

## **The Work of God**

### **A Story of Remembrance**

**Introduction:** If it is your first time joining us - Welcome! We have dedicated this year to Biblical Literacy; meaning we as a church are reading the Bible for ourselves to know first hand what it teaches and in order to be shaped by the story of God. And along with that we are teaching through the Bible on Sunday mornings - the main themes, characters and storyline. This morning we are concluding our short series through the book of Esther.

As has been mentioned this is a crazy book to find in the Bible - There is no mention of YHWH or the generic term for God (Elohim) - no mention of Torah, Temple, Prayer, there are no visions, no prophetic denunciations or encouragements and no miracles - It's a wonder what this book is doing in the Bible..

God not being mentioned at all is actually a brilliant move by the anonymous author - it's as if the author is saying - "reader can't you see all the ways YHWH is so very present and at work behind the scenes??) The providence of God is all over this book..

The Book of Esther is a very relevant book - It feels a lot like the days we are living in - We are not familiar with experiencing divine intervention, and the miraculous in the way the Bible often describes it - God is often out of sight to the naked eye. Not only that but our culture and church culture are far from a biblical Identity and rootedness similar to those like Esther who were born in exile..

Never the less Esther is a story that chronicles God's surprising preservation of his people when their very existence is threatened by a superpower.

Last week we saw how the Story of Esther has this turning point where Esther is faced with a life altering decision - whether or not to identify, and take her place, with the people of God or continue her life incognito, protected and insulated with the possibility of losing her connection and place with the people of God - We saw how Esther in that moment chose to come home - she had a spiritual revival as she not only took up her identity but the cause of the people of God...

The book of Esther is many things - a story for our times, a story of irony, a comedy, a story about sovereignty and providence, A story about coming home - But most of all I believe it is - A Story of Remembrance.

**“So the Jews accepted what they had started to do, and what Mordecai had written to them. 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. 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. 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, 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, 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 9:23-28**

This story has this call to remembrance all over it - even recalling and referencing the fact that Mordecai and Haman are a part of an ancient conflict (Esther 2:5; 3:1) - Saul the king of Israel, and Agag the king of the Amalekites - which is a conflict that goes back even further when the People of Amalek Attacked the weak and helpless of the children of Israel on their way from Egypt to Sinai (Exodus 17:8-16) - it was then that God called Moses to write this battle story as a memorial for the people of Israel. Remember, **“I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven...”** Biblically this becomes a picture or a metaphor for God’s promise to eventually and finally destroy all evil from the world....

During the Feast of Purim, the book of Esther is read in the commemoration of the saving of the Jewish people from Haman (the antagonist and descendant of Agag - the Amalekite). On the basis of Exodus 17:14, where the LORD promised to "blot out the name" of Amalek, it is customary for the audience to make noise, to boo and shout

whenever "Haman" is mentioned, in order to desecrate and "blot out" his name.

As I said this book, this whole story, is itself a call to remembrance and in the Bible, a call to remember—especially when tied to a covenant sign or ceremony—is a vibrant, powerful, and participatory concept where people recalibrate their lives according to what's being remembered.

So let's talk this morning about what is being called into remembrance and what that might look like for us, God's people living in modern times.

## 1. Remember - The Reversal of Fortunes

1. From where we left off last week - the next scenes chronicle the downfall of Haman and the plot to Annihilate the Jews.
2. The irony that is employed in this story is incredible - Haman seeks to exalt himself and is humbled first by having to parade Mordecai around on the king's horse, in the king's royal garments and from his own mouth proclaiming - "Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king delights to honor." Next, Haman, who everyone in the empire had to bow to before, will fall or bow before Esther - The Jewish queen, begging for his life - when his plot is revealed as coming against her, and her people. Then, instead of Mordecai being impaled upon Haman's 75 foot stake - Haman himself will be impaled upon it by order of the king. All of Haman's estate, wealth, and even his power in regards to the kingdom will be bestowed upon Mordecai... From here on out Esther and Mordecai set up a counter law and plan - so that the Jews can protect themselves on these days that were appointed for their annihilation. This brings about the destruction of all the enemies of the Jews, prosperity and peace in the empire for the Jewish people. It is a complete reversal of fortunes...
  1. The story summarizes it this way - **"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."**
  2. So where we had previously read - **"And the city of Susa was thrown into confusion...When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry. He went up to the**

entrance of the king's gate, for no one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

