

Esther 9:18-10:3

Remembering the Works of the Lord.

Exegetical Big Idea: Purim is established as a lasting memorial, and Mordecai's prominence is a reminder of the Abrahamic Promise.

Homiletical Big Idea: **May the works of the LORD forever be on the lips of his people.**

Fallen Condition Focus: We tend to forget the works of the Lord. Forgetting God's works produces fear and doubt and unfaithfulness.

Intro:

The story of Esther is the basis for the Jewish holiday of Purim, which we'll see in the chapter today. Purim comes from the Persian word "pur" meaning "lot". Of course the name comes from the fact that Haman cast the "pur" or "lot" to decide the fate of the Jews, but God had turned it around and brought it upon himself.

Jews today still celebrate Purim and they have some traditions that reflect what happened in the book.

Hamantaschen or Ozney Haman – cookies called "Haman's pockets" or "Haman's ears"

Braided challah bread – represents the rope that Haman was hanged on.

Non-food related traditions include the reading of the entire book. As the person is reading, listeners would have noise makers and be dressed up and when Haman's name comes up they boo loudly and make noise, possibly to symbolize the blotting out of his name and family line.

The point of these traditions is to help people remember the story. And that's what the ending of the book of Esther is all about. We come to the end of the story, and there is a strong argument that the works of God in the pages of Esther should not be forgotten.

Of course we know the rest of the story. Esther is part of the larger story of redemption for God's people. How much more should the works of God throughout all of the Scriptures and throughout all of history be on the lips of his people?

As sons and daughters of the living God, who have eternal hope in the risen Lord, may the works of the Lord be forever on our lips.

There are a number of reasons why this ought to be the case that we see in Esther chapter 9-10.

Verses 18-22: The works of the LORD are joyful

The day of battle is done. God's people are victorious. God has granted them a huge victory that he has shown his powerful hand over the events of history. So what is the reaction of God's people to all this?

Here's a good hint: in these 5 verses, we read the words "celebration" twice and the words "joy and feasting" 3 times. At the works of the hand of God, his people celebrate. And not only do they celebrate, but they do so on a regular basis. It's yearly thing to celebrate the works of the LORD. And not only is it a celebration on a regular basis, but it's marked as well with gifts to each other!

The giving of presents of food to one another is a picture of invitation to partake in the blessing of the LORD over his people. It brings to mind Psalm 16:5-6. *“Lord you assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.”* Giving gifts to each other and to the poor in association with Purim was a way of remembering the good lot God has for his people, all his people. All of God’s people partake in the blessing of the LORD, rich and poor, small and great, young and old. None of God’s people should be left out of the celebration of the works of the LORD.

If the Jews in Persia were celebrating their physical salvation. How much more reason do we have to celebrate our eternal salvation? We have been saved from no less than what the Jews in Persia have been saved from, and indeed we have been saved from much more! We have been saved from death by the resurrection of Christ. Death now has no hold on those who belong to Christ, because as he was raised from the dead so we will be too. And not only have we been saved from physical death, but spiritual death as well. Christ has taken upon himself the guilt of our sin. The sin that separates a person from God for all of eternity is taken by Christ on the cross and applied to his people by grace through faith.

I need to learn from these Jews in Persia. How often do I know and recall the events of my salvation, the death of my savior and his glorious resurrection, and they become too familiar or normal? That’s not an indication of the lack of glory of these events, but instead it’s indication of how dull my heart can become.

What is my hope when my heart is dull? Giving thanks for the works of God, rather than just thinking of the details. Remembering with my heart rather than only my brain. After all, “the joy of the LORD is your strength” says Nehemiah. Communion, baptism, Good Friday service, Easter Sunday service, are all times to focus our celebration on the redeeming work of Christ on the cross and his glorious resurrection.

May the works of the LORD forever be on the lips of his people.

Verses 23-26 **The Story is the LORD’s**

So the Jews agree that celebrating Purim is a great idea, and then we read “for”. Almost in a redundant and unnecessary manner, we get a very short retelling of most of the book of Esther. Now, we have just gone through the book, we know what has happened. Why give us a short recap of this? I think there is a pretty good clue not in what is said, but what is not said.

Who are the main characters in the book of Esther? Yes of course God is, but other than him, Esther and Mordecai are the main characters.

Notice who is missing from these verses that recount the entire book of Esther? Mordecai and Esther! This short account leaves out the work that Mordecai and Esther accomplished for God’s people. You’ll notice if you’re reading the NIV that the footnote gives an alternative translation for verse 25 that reads “when Esther came before the king”, but the original language does not have her name there. It just reads “she came to the king’s attention”. Most scholars agree that this feminine pronoun does not refer to Esther but the plot itself.

