHRIST ALONE! So when you look at Esther you realize that one day Esther and Mordecai both died. What you see is that their rescue of the Jews, as awesome as it was, was not permanent. But Jesus? Jesus gives us ETERNAL victory over sin and death.

The gospel message says that sin is any direct defiance of God's laws. And that lawbreaking comes with a penalty. The penalty is death. You can't escape it and you cannot pay it off.

[6] We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. Isaiah 64:6

See when you understand sin you understand you cannot do enough good to outweigh the bad because your good deeds...even your best deeds...are still stained by the curse of sin. You know this. You know you cannot save yourself. You are like Paul at the end of Romans 7. You do the things you don't want to do and the things you want to do...you never seem to do them. You keep wandering back into old sin patterns and habits. And Paul says who will save you? THANKS BE TO GOD IN JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD!

You CANNOT deliver yourself. You need a deliverer. His name is Jesus. He is the warrior who can take on all of sin and death. He didn't just die in your place he won victory over it forever! And if you will turn to him...you will have salvation from your sin. And let me say, he is according to John 14.6 the only way. You are under the penalty of death and I don't know when that day will come. But you can either surrender to him or reject him. The gospel says the victory in Christ is for those who receive the gospel and surrender their lives to his leadership.

So that when God looks at you, he sees Christ because you are, as 2 Corinthians 5.21 says, clothed in Christ's righteousness. Like the invisibility cloak. You are hidden with Christ. Protected by him. He takes the wrath of your sin and you are saved from it. But that is only for those in Christ. You need a deliverer! Have you ever received him? You cannot wander in. You must receive it. Do so today!

When you do:

God sends a helper to guide you

I told you he doesn't just deliver you but he reverses your course. When he rescues you, he gives you a new life and he promises, John 14, that he will walk every single day with you.

God sends a community to celebrate with you

See the first occurrence of Purim – the holiday – was a spontaneous celebration of the joy of finding oneself still standing on the day after an irrevocable death decree was executed. The day of death had come and gone and God's people were still alive!! What is our Purim?

It's the gathering of the church! The people

- Christmas & Easter – yes
- THE CHURCH! – God's people gather together as the local church and we celebrate. We worship singing songs of victory! There is no mourning here each week. This is to be a weekly rhythm of your life. Some of you are like I worship in the mountains...Um, the mountains didn't receive victory from certain death for their sins. The Church did. You need the church! I used to get frustrated at my parents for making me go to church 3 times a week: Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night. Now I realize the discipline that built in me would pay off because I, your pastor, NEED to be reminded of the victory GOD won for me in Christ multiple times a week.

It's like my daughter Haddie trying to help me do the dishes after finger painting. I appreciate the effort but because her hands are covered in paint...she isn't helping at all! Everything she

does is stained by the paint on her hands. Everything we do is stained by our sin. We need to be rescued and cleansed from our sin.