

The Feast of Purim; Celebrating Deliverance

Call to Worship: Psalm 111

Hymn #186- *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*

1st Scripture: Matthew 26:17-30

Hymn #188- *There is a Fountain Filled with Blood*

2nd Scripture: Esther 9:18-32

Hymn #731- *And Can it Be*

Introduction:

God has brought about a great and awesome deliverance for the Jews, and there is only one thing left for them to do...celebrate! Haman, the Agagite, and all of the enemies of the Jews, had, by far, the greater advantage, from a worldly standpoint, but the living God was with the Jews, and so, they prevailed, greatly! And what seemed to be a hopeless situation for the Jewish people, turned out to be nothing less than an opportunity for God to shine forth the light of His great wisdom, power and glory! It was all under His control, the whole time; it was all preordained by God, and for the glory of God, who raised up a lowly Jewish orphan girl and her faithful cousin, to bring about the deliverance of His people, and the fulfillment of His curse upon the Amalekite Haman and his children.

And so, this morning, we move beyond the conflict and into the celebration! The Jews celebrate their deliverance in a newly sanctioned holiday; a holiday of great feasting and gift giving, called, "The Feast of Purim." And brethren, in the good providence of God, we have come to consider this celebration of deliverance, as a preface to our own celebration of deliverance, as we partake together of the Lord's Supper! May God fill our hearts with great joy and thankfulness as we move to prepare ourselves to that end!

I. The Feast of Purim

Following the two successful days of war, the Jews in Shushan rest on the fifteenth day of the month, and celebrate with a time of feasting and gladness. And the Jews outside of Shushan, having obtained the victory on the thirteenth day of the month, rest, feast and celebrate

on the fourteenth day of the month. And they all have a time of great joy, with feasting, and the sending of presents to one another.

Following this, Mordecai sends letters out to all of the Jews, initiating a celebratory ordinance, calling for all Jews of every generation to set apart the fourteenth and fifteenth day of the twelfth month of each year, as days of rest, days of feasting, days of great joy and celebration, where presents are given to one another, and gifts are given to the poor. And all of this was to commemorate what God had done for them, by giving them rest from their enemies, turning their great sorrow and mourning into joy, and turning the wicked plans of Haman on his own head. They were to celebrate and commemorate their deliverance. They were to celebrate a yearly reminder of the glorious divine "reversals" brought about unto their own salvation.

And the name given these two days of feasting, would be Purim, after the name Pur. The name itself, emphasizes the great "reversal" brought about by God, which fell on the head of Haman and the enemies of the Jews. For, you will recall earlier in the Book of Esther, that it was when Haman casted "Pur" (lots), that he had come to determine superstitiously, which day would be best to set apart for the destruction of the Jews. And the lot; the pur, fell on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month. But ultimately, God used that very lot to set apart the specific day that He would grant His people victory over their enemies. The lot was cast unto the reverse end, and it blew up in the faces of all who sought to harm the Jews. And so, this "Feast of *Purim*," is labeled in such a sarcastic, paradoxical fashion, so as to emphasize the very principle of "reversal" that we have considered, these last several weeks.

And so, the Jews gladly accepted Mordecai's edict, and set apart the two days as holidays, to be taught and celebrated throughout all of their generations, among all Jews. And to this day, we still find the Jews following this tradition, with a whole host of passed down, celebratory practices attached to it. Indeed, this ordinance, given by the decree of Mordecai and Esther, was written down in the book, and has virtually become as binding as all of the other ordinance laws of Moses.

II. Celebrating Deliverance

Now brethren, I want to suggest to you that the "Feast of Purim," ought to provide us with some insight regarding how we ought to celebrate the Lord's Supper. The "Feast of Purim," in some sense, resembles both the celebration of the Passover (and especially the "Feast of Unleavened Bread") for the Jews, and the celebration of the Lord's Supper for Christians. It identifies well with both, because all three celebrate deliverance. Remember, the "Feast of Unleavened Bread," while picturing, in some sense, the holiness of God's people in not mixing with the ungodly leaven of the world, was especially meant to commemorate the speed at which God delivered His people from out of their Egyptian bondage. The Jews were not to add leaven to the bread, as a means of remembering that God had delivered them speedily and with a mighty, outstretched arm. They were not to forget, ever, the fact that they had no time to mix in yeast, which would have caused them to have to wait for the dough to be leavened before leaving. The quickness and the greatness of the deliverance were to be seen as reminders of God's sovereign power bringing this all about. And interestingly enough, the Passover was to begin on the fourteenth day of the first month, and the "Feast of Unleavened Bread" was to begin on the fifteenth day, the two days that immediately followed the day when Haman's decree was written. And furthermore, these are the same two days, though eleven months earlier, upon which the "Feast of Purim" was to be celebrated.

