

# He Sought the Welfare of His People and Spoke Peace to All His People

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*Esther*

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**Bible Text:** Esther 9:16-10:3; Ephesians 2:11-22

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## **Covenant OPC**

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I'd like us this morning to continue but also to conclude our study in the book of Esther as we reflect upon what God in his word has provided for us. We do desire that we may not read this, God's word, in the way which we might read any ordinary book or any ordinary history book, just as a record of events that have now long since passed and perhaps bear little connection with us in our generation. After all, we might look back and see these events occurred hundreds of years before even the birth of Christ. They occurred in a land far, far away in a society and a culture so very different from our own, circumstances with which we might in many ways say we have but little with which we could identify ourselves and yet truly as we have examined this portion of God's word, the lessons surely have not been lost on us. For the people of God in Esther's day, there was certainly great assurance that God did look after them, that in the midst of great persecution when important men in the kingdom of King Ahasuerus had risen up in order to destroy the people of God, God nevertheless showed himself gracious and merciful and the very man that was chiefly responsible for seeking to destroy the people of God was himself destroyed. God's enemies were overcome and this book of Esther gives the background for a festival which is celebrated by the Jews down to this very day. So we can read through the book of Esther and always ask yourself, "Lord, what lessons are there for me to learn in this particular portion of your word?"

Well, let me just remind you of some of the lessons which have been ours as we have studied this portion of God's word. God preserves the weak. In the Persian Empire of some 127 provinces stretching from Ethiopia to India, the Jews held no significant place. Ahasuerus was the most powerful man upon the face of the earth at that time and, indeed we could say, in his generation was the most powerful man that had ever lived. The Persian Empire stretched across thousands of miles. It encompassed many different tribes and peoples. Indeed, we're told at the conclusion of this particular book in the Old Testament that the record of the events are to be found in the Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia. Now, perhaps you don't have your own copy but there would be a reason for that. The Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia no longer exist, at least they are not known to exist, perhaps they may yet be uncovered in some archaeological dig in the Middle East but there is no library in any place in the world in the Middle East or anywhere else where you will be able to go and consult such a document. There are no translations available for us to get some of the background information from the

perspective of the official Chronicles. But I would suggest to you that even in that, there is something of considerable significance.

King Ahasuerus, the most powerful man of his generation, the king that ruled over an empire which stretched from Ethiopia to India, is known to us largely because we read of his name in the book of Esther. In God's providence, I had reason to phone up a Christian bookstore and ask for a particular book for which I was looking. The person who answered the phone is not the person who normally answers the phone but in God's providence I say she answered the phone and said, "This is Such-and-such a Christian stores. Esther speaking." I dare say that if I was to ask each of you in turn, you'd probably be able to say that you know an Esther, that there are those who have named their daughter Esther. Are you able to say the same? How many sons have been called Ahasuerus recently? The name Esther is remembered and the name Ahasuerus if it is remembered at all is only remembered because he was the spouse of Esther. Perhaps you begin to see the significance of that, that God is preserving the record of what he does for his people because that is more significant than the reign of the most powerful man that lived upon the face of the earth in his generation. The Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia have been lost and forgotten but God's gracious dealing with his people has been preserved and the Jews to this day remember God's faithfulness in delivering his chosen people. The mightiest of men are brought to nothing. Ahasuerus' name is all but forgotten except that it be preserved upon the pages of Scripture. Haman, second in importance only to the king himself, swept away and executed. The people of God are kept safe.

The people of God therefore in Mordecai's day, the Jews to this day remember the feast of Purim as they rejoice in deliverance and so let us pause for a moment and consider together what cause they had for rejoicing in their day and pause and reflect what cause for rejoicing we have in our day. Paul as we read in Paul's letter to the Colossians, he speaks about our temptation to sin. He says, "You set your minds upon the things that are above where Christ is, where he is seated at the right hand of God the Father and put away those things to which you naturally find after the flesh to yield to, those sins which do so easily ensnare." They are like weeds that grow around our feet and hold us back. "Well," he says, "engage in the things which will be to a blessing to yourself and to others. Be patient with one another. Be kind. Be thoughtful and as you do these things rejoice."

