

9. From sorrow to joy

July 3, 2008

As we wrap up this great Book, Esther, one thing the Lord continuously is showing me is His providence in the midst of a seemingly chaotic situation. At the beginning of the study, I defined 'Providence' like this: "the foreseeing care and guidance of God".

This time, I'd like to get an elaborate version of its definition from New Dictionary of Theology.

Providence: The beneficent outworking of God's sovereignty whereby all events are directed and disposed to bring about those purposes of glory and good for which the universe was made.

It is incredibly hard to fathom God's providence and sovereignty with our extremely limited intelligence. No matter what kind of free will choices we make, God already knew it before the beginning of the creation and He prepared everything to encounter our silly choices.

It is never a good idea to play a chess game with God or going against Him with our sins. Because before you even move your pawn, God knows your every single moves; before we go against His will, He prepares the consequences for our bad decisions.

"D-Day" has arrived for the Jews in the 127 provinces of the Persian kingdom. The day appointed by Haman's decree for the slaughter of God's chosen people in the entire empire. But the newly appointed Prime Minister Mordecai's decree had changed that "D" from "destruction" to "deliverance."

The Jews had permission to resist their enemies and had been given nine months to prepare for the encounter. The people in the empire who hated the Jews were hoping for victory, but the tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them. In addition to that, the Lord was going to spread tables of feast for the Jewish people to remember His incredible kindness and sovereignty to them.

A. FIGHTING FOR THEIR EXISTENCE

Esther 9:1-10 Now in the twelfth month, that is, the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day, the time came for the king's command and his decree to be executed. On the day that the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, the opposite occurred, in that the Jews themselves overpowered those who hated them. 2 The Jews gathered together in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could withstand them, because fear of them fell upon all people. 3 And all the officials of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and all those doing the king's work, helped the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them. 4 For Mordecai was great in the king's palace, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces; for this man Mordecai became increasingly prominent. 5 Thus the Jews defeated all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, with slaughter and destruction, and did what they pleased with those who hated them. 6 And in Shushan the citadel the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men. 7 Also Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, 8 Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, 9 Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vajezatha-- 10 the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews--they killed; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder.

Like no other country, the history of Israel has been riddled with the battles against all the surrounding countries for their mere existence. When they were scattered all over the world, they still had to fight every step just to survive. It is no difference in current situation. At least 15 Arab/Muslim nations around Israel want nothing less than wiping out her existence from the map. However, no one ever had succeeded it and no one will because of the Lord our God.

Better than any weapon including thermo nuclear bombs, they could ask for, the Jews had God on their side. The fear of the Jews fell upon the ones who wanted to destroy them. It was the same fear that went before Israel as they entered the Promised Land. This fear helped give Israel the victory they needed.

One major problem with our world today is that there is no fear of God before our eyes. Like Pharaoh, people are saying, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice?" Pharaoh chose not to obey the voice of God and lost everything. His land was demolished with the ten plagues from the God of Israel and his army was drawn in the Red Sea. I guess that is what it takes for this world to realize that God is the Lord and the Master.

I forwarded the e-mail from American Family Association that informs us McDonald's chose to support gay and lesbians continuously in spite of AFA's request not to. I recommend you not use McDonald's until they back off like Ford did. McDonald's is doing this because they have no fear of God like the majority of people around the world.

Speaking of not having fear of God, it often applies to many churches. Instead of the godless world being afraid of the church, the vast number of churches are afraid of the world and so imitates the world. They're so worldly that it's difficult to tell the difference between the two.

Even though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. Whenever the church has tried to use the weapons of this world to fight its battles, the consequences have been embarrassing if not disastrous. Wearing the whole armor of God, however, and depending on prayer and the Word of God, we can march forward with courage and faith.

I asked you to underline '*they did not lay a hand on the plunder*'. The Jews restrained themselves from an onslaught retaliation. They only attacked the ones who tried to harm them in the first place.

I think of Joseph. I always wonder if he had a thought come across to retaliate against his brothers or Mrs. Potiphar for her false attempt rape charge. As the prime minister of Egypt, he could easily flick his thumb to take off her head as well as deploy a thousand chariots to wipe out his brothers from the face of the earth. Rather he displayed self-control.

B. THE MOP UP OPERATION

Esther 9:11-17 On that day the number of those who were killed in Shushan the citadel was brought to the king. 12 And the king said to Queen Esther, "The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the citadel, and the ten sons of Haman. What have they done in the rest of the king's

provinces? Now what is your petition? It shall be granted to you. Or what is your further request? It shall be done." 13 Then Esther said, "If it pleases the king, let it be granted to the Jews who are in Shushan to do again tomorrow according to today's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows." 14 So the king commanded this to be done; the decree was issued in Shushan, and they hanged Haman's ten sons. 15 And the Jews who were in Shushan gathered together again on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and killed three hundred men at Shushan; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder. 16 The remainder of the Jews in the king's provinces gathered together and protected their lives, had rest from their enemies, and killed seventy-five thousand of their enemies; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder. 17 This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar. And on the fourteenth day of the month they rested and made it a day of feasting and gladness.