And, of course, the Lord's Supper very much commemorates the Passover celebration, only the most significant Passover, celebrated by our Lord and His disciples on the night that He was betrayed and sent to be our Passover Lamb. But all of these things emphasize a very common theme of deliverance, and to that end, all of these things are indeed celebrations. The Israelites, under the leadership of Moses, celebrated their powerful deliverance from out of their Egyptian bondage. The Jews, under the leadership of Mordecai (and Esther), celebrated their powerful deliverance from their enemies. And Christians, under the leadership of Christ, celebrate their powerful deliverance from sin (both its penalty and power). And in all of these cases, great joy and celebration come out of great mourning and hopeless sorrow.

Now brethren, while there are differences, especially regarding the exact traditions surrounding these celebrations, there is one common theme that pervades them all...namely, great joy, peace and rest. And this is what I want us to recognize, as we celebrate the Lord's

Supper this morning. Brethren, we celebrate the Lord's Supper by eating and drinking, not so much to fill our bellies, but rather to associate the nourishing of our bodies with the true feasting and joy that we have in our crucified and risen Christ! We proclaim His death till He comes! To proclaim, is to state with certainty, that on the basis of Christ's death and resurrection, we have peace with God, and we boldly anticipate the day soon to come, when we will all feast with Christ at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. The Lord's Supper is an ongoing ordinance; it is an ongoing reminder of what has already been done, which guarantees all that will be done. It keeps our focus on the blessed, unchangeable hope that is set before us. It takes all of our present sorrows and trials and brings them back to a proper perspective of viewing them in the light of all that we are and have in Christ! We do this "in remembrance of Him," unto His glory, but certainly for our great benefit.

Brethren, as we eat of the bread, which represents His broken body, and as we drink of the cup, which represents His shed blood, we are reminded of at least two very critical, fire infusing facts:

1) We have peace with the living God, who created us for His glory! Indeed, we still suffer in the world; we still experience the healthy blows that bring about our sanctification, but nothing; none of that could ever change a thing regarding our position and stance before God. We are justified in Christ! We are reconciled to God in Christ! We have peace with God, in Christ, and nothing could possibly change that! And so, we celebrate! We celebrate a speedy change; a speedy deliverance from out of the realm of darkness and into the glorious Kingdom of the Son of God. We celebrate a "new birth," where we were changed instantly, by grace. We were just like the rest of this world, blinded to the truth, dead in sin, walking about the course of this world, under the power of the devil; but God quickened us, and shined the light of the Gospel of His grace right into our hearts, and our chains fell off; we rose, went forth and followed Christ! Life, and its true meaning; this glorious creation and world, and our conscious existence, suddenly had profound, glorious relevance...in Christ! And so, we are ever reminded of this, when we take this Supper! We are here...because of grace! We have been speedily delivered from the power, penalty and weight of every single sin that we have ever committed, and ever will commit!

2) The Supper; the bread and the cup, remind us of the specific means and cost of our redemption and deliverance! We are not simply reconciled to God; we are reconciled to God at a high cost. Divine, perfect, infinite holiness has been usurped by finite, created dust, and the righteous payment for reconciliation came at the expense of the broken body and shed blood of the righteous Son of God. That Christ should dare step down from His throne and bear flesh ought to amaze us, but that He should do so unto the ultimate shame of the cross, and unto the hellish torments of bearing the wrath of men, devils and worst of all, the wrath of His Father and our Almighty God, speaks volumes as to the extent of His love for us! The Lord's Supper is indeed a celebration of our reconciliation in Christ, but it is also a celebration of the incomprehensible love of Christ for us! The Passover Feast, the Feast of Purim and the Lord's Supper, all represent glorious deliverances for an undeserving, sinful people. And as we celebrate this morning, we celebrate not a sacrifice made for the worthy, but a sacrifice made for the unworthy, and the naturally condemned. That is the wonder of grace, is it not? Christ died for me! Christ died for me! My name is written on His pierced hands! The love of Christ sought me, won me, overcame me, changed me; indeed, it turned my whole world upside down, when I was utterly lost and running full speed ahead in the opposite direction.

[Consider the principle of reversal in the light of Isaiah 53---What we deserve, fell upon Him]

And so, brethren, the Lord's Supper is a time of celebration, not without sobriety, but a celebration none-the-less. We ought not to partake of it with morbid or dull hearts; we ought not to take it with a sense of indifference; we ought to war against every inkling of treating it in some casual or common manner; for this ordinance is a time of great celebration in Christ! And brethren, God forbid, that we should partake, while having an unresolved conflict with another brother/sister in Christ! If the Jews gave gifts to one another during the Feast of Purim, what ought our hearts and attitudes to be toward one another, in the taking of the Lord's Supper? Can we dare have resentment in our hearts or bitterness toward another brother/sister in Christ, while partaking of the body of Christ? Can we anticipate communion with Christ whom we cannot see, when we have *not* communion with our brethren, whom we can see? May it never be, brethren; may it never be!

The Gospel

Amen!!!