Well, what reason have you to rejoice? Well, let me spell it out for you. I trust it is entirely obvious and you're saying, "I'm way ahead of you, Preacher. I have much to be thankful for. My sins not in part but the whole are nailed to the cross and I bear them no more. I have cause to rejoice this day. I can enter into a particular place and hear the Gospel being preached. I can enter in a sinner but I can exit a saint. And I may not come with the clarion call of the Archangel Gabriel and the heavenly host as to the shepherds in the fields long ago. It may come through the foolishness of preaching, through a man who stumbles and stutters and yet proclaims the unsearchable riches of Christ." The people of God had cause for rejoicing that they had been delivered from evil and wicked

men. Do we not have even more cause to rejoice this day seeing as we are delivered from our sins?

So as we trace back the story of the people of God in the days of Mordecai, we see their deliverance, that God heard their prayers as God hears our prayers. That God responded in grace as God response in grace to our prayers. That God is working even though he may not to our senses announce himself in any clear and obvious way. He may, as it were, work behind the scenes and yet for those who have the eyes of faith, are able to say, "We see God's gracious providence working out." It may often be, indeed, almost always if not invariably be in hindsight that we look back upon the events of last year or our entire lives, we look back and we say, "We saw that that was a difficult time but God brought us through. He strengthened us." And with the psalmist we're saying, "It was good for us to be afflicted because I grew in confidence and in grace. I grew in knowledge of God's goodness that it is not only in times of happiness that I can see that God is gracious to me but in times of affliction. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I need fear no evil."

So we fret not for evil doers. But I would press upon you something further, not just to say that God has shown himself gracious to the children of Israel in Mordecai's day but there's something that we can say even more than that. After all, there may be times as Jesus gives illustration of the widow who comes to the unjust judge and she gets what she wants. She gets justice. Why? Because it was in the nature of the judge to do that? "No," says Jesus in that illustration. The judge gives her what she wants because he doesn't want to be bothered by her constant repetition of her case. But Jesus goes on to say, "How much more?" In other words, he's pointing to the character of God himself. If even an unjust judge will give justice, how much more will a just judge give justice? You will not give your children a stone when they ask for bread so how much more will God give you his Holy Spirit when you ask?

What we're seeing in the book of Esther is something that surprises us. You say, "No, this is a character of the God whom we worship. He is a God of grace. A God who protects and delivers his people." We see it in the book of Exodus where the people of God were brought out of Egypt. We see how God raises up deliverers in the time of the book of Judges. We see how God raises up prophets to preach to his people, to call them to repentance and to turn them back to the living God. Why does God do all these things and do it upon every page of Scripture? It's because God is still a God of grace. That is his character. Though the people of God had cause to rejoice in Esther's day for deliverance then we might say, "Then how much more have we as we meditate upon the deliverance which God has wrought for us in the Lord Jesus Christ?"

Oh my dear friends, have you found yourselves perplexed by your circumstances and it seems as though everything is just going against you? Things are not going well for you at work. Things are not going well within your family, perhaps there is some child or some parent who is ill. Or perhaps there is someone who is straying in your family and it disturbs you greatly. Do you think you cannot turn to your Father in heaven and present all these needs before the throne of grace and say, "Here is the God who has shown

himself to be gracious. I come not because I am worthy to be heard, I come not because there is something that I can present before the throne of grace and say, 'Now, hear me because of what I am presenting. Can I bring this gift so that you will now hear me?'" "No," says God, "I'm hearing you already." Why? Because he is a God of grace. He gives deliverance to his people. I know not what may befall you in the course of this week. You don't know what may befall you in the course of this week. But I can assure you on God's behalf that you being a child of God will know his favor. Place your hand in the hand of God, say to God, "Take hold of me. Lead me and guide me. Lead me and guide me."