So Mordecai and Esther are not mentioned here, because in one sense, it is the LORD that did all the work. The story belongs to the LORD. It's good to remember the faithful, but remember that they were only servants.

[You'll remember Hebrews 11, often called the "Hall of Faith". It's a whole chapter devoted to recounting the faith of some of God's most faithful servants. There's Abel and Noah, Abraham Isaac and Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Rahab, some of the judges, King David, the prophets, and many others not directly mentioned. God commended them for their faith. But how does chapter 12 begin?]

***1**Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, **2** fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. **3** Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

Of all these faithful in Hebrews 11, we are surrounded by them, not so much that we look to them for as heroes, but as those, like us, who put their faith in the only hero of history. Christ himself. Let us together fix our eyes on Jesus, and let us consider him so that we do not grow weary and lose heart.

History tells us that Xerxes was assassinated in his bedroom. And that was the end of the most powerful person on the planet at that time. Mordecai and Esther live out their days and eventually pass away, we don't know how or when. But what remains is the work of the LORD. His promise to keep his people by his mighty power is what remains.

It is good to encourage each other, please don't misunderstand me. Let's spur each other on to good works for sure. But when Haman cast the lot, who decided where it would land? When Haman devised evil for God's people, who caused it to turn around and fall instead on Haman's own head? The LORD.

The story belongs to the LORD because he is the only hero.

This gives me great encouragement. Our heroes in the faith are not perfect. But we have a God who is. God uses his imperfect and fallible servant to bring glory to himself, and good to his people. So praise be to God if there is good coming from us!

May the works of the LORD forever be on the lips of his people.

Verses 27-32: **We are responsible for teaching the works of the LORD to the next generation.**

So the day of Purim has been established. It is fresh in the minds of the people because they are saved from Haman's evil. They tasted death but now have life. But what about their children? And their children's children? What happens when the events are not a memory?

In these verses the Jews realize that the works of the LORD need to be passed on to the generation that comes next. Verse 27 reads that they "*took it upon themselves* to establish the custom that they and their descendants and all who join them should without fail observe [Purim]"

They recognized that though the events are fresh in their minds, there will be a whole new generation who will have no memory of it since it didn't happen to them. I think first they realized that this doesn't happen on its own. The end of verse 28 realizes that unless this generation teaches the works of God to the next, memory of them might die out.

Jump ahead to verses 29-32. Mordecai and Esther, in an effort of establishing Purim as a permanent celebration, confirm it in writing. They make it official with their official status in the kingdom, they enter it into the official records of the king. We get the sense here that

You've probably heard it said that the Christian faith is always only 1 generation away from dying out. There is truth to that. True, God will continue to build his church and the gates of hell will not stand against it. There will never be a generation that completely forgets about the LORD, but who do you think God uses to propagate the faith? You.

[I've gone about a year now without biting my nails. Before that however I don't remember a time when I did not bite my nails. So it's been like 30 or so years that I've bitten my nails. I hope I never go back to biting my nails, but I'll tell you how I finally stopped. I stopped because I realized that both my girls now bite their nails. They got that from me! They obviously saw me do it and picked up the habit. Kids are so perceptive. They watch mom and dad and pick up on things, sometimes good and sometimes bad.]

Parents, you are primarily responsible for evangelizing your kids, and what an opportunity! You have little minds that are like sponges, who inherently trust mom and dad from a young age, and who can't run away! All this changes as they get older and more independent, but what an opportunity to preach and teach the gospel to them from a young age. Kids are never too young for us parents to start to teach them concepts like sin and grace, God and creation, forgiveness etc.

Places like Sunday school are great. They have their place. Things need to be explained to kids on their level for sure. But it is no replacement for evangelism in the home. And I think too it's important for the kids to be a part of the main worship service of the church. I never want to fall into the habit of thinking that we just relegate our kids to Sunday, out of the way, so that the adults can enjoy the worship service. It's good for kids to see their parents and other adults in the church singing loudly the works of the LORD, to see baptism and communion and ask what it means. To watch us pray and listen intently to the sermon. Sure some of it is over their heads but often what they take in surprises us. And they take in more than words, they watch how we worship. Are we modeling a joy for worship? I don't say this to shame us, I hope we do model joy in our worship! I just know my own heart, and oh how I need God to give me more and more joy for Jesus, because I desperately need more.

