

Title: “Feast of Purim”

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Esther 9:20-28

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Service Readings: Esther 9:20-28

What can the Feast of Purim teach Christians, today?

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

God's people seem to never have it easy. Well, maybe in the garden when there was but one extremely simple rule. But even then, there was Satan and his plan to destroy that which God had created. God may have thought man very good, but Satan didn't agree. In fact, Luther once wrote that he believed Satan interfered within just a few hours after Eve was created! And the very moment that this first couple questioned their trust in God, I'm sure Satan celebrated for he probably believed that he had won a war he had started with the Creator.

And he probably celebrated again after the first murder at the hands of Cain. And then again when God flooded the earth and destroyed almost all of his creation. And as history continued to be written, and as the war continued between him and God, he continued to leave his fingerprints all throughout its pages. He may have been unsure about how the war would end, but he was confident that he would be the victor through many of her battles. And maybe, just maybe he would come out the victor when all was said and done.

And so he continued to interfere in God's creation. And he continued to focus his efforts on those people who looked to God as their lord and savior. For why would he waste his energy on anyone else? The lost were already his! And the lost could even be useful in his efforts. And so he used them time and again to tempt God's people and pressure them to find security and trust in someone or something else. Pharaoh and his army. The Canaanites. The Amorites. The Babylonians. Each and every time, Satan would use the leaders and peoples of these nations to attack God's chosen. But each and every time, God would intervene in some way and free his people from their situation and reestablish them as his own. But Satan wouldn't stop. During the time of Esther, the Persians were his tool of choice. He used them to trick the king into legislating a day of genocide – a day when the people could hunt down and kill all of the Jews. But God intervened again, this time through Esther. Because of her pleas to her husband the king, her people were permitted to attack and kill those who sought them out. In the end, over 75,000 Persians perished and the Jews were saved from annihilation. And so they celebrated because God had saved his treasured possession from the throws of Satan once again. This came to be known as the Feast of Purim and it would be celebrated to this day.

You see, the lives of God's people have been fraught with peril since the beginning of time. Satan has not relented. His mission has been the damnation of mankind and he has found much success.

He has also seen failure, but his failures have not dissuaded him to cease his pursuit. Instead, it seems to have motivated him, for today it seems that we have all but abandoned God. Everywhere we look – in the governments of the world, in the societies in which they rule, in schools, in families, and even in the minds of people. Everywhere we look we find a people who have replaced the God of the Bible with the god of self. There can be no doubt that Satan is active and continues to hold firm to some truth... Something seems to motivate him to continue scouring the earth looking for new victims. But what? What must he grasping? For he was surely present with Jesus was crucified. He was surely dancing when Jesus gave up his spirit and breathed his last breath. Didn't he realize what that meant? Maybe he thought it meant that he had won. Maybe he figured that God had worked out many things up to this point, but there was nothing that he could do to fix this! Jesus was dead, and with him any hope of salvation for mankind.-

But God did work it out. Indeed, he even used Satan to accomplish the rescue of his people. Satan *had* to have realized that, if not at that moment, but when he saw Jesus rise from the grave as a victory over death and sin. So why is he still active today? Is it because he is aware that he has finally lost the war but insists on taking as many of God's creatures with him as he can? Are we experiencing Satan's last fit of anger? Is he trying to burn the ship, so to speak?

Where does that leave us, then? We look out into the world and we see it a mess. But we don't have to look very far; we can look much closer: our communities, our local schools, maybe even our families. Or maybe even closer than that: maybe we can look at our own hearts. Where is it that Satan is distracting us? Where has he presented to us a problem that causes us to struggle in our faith? Maybe it is the government. Maybe it is neighbor. Maybe it is ourselves. But it is something, Satan guarantees it. He is trying to distract you from focusing on God. For you see, if you are looking to God for strength, Satan is looking to you for destruction.

And here is where the account from Esther can provide encouragement. It might be easy to read this account and accept God's hand in their survival. It might seem obvious that God would do what he did because of what he had promised. He *had* to sustain David's line so Jesus could be born. That is clear to see when we look backwards. But our problems are not behind us. They are *with* us. They are right here, today, this very moment. And just because God helped his people *back then*, just because he had a plan, *back then*, does he have one *now*, *for you*?

And maybe even more frightening.... *What might that plan be?* God works in his own way and sometimes that work is contrary to our desires. The thought that maybe, just maybe God is truly at work in our lives at this very moment, and has even... maybe.... just maybe placed us in this situation, can be even more frightening than not believing he is in control! And Satan keeps whispering..... "Maybe you are right. How can you love a god that would allow you to be in this situation, or to feel this way, or whatever?" You see? Satan will use anything and everything to pull you from God, to get you to blink for just a moment.

And so, if the account from Esther is anything, it is encouragement to cling to Jesus, even when all hope seems to be lost, even when you don't think it will help, even when you are afraid that it *will* help and God *wants* you burdened in the way that you currently are. It is an encouragement to you that wisdom of God is greater than your wisdom. It is an encouragement to you that the power and control of God is greater than the power and control of self. The account teaches us that God is

able to control all things to keep a promise that he made thousands of years before. It teaches us that God has a love for us that drove him to keep a promise that he made to us thousands of years ago. How do we know? Because God orchestrated everything so that his son would suffer and die for us. And God raised him from the dead as a visible sign of that power and love. That's why. And so, as you continue to be weighed down with your burdens, cling to Jesus. And when Satan tempts you to let go, cling even tighter. For in Jesus you will truly find comfort, strength, and everlasting life. And the feast that you will participate in on the last day will be better than any Feast of Purim ever could be. This I promise you.

Please pray with me.

Lord, our hearts are heavy with the burdens of this world. We know that you are in control but sometimes it doesn't feel like it. And so we cling to you and pray that you would keep us in your arms – through all of our trials, all of our sufferings, and all of our temptations. Strengthen our faith to remain steadfast in our devotion to you.

Amen.