Why do you suppose the Jews were told to keep the festival of Purim? It is so that they should be reminded of God's faithfulness. Should we not keep in remembrance also for the good of our souls God's faithfulness? His goodness to us? But it is such a routine to us, we lose sight of what the routine actually is and how it came about. Why do we worship on the first day of the week? We worship on the first day of the week because it was on the first day of the week that Jesus rose from the grave. Deliverance. God has shown himself gracious by delivering us from our sins. We gather together on the first day of the week to be reminded of God's goodness and his grace to us. It is, as it were, by parallel, it is our own miniature Purim. Week by week we would remind ourselves that God is gracious, God is faithful so that whatever this week that has now begun has in store for us, we start it off with this remembrance: God is good to me. He is gracious. He is kind. He is merciful. And whatever befalls me I know that it comes from the hand of my loving Father and will be a blessing even to me.

There is rejoicing therefore in the people of God as they keep the feast of Purim. There is a second thing here to which I would point you: it's the closing verse of the entire book, words which are pregnant with great blessing, "For Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brothers, for he sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his people." He sought the welfare of all his people. Now, of course, this upon the pages of Scripture is telling us how Mordecai raised or placed second only to the king himself, sought the welfare of his people. He used the resources which he had to bless the people of God.

Boys and girls, as we come to the study of God's word, perhaps the chiefest question that we should always ask when we're reading through Scripture is: what does this show me about the Lord Jesus Christ? When Jesus walked with Cleopas on the road to Emmaus, he opened up Scriptures and showed him what? Christ in all the Scriptures. It should be our endeavor, as it were, we come to the school of Christ and we sit under the ministry of God's word and we say, "I want to see Christ in this portion of God's word. Where does Christ appear to us in this?" Can we not say that if Mordecai with all his fallenness as a mere man sought the welfare of his people, what would that point us towards? The endeavors of the great King of kings as he looks out upon his people. Can we not say, "If this is true of Mordecai, it must be infinitely true of the King of kings." That my great and lovely Savior looks out upon his people and says, "I have their welfare at heart." Or as the psalmist says, "I will withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly." Withhold no good thing.

How often do we underestimate God's grace, his mercy, his love toward us? That we doubt in some measure, at least in the way in which we express ourselves, even in the place of prayer, that not truly has such an attitude towards us, one of love and of tenderness. We wonder if he will really do this? Well, what is God's promise to us? Whatever is for our welfare he will not withhold. Now, you who are parents know something about the distinction to be made between doing something which your child will like and doing something which is in their interest, what is in their welfare to do. And there are some times you as parents will say, "No, I'm not giving you what you're asking for." Why not? "Because it's not in your interest. I'm thinking of your welfare." And God deals with us graciously in exactly the same manner. He makes provision for us. He protects us from harm.

But there is something more I think that we can say about the Lord Jesus Christ of which we cannot say for Mordecai. When God promises to look after our welfare, he does so not counting the cost for as Paul put it, "If God has not spared his own Son, how will he not with him freely give us all things?" All that men can do is point towards the grace and the mercy of God. They can never equal it, not even remotely. But Christ is our Good Shepherd who having the welfare of his sheep at heart lays down his own life.

Finally, there are these words which are spoken in the book of Esther which surely we can apply to ourselves, "For he sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his people." Those words we find also repeated in the book of Psalms, that God speaks peace to his people. A little while ago we read from the book of Ephesians and in that book the Lord is speaking to his people. Paul is writing but he's speaking clearly as with the voice of the Lord. Let me just remind you of its content so that you might see clearly that Paul is not writing concerning himself but concerning the Lord Jesus Christ as he deals with his people. He speaks here, here is Paul writing, "For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace." Of whom is Paul writing? There is only one possible conceivable explanation: he's writing of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's who the pronoun refers to, Jesus.