Singles and those without kids or grandparents, you're not off the hook. Serving in the church to proclaim the gospel. After all, verse 27 does say "and all who would join them". In the same way we model for our kids, we model to an outside world.

As we worship together as a body, teaching our kids and witnessing to the world, God does another amazing thing. He brings unity to God's people. The word "every" is repeated 4 times in verse 28: Every generation, every family, every province, every city. Every Jew was under the curse of sin, every Jew was saved by God's mighty hand, so every Jew shares in this together.

[one of the things I can honestly say I've missed the most about being away from all of you during Covid is the singing. During the weeks we recorded music in an empty room, or when there was a limited

number of people here on Sunday, the singing was not the same. Don't get me wrong, all that we do should be worship to God and that was no less worship than it is now, but what was lacking was the unity. When we come together and sing of the glories of God in Christ Jesus and what he did on the cross for his people, there is a glorious unity in that.]

May the works of the LORD forever be on the lips of his people.

10:1-3: All God's works point to Christ.

Life returns to normal. The king continues to reign and he continues to impose taxes. He continues doing what kings do and his events are recorded in the record books. We get the sense here that things return to normal for the Jews. The temple in Jerusalem and the walls of Jerusalem continue to be built, and the Jews in Israel continue to rebuild their homes. The Jews in Persia go back to their normal lives. But there is a new normal. The irony here that in a distant land, a Jew is the power and might behind the king. Mordecai was God's representative to work for the good of God's people and the welfare of all the Jews.

We don't get the sense here that Mordecai is working for the good of the Jews and *not* for the good of the rest of the kingdom, but that as he blesses the Jews, the whole kingdom is blessed.

Do we see some reflection of the Abrahamic promise here? Specifically, that "the nations will be blessed through you?" Presumably, it is implied that Mordecai will work for the good of God's people, and by extension the whole of the Persian kingdom will be prosperous. We have already seen very clearly the promise to Abraham that "those who curse you will be cursed" was fulfilled in the death of Haman and his sons. So too here we see another aspect of the Abrahamic promise coming out.

With this, we have a happy ending...but still an incomplete one. See we leave off the book with a reminder of the Abrahamic promise. But with that reminder brings the realization that God's promise to Abraham is not yet completely fulfilled. And in this way, the book of Esther fits perfectly in with the rest of the Old Testament, which looks forward to the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham, but doesn't see it yet.

Esther was not the fulfilment of that promise. Mordecai was not the fulfilment of that promise. Just like God is the hero of the book of Esther, God himself, would become truly human to be the fulfilment of that promise.

All God's works point to Christ.

[Some people really enjoy puzzles. I'm thinking of the kind that you put together from little pieces. We have puzzles at my house but the ones we have are only like 20 pieces max. Some people are really into puzzle though, like more than a thousand pieces. I admire those people who have the patience to sit down and spend hours and days on end figuring out where a few thousand pieces go to fit together. Question, how many pieces of the puzzle do you need to put together to complete the puzzle? Whether it's a twenty piece puzzle or a thousand piece puzzle, you need every piece to complete it! It doesn't make sense to put together a corner of the puzzle and then step back and admire your work and call it a day. The point of the puzzle is the completion of the image with all the pieces put together.]

Esther is an interconnected piece with the rest of Scripture that is completing a larger image.

Jews today celebrate Purim and celebrate their heritage and connection with Esther. There is a strong notion of solidarity with Esther in the idea that “because she lived, I too live”. Every Jew in one sense owes a debt of gratitude to Esther. Unfortunately, if you stop there, you miss the big picture!

But we can see the bigger picture in all of this. We can see that yes, because of Esther the Jews continued on as a people group. They continued on and the line of David was not cut off. From this line came the long-awaited Messiah. And we as God people hear the words of Christ as he says not just to Jews but to people from every tongue and tribe and nation who come to him by faith, we hear from the mouth of our Saviour “because I live, you also will live” (John 14:19).

Because of Jesus’ resurrection, we as God’s people can face evil and death with the assurance that God will not let us remain in the grave, but will gloriously resurrect us to be with him forever.

Rev. 1:17-18

“Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”

The book of Esther, as all of Scripture, points us to the God who is there. And the God who is there is active in the grand scheme of history, and the details of our lives. He is there in the times of great joy and he is there in the time of great sadness. He is there when we do not feel his presence, and he is there when we feel it the most. He was there from time immemorial, and he will continue to be there with his people for all of eternity. God is there, to reveal his glory for the joy of his people, and therefore:

The works of the LORD will forever be on the lips of his people.