

Introduction to Esther: Why is this Book Important?

Call to Worship: Psalm 145:14-21

Hymn # (Supp)- *Victory in Jesus!*

1st Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Hymn #689- *One Day!*

2nd Scripture: Romans 15:1-7

Hymn #432- *Jesus! What a Friend for Sinners!*

Introduction:

About a month ago or so, I was preparing to cross Merrick Avenue with one of my children, as we were coming home from the stores across the street. And as we were waiting for the light to change, so that we could cross, a group of two or three young Jewish boys walked over to us and stopped, as they were preparing to cross the same street. I was surprised, however, to see them dressed up in very colorful and entertaining costumes. After all, I thought, "Halloween is in October." And then it dawned on me, "Today is Purim." I asked the boys if they were celebrating "Purim," and indeed they were.

"Purim" is a special day for the Jews, which has been celebrated since the time of Esther, when God had used Queen Esther to deliver the Jews from ultimate and total destruction. The Book of Esther speaks of events that took place during the reign of King Ahasuerus, perhaps better known by his Greek name, Xerxes I, who reigned over the Persian empire from 485-464 B.C. You might recall that it was during the reign of King Cyrus, King of Persia, in 538 B.C. that the Jews were given permission to leave the nation of their captivity, in Babylon, to return and rebuild in their own land. Well, many of the Jews did not return with Zerubbabel or Ezra or Nehemiah to the Promised Land. Many stayed behind in the far more developed kingdom of Persia. Esther is written in the context of Susa, the capital of Persia, among those who stayed behind.

The kingdoms of Persia and Media enveloped far beyond the reach of every Jewish population, as far west as beyond Egypt and as far East as beyond India. Suffice it to say that it was well within the power of the Persians to annihilate virtually every Jew in existence. And that is exactly what almost happened. The Book of Esther sets the stage for this potential event,

and then shows how God used Esther to deliver and prosper the Jews in the face of this great threat. Hence the celebration of "Purim", which we will consider in more detail as we work through the small Book. But at least you can appreciate why the Jewish people, even in our own day, celebrate this great festival, with much fun, festivity, rejoicing, and in the giving and receiving of gifts. And furthermore, they sit together and listen to the story of Esther, read in its entirety.

Well clearly, the Book of Esther has much relevance for the Jews, but what does that have to do with us, the Christian church? Is there anything in the Book of Esther for us? Well, I would argue that there is....and in fact, I believe that we have much more to celebrate and much more to benefit from, in the content of this short Book, than even the Jewish people of our day do. And for this morning then, before beginning to work through the Book itself, I want to convince you of the great importance of this Book for us.

I. Why is this Book Important?

1) I chose 1 Corinthians 10 and Romans 15 for our first and second Scripture readings this morning because they both clearly teach us of the importance and ongoing relevance of the Old Testament for us. The Old Testament teachings, and especially the recordings of very specific historical events, add much color and detail to the teachings of the New Testament, and we would be at a great disadvantage to ignore this. Remember, the Bible is not primarily a Book of history or a biography of any sort. It gives us a limited sketch of various characters and events, which are all meant to convey very specific things about the character and will of God, to us. Most of history's details are left out, and so, what we are given, is preordained by God to be used as a medium for God speaking directly to us. All of Scripture is God breathed; it is a divine message board, displaying all that God deems necessary for the salvation and sanctification of His people. In his argumentation in 1 Corinthians 10 and Romans 15, the Apostle Paul confirms this.

Romans 15:4- "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."

1 Corinthians 10:6- "Now these things [what happened with Israel during the wilderness wanderings with Moses] became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted."

Specific portions of Old Testament history were jotted down, not to satisfy historical curiosities, but for our sakes, so that the people of God today would learn from the examples of the past, as we seek to serve God in the church, in our generation.

And brethren, this is one very general and all encompassing reason that we should consider the Book of Esther as important, and very relevant for us. God has given us another God-breathed document, displaying the specific events that took place during the time of Esther, and that, in and of itself, ought to convince us of its importance. However, as is the case with every Book of the Bible, upon considering the specific revelation given in this Book, we can hopefully appreciate *more specifically* why we were given Esther, which brings me to a few other additional, more specific reasons for the importance of the Book of Esther.