God commanded Saul, the son of Kish, to execute the full extent of God's judgment against the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15. King Samuel chose not to be submissive to the Lord and eventually he lost the throne to David. But this later descendent of the tribe of Benjamin and a son of Kish named Mordecai completed God's judgment against the Amalekites.

C. THE INSTITUTION OF THE FEAST OF PURIM

Esther 9:18-32 But the Jews who were at Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth day, as well as on the fourteenth; and on the fifteenth of the month they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. 19 Therefore the Jews of the villages who dwelt in the unwalled towns celebrated the fourteenth day of the month of Adar with gladness and feasting, as a holiday, and for sending presents to one another. 20 And Mordecai wrote these things and sent letters to all the Jews, near and far, who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, 21 to establish among them that they should celebrate yearly the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar, 22 as the days on which the Jews had rest from their enemies, as the month which was turned from sorrow to joy for them, and from mourning to a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and joy, of sending presents to one another and gifts to the poor.

29 Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter about Purim. 30 And Mordecai sent letters to all the Jews, to the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth, 31 to confirm these days of Purim at their appointed time, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had prescribed for them, and as they had decreed for themselves and their descendants concerning matters of their fasting and lamenting. 32 So the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim, and it was written in the book.

How easy it is for a new generation to come along and take for granted the blessings that previous generations struggled and sacrificed to attain! The Jews didn't make that mistake but established the Feast of Purim to remind their children year after year that God had saved Israel from destruction.

I am sure that you have heard "The church is always one generation short of extinction." If we don't pass on to our children and grandchildren what God has done for us and our fathers, the church will die of apathy and ignorance. It's when tradition gradually becomes traditionalism that we get into trouble. Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.

It is so easy to remember the ones who hurt us rather than the ones who've helped us, catastrophic events more than celebrations, the circumstances that brought tears, blood and sweat more than how we were delivered from those horrifying situations. Anyone who focuses on the negatives in the past, and keeps focusing on them, will tend to ache rather than celebrate.

A good example of this was the Israelites who escaped from Egypt. As soon as they left Egypt where they were nothing more than no-hope-for-tomorrow slaves, started to complain for what they had and what they didn't have. For the entire forty years journey, they complained and murmured against the Lord. Unless they were backed against the wall, they didn't remember the Lord's kindness and love for them even though they had food and water and the pillar of cloud during the day to give them a gigantic shade from the hot desert sun, the pillar of fire to give them warmth at night.

We are no different than them. We remember the bad times more than good times the Lord provided for us. We are quick to complain, slow to give thanks to Him.

Mordecai and Esther wanted to make sure that these Israelites would remember God's goodness throughout their generations.

D. MORDECAI THE MAIN MAN

Esther 10:1-3 And King Ahasuerus imposed tribute on the land and on the islands of the sea. 2 Now all the acts of his power and his might, and the account of the greatness of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? 3 For Mordecai the Jew was second to King Ahasuerus, and was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his countrymen.

Let's go over the providential will of God in the Book of Esther quickly. While the king, Haman and others thought they were doing their own thing, God was behind every situation to orchestrate the entire saga to bring glory to Himself:

- The noble Queen Vashti lost her place.
- A beauty competition was held to replace Queen Vashti.
- Esther was chosen to enter the competition.
- A special favor was given to Esther among the other women.
- God arranged for Mordecai to have access to both Esther and the affairs of the kingdom. While he was on duty, he overheard an assassination attempt of the king. With his information, they were able to save the king.
- Haman decided that he was going to kill the entire Jewish population in the Persian kingdom when he found out Mordecai was a Jew.
- The lot that was cast to give 11 months warning before the evil event.
- The decree command that the Jews be killed by private hands, instead of by the army of Persia – which would have been much more difficult to stop.
- Esther to delay her request – first asking for a banquet with the king and then another banquet.
- King Ahasuerus to have a sleepless night and found out about the assassination attempt on him that was exposed by Mordecai.
- Haman was hung on the very gallows which he wanted to use for Mordecai.
- The Jews were able to defend themselves and celebrate the victory – from sorrow to joy.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) When the Lord gives you an assignment, do it with all of your heart and effort until the Lord says it is done. Doing a half way job for the Lord is not the way to bring glory to Him.

2) Restrain yourself when it comes to revenge. The high road of life is not the road of retaliation, it is the road of forgiveness – the road that Jesus traveled when He went to the cross.

3) Anyone who focuses on the negatives in the past, and keeps focusing on them, will tend to ache rather than celebrate. Move on. Remember how the Lord set you free from guilt and bondage. Thank Him today, tonight, tomorrow and everyday.