3. We now read - **"Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white, with a great golden crown and a robe of fine linen and purple, and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced. The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor. And in every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and his edict reached, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews, for fear of the Jews had fallen on them."**

1. **Okay - I keep saying this is a story of remembrance.**

1. In the kingdom of God there will be a complete turnaround; a reverse will occur : those now on top will be on the bottom, and those now the lowest of the low will be lifted very high. This is the thing the Jews set to remember by inaugurating Purim : **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. 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."**
2. Things to remember - God will one day banish all evil from his world. Church never forget - God will set all things right, he will judge all evil and sin, all exploiters and tyrants, all oppressors and dehumanizers.. He will blot out the name and remembrance of the evil Hamans and Amaleks of this world forever.
3. Remember - God will also preserve and exalt the righteous - The picture of Mordecai being given the second place of power in the whole empire is a picture of that. of course this is not an isolated teaching in scripture but is said again and again and pictured in many places, from Joseph, to

Moses, to David, and finally to Jesus himself - God takes what is lowly and weak, what is trampled over and despised and he exalts it to the heights - we can rest assured that God will one day turn the world right side up

4. We know the promise - that he will make all things new (Revelation 21:5)
4. This story highlights the truth that evil is turned in on its self and it cannot prosper against the purposes and promises of God... remember that, never forget.

## **2. Our Own Call to Remember**

1. Last week - we really focused on awaking to reality of this cultural moment, the call to come home and re-engage with our faith -which is absolutely vital to the christian life.. But is there a way that God's people can have more consistency in our lives? Or are we just subject to this continual cycle of regression and progression - to continually be on the verge of burnout unless we have some Radical crisis or ecstatic experience..? Is there a way to remember so we don't fall subject to constant polar extremes? Is this the plan Jesus had for his people? Does this properly display the life of Jesus to the World?
1. Alter calls, revivals, and renewal moments etc. seem to be essential to certain seasons of life - moments where God breaks thorough the noise, where we awake or are awoken to life in Christ, aware to the spiritual battle raging all around us - awakened to enter back into the fight. In Israel's history they had many of these - the crossing of the red sea, victory over the Egyptians, being sustained by God 40 years in the wilderness, victory over various enemies, spiritual revivals.. the crossing of the Jordan into the promised land... Many times these events were remembered through feasts like Purim and Passover And in many of these cases the Israelites set up monuments or altars to remember....
2. So how do we remember what Esther and the people living in exile seemed to have forgotten? How do we remember who we are? How do we remember that we are God's people? How do we remember that we have been called to be a light to the nations? How do we remember God's Faithfulness? How do we remember that even when God seems absent he is present and at work? How do we go forward in life in faith, rather than fear - especially when the way is darkened and unknown?

3. Grace and I were just having this conversation the other night - we go forward by recalling the past - By remembering who God is and what he has already done

2. **How does the Lord Call us, his church, to remember?**

1. As I said, in the Bible, a call to remember—especially when tied to a covenant sign or ceremony—is a vibrant, powerful, and participatory concept where people recalibrate their lives according to what's being remembered.
2. I love what Luke describes the early church doing - It says they devoted themselves... Which is a great way to remember, to set up a rhythm and a habit for your life. Devote yourself to remember
3. They devoted themselves to:
  1. **The Apostles Teaching** - Jesus stories - how he opened eyes; how he reversed the curse of sin everywhere he went; how he laid everything down for us; How even in weakness and death he was victorious.
  2. **The Fellowship** - The Jesus way of Life - bearing one another's burdens, self sacrifice, love, service
  3. **The Breaking of Bread** - Jesus sacrifice for our sins
  4. **The Prayers** - Jesus' access to the Father
1. You see, Staying in the fight, staying awake to who you are in Messiah, staying alert to the mission of god and the need of the world takes both Fire and Form - The Holy Spirit actively moving in our lives - us responding to his promptings, us engaging with his work in the world, but also a life of spiritual rhythms and practices that keep us grounded - The early church had such a rhythm - life together - regularly gathering, devoting themselves to the apostles teaching, the breaking of bread, the fellowship and prayer...
  1. *"Yes the critical moments of our life, when we must choose whether or not to identify with God's people deeply matter. And yes, we need spiritual awakening too, and identifying as one of God's people isn't just about a decision: it's about a way of life. Purim invites us to see it that way. It's a rhythm built into the calendar to remind us that our identity is easily forgotten, that physical and spiritual danger is all around us, and that no matter what,*

*God preserves his people.” - Mike Cospers, Faith Among the Faithless*