2) Esther gives us another revelation of the way in which God divinely intervenes, in order to preserve His chosen people. It reeks of the divine power, which is always at work, providentially governing the unfolding of history unto God's ordained will. And in doing this, it reinforces all of the promises given to God's people (in all of history) and all of the warnings given to God's enemies (in all of history), strengthening our confidence in our omnipotent (our all-powerful) sovereign God, during times that we might begin to lose hope, in the face of very difficult and seemingly impossible trials. Esther reminds us that God is indeed right here with us ("a very present help in times of trouble")...and just when you think you are finished, He intervenes and shows how He has been setting the stage for your deliverance, the whole time. He has been carrying you all along. Esther improves upon our ability to "walk by faith and not sight," so that we persevere and endure, as God leads us home, and produces more of Christ in us, along the way!

3) Esther introduces us to the glorious Jewish holiday of "Purim," but only to remind us that the events represented and celebrated during "Purim" have actually served to greatly benefit us, in fact, more than the unconverted Jews of our day. Purim is a celebration for the true people of God, for all ages, because by means of God preserving the Jews from utter annihilation, God

has, once again, stepped in to preserve the Messianic line. And in doing so, He has stepped in to preserve us! Purim is our celebration, brethren...it is our celebration in Christ! And we don't want to miss the significance of this reality!

4) Esther reminds us that the wicked ultimately cannot prosper. In due time, their malicious actions will turn upon their own heads. Haman is the epitome of all who think that they will get away with their wicked acts. And therefore, Esther is both a reminder and a warning to the wicked, and the unsaved, to realize that God is ultimately running the show, and it is utterly foolish to contend with the living God. In the end, the sins of the wicked will turn upon them and smite their own heads.

And so, brethren, this is a non-exhaustive list, containing four reasons for the importance of the Book of Esther. All Scripture is profitable and God-breathed unto a divine purpose. Esther gives a clear display of God's providential preservation of His people. It moves us to celebrate God's preservation of the Jews, and through them, the line of our blessed Christ. And it gives a clear picture of the way in which the acts of the wicked will ultimately all turn upon their own heads.

And brethren, what makes all of this even more fascinating is that, while God and His glory are clearly laced throughout the entirety of this Book; while the working of God is beyond evident and most pronounced, God Himself, is not directly mentioned anywhere in the Book. If you look in your exhaustive concordance and search for the word "God" or "Lord" in any of their Old Testament forms, you will find no references in the Book of Esther. Aside from "The Song of Solomon," no other Book of the Bible lacks a single use of the word "God" or "Lord." Perhaps, this is to remind us that even when God is not directly mentioned, heard from or seen, He is always clearly right there the whole time. You cannot get away from the reality of God in history, try as you may. He is always very present and active, perhaps in even more obvious ways, then when He directly speaks. Esther proves this!

II. Conclusive Thoughts

Brethren, let me just close with some conclusive thoughts, as we prepare to make our way into this Book, next time, Lord willing.

One of the main reasons that I am drawn to this Book at this time, and desirous to work through it with you, is because it presents us with a fascinating reality of the ever presence of an invisible God. As I said before, God is not even specifically mentioned in the Book, but His hand is clearly, visibly at work, in some of the most profound ways. No miracles are presented, as in the time of the Exodus...just fascinating providences that are well beyond the scope of "pure luck" or "chance." And it is very easy for us (very easy!) to lose sight of the reality of God, and His very specific detailed work in our lives, in our trials, in our circumstances and in our surrounding culture and world. God is at work, brethren, right here and right now. He is very active in a world that fails to even acknowledge His existence (if not in theory, certainly in practice). And if you are His blessed child; if your hope is bound to the living Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, then you can and must be certain that He is at work in and by and through you, at this very moment. God is bending and shaping your history and your surroundings, in such a way that they all serve His loving and gracious purposes in you.

Your physical problems; your physical pain and suffering are working a weight of glory in you, right at this very moment. Your emotional/spiritual trials; your spiritual warfare in depression and anxiety, are all tools of grace in the hands of a God who cannot fail, shaping you into the glorious image of His Son. Your marital problems; the challenges you face with your children, are all there, in part, to deal with your own heart, producing an obedience, an endurance, a patience and a faith that are made stronger and stronger by the day, as you seek to obey God under the weight of your burden. And often times, you may not even realize it (anymore than you realize your own physical growth or aging), but God does. Brethren, God is actively involved in your life, and He means to accomplish all His holy will and desire in you. He who began the good work, will complete it...in spite of you. God is always right here, right now, at work, especially in impossible circumstances. Esther will remind us of this.

And lastly, women, be encouraged to see how God uses women to accomplish some of His great feats in the building and preservation of His glorious church. God is no respecter of

persons when it comes to building His kingdom, and while men and women have different roles in the church, women have been used in very profound and fantastic ways, throughout the course of redemptive history. Esther is another testimony to this reality!

The Gospel

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25