Who was it that preached to the Ephesian church? Well, in the book of Acts we have the record of Paul's own estimation of the time that he had: 3 years in Ephesus. He calls the elders together, the session from the church in Ephesus and meets with them and Miletus. Why? Because he'd been their pastor for 3 years. But listen carefully to how Paul writes to the church in Ephesus, the church which he had founded, the church which he had served as minister for 3 years. Well, let me read it to you in its context, "that he," that is Jesus, who else can it be, "that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near." Who came? Who preached? Surely the only explanation there if we are reading through Scripture consistently is that Jesus came and preached peace. But the word of God is being proclaimed. Whoever might have the voice to make it audible to a congregation, it is Jesus who comes and Jesus who speaks peace.

Now, for the time of Mordecai, of course, they had peace from those who wished them harm, the thousands who were their enemies and wanted to destroy them. They had peace in that sense. There was a peace that had been brought about by the wisdom, through the wisdom of Mordecai, that God had brought about deliverance. But what the world can give, the world can take away. But what God gives us is something infinitely better than what the world can give. God speaks to us peace. If you're at all familiar with the book of Romans you may remember how Romans 5 begins, "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God." Our sins being forgiven, we have peace with God. There may be a number of things about which we might grow anxious in this world. If things are not working out for us in the place of work or in our family or whatever other circumstances through which we might pass, but to have peace with God, that surely surpasses everything. To be able to enter into the presence of God and say, "I have knowledge from God's word that I have peace with him. He welcomes me as his child. I have peace with God."

Now, you may respond, "The people of God to this day have been persecuted to death. They have been imprisoned and there are parts of the world where even now our brothers and sisters in Christ face the persecution of those who want to destroy them as in Mordecai's day and for some of them, persecution will mean even death or physical maiming, injury. Why isn't God doing something there?" Well, surely our response is that God is doing something there. If we're sitting under God's word and reflecting upon it, Paul says, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." What is the worst that your enemy can do but promote you into the presence of your Savior? If God should allow that, is that some great defeat or disaster? To be glorified in the presence of your God and King?

"Well, perhaps it means greater pain and suffering in this world. How is that to be seen as God's protecting hand?" It has always been so. Peter and John in the company of the Sanhedrin beaten for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ but going out rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer for the name because it is through suffering that we grow in our knowledge of God's goodness and grace. It is a paradox of the Christian faith. Inconceivable to the world but known to saints in every generation that the persecution of the unbeliever drives us closer into fellowship with God and that that fellowship is sweeter by far than what this world can give.

So we would join our hearts and minds with the people of God in a bygone age. Our confidence is renewed. We would be reminded that God is still a God of grace and of mercy. But God does not always announce himself in your life or in mine but perhaps in retrospect we are given to see that even in our darkest days, God has still been with us. He never deserts us. He never leaves us but perhaps that sometimes we become more aware of it. As the Jews, as they celebrated the feast of Purim looked back and saw God delivered them, so let us with the eye of faith look back and see that God has delivered us so that our confidence might be renewed, that this week, the remainder of this year and on into the future, it is the character, the nature of God to deliver his people and to bless them.

Let's pray together.

*Our gracious God and our heavenly Father, we do thank thee for this thy word and though the name of Ahasuerus is all but forgotten, the Chronicles of all his great deeds are lost in history, thou hast preserved this record of thy faithfulness so that we to this day might record with thanksgiving that thou, the God who delivers thy people, protects them from harm and even at times when we are not most conscious of thy gracious presence, thou art nevertheless working out thy plans and purposes for thy glory and for our blessing. So, O God, write upon the fleshy tables of our hearts thy word and grant to us this day confidence that our great King, our great King even now seeks the welfare of his people and speaks peace to us. Hear us we pray for the sake of thy dear Son, our King and our Lord, even Jesus Christ. Amen.*