

Exegetical Big Idea: God's people engage in a holy war, which God has ordained and over which he stands in victory.

Homiletical Big Idea: **The battle rages on, but God has ordained it, he will fight it, and he will finish it.**

Fallen Condition Focus: God's people are engaged in a holy war, not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, powers, and authorities of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Intro:

The nation of Israel fought many battles in the Old Testament. There was a particular kind of battle that God would have his people fight. We see this mostly as the wandering nation of Israel crosses the Jordan River and begins their conquest of the Promised Land. Scholars call many of these battles "holy wars". What made these wars different was the nature of them. God had commanded his people to go up into the land and displace the evil that was there. The peoples who inhabited the land were a vile people. God's intention was to bring his people into that land and replace the evil with good. So as they were commanded to go up, we often read the accounts of these battles and see that God commanded his people to destroy completely the city that they marched against. They were commanded to kill all who live there, burn the city, and devote all the plunder to the LORD, often by completely destroying it. These characteristics make these specific battles different than other battles where the Israelites took cities to live in, and took the plunder for themselves.

I bring this to your attention this morning because as we are ready Esther chapter 9, we need to have that in mind. Many scholars recognize what the author is trying to do here in chapter 9, and that is recount the events in light of them being a holy war. The enemies of the Jews are bent on destroying them but, God turns the tables and now the Jews have the upper hand.

As we'll see, the characteristics of holy war are here, and as we're looking at it, we need to recognize that we as God's people today are still engaged in holy war.

Now I'm not suggesting we get swords and defend ourselves, and I'm not saying we should burn evil cities to the ground. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities, and powers of this dark world. And against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Our struggle is with the evil around us, pressing in on us, and the evil within us, pressing upon us.

But just like the holy war in Esther 9, we need to know that though...

**The battle rages on, God has ordained it, he will fight it, and he will finish it.**

**Verses 1-4 – God has assured the outcome.**

**The battle rages on, but God has ordained it, he will fight it, and he will finish it.**

Verse 1 of this chapter gets everything out in the open. We know the outcome of the whole chapter based on the first verse. It's a summary verse that takes away all suspense and questions as to what is

happening in the chapter. There's no need for suspense because the story, although not completely done, is a forgone conclusion. God has pre-ordained the victory for his people.

The enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but now the tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them.

Now humanly speaking this should not be possible. The Jews are a scattered and defenceless people. They have no fortified cities, no army, no generals, no king to lead them in battle. They are a rag tag group of people who by any measure cannot defend themselves.

In fact this verse should remind us the group of Israelites many years prior to this who were in a similar situation. They were a nomadic people, wondering in the desert of Sinai. No fortified cities, no generals, no king to lead them into battle, no alliances. They too are a rag tag group of people who cannot defend themselves.

But we are told the tables have turned. How?

Verse 2 -4 tells us. Twice we are told that people fear them, and once we are told of the powerful position of Mordecai.

Now I think it's unrealistic to think that all of a sudden this group of Jews who were doomed to destruction the day before now became giants and warriors to the people around them. I think we see here the fear of the LORD. It's the LORD who has placed a fear in the hearts of the people around them.

I think we're supposed to see here that the LORD is fighting for his people. And because he is fighting for his people, victory is assured.

[Remember the battle with the Amalekites in Exodus 17. God had just brought the people up out of Egypt and given them water and food and the promise of the Promised Land is fresh on their minds. And then the Amalekites show up with their entire trained army. Moses gets Joshua to make an army and go up and face them as Moses stands on the top of a hill with his staff. As long as Moses has his hands up the Israelites are winning, but as Moses gets tired and lowers them they are losing. Even though victory is assured in that battle, there is ebb and flow.]

There is ebb and flow in the Christian life. Some days we are winning the battle with sin, other days sin gets the best of us. Some days evil wins the cultural battles and legislative battles. But we must have faith that God has assured the outcome.

God here proves that the earth is his and all that is in it. God uses the earth as his footstool. God is just as sovereign over vast battles as he is over every breath we take.

And because everything is under the sovereign command of God, he works out all things for the glory of his name and victory for his people.

God's people have enemies that hope to overpower us. But God fights for his people. He has ordained victory from the outset.

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**Verses 5-10 – God’s holiness does not change. (cf. 1 Sam. 15)**

So the big day comes: the day of defense against their enemies. Now we read the account of this battle in Susa and at first it may seem like just details of a battle, but these details have significance.

First, we read that the Jews did not hold back, we are told that they struck down *all* their enemies with the sword. Killing and destroying them, doing what they pleased to those who hated them.

We have 3 different ways of saying that they killed their enemies. “Struck down all their enemies” “killing and destroying them” “did what they pleased to those who hated them.

We have this repetition that is telling that is that they did the job thoroughly. Then we read that they killed the sons of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And then we read that they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

These three details are showing us a reversal of the sin of Saul in 1 Samuel 15. Remember that Mordecai is a descendant of Saul.

In 1 Samuel 15, God had instructed Saul to attack the Amalekites. His instructions were very specific. They were to kill every, not leaving anyone alive, and dedicate the plunder to the LORD.

Saul however, when he attacked the Amalekites spared king Agag, and the best of the plunder.

Guess which villain in Esther is a direct descendent of that king Agag. That’s right, Haman.

So what is going on here? The writer of Esther here is showing us that the Israelites are reversing the sinful actions of Saul. They totally destroy their enemies, they kill the descendants of Agag, ending his family line as Saul should have done back in 1 Samuel 15, and though Mordecai says they can take the plunder, the Israelites don’t lay a finger on it.

Remember that this right here is a snapshot of what is happening in the citadel of Susa. These Jews understand that if the sin of disobedience got them into this mess, and turning away from the LORD and his decrees caused them to go into exile, then obedience was the only way forward. Because God’s holiness does not change.

And since God’s holiness does not change, his people are always called to obedience and repentance.

This story is an acting out repentance of the unfaithfulness of their past as a people. It has not changed one iota for us today. We are in covenant relationship with a holy God who does not change.

[Remember another battle that the Israelites fought. This one you’ll have heard of: the Battle of Jericho. The LORD’s instructions in that battle were to totally destroy all the plunder. Achan however saw some gold and silver and clothes and took them and hid them. At the next battle, the battle to take Ai, the Israelites were routed! They couldn’t believe this and cried out to God. God revealed to them that someone had taken some things that were devoted to God. When they found out it was Achan, he paid for his disobedience with his life, and the lives of his family. God’s standard of holiness does not change]

What’s our role in this holy war? Obedience. Radical obedience. Self-denying obedience.

Three times in this chapter we are told that the Jews did not lay their hands on the plunder. Now Mordecai had specifically said in his decree that the plunder belonged to the Jews, and yet we are told three times that they did not lay their hands on it. Why?

Well as the people of God would go into war in the Old Testament, God would often command the people to totally destroy everything, including all the plunder as a way of irrevocably giving things over to the LORD. What is it? Self-denial to display the worth of God. We'd rather have him, than this immeasurable pile of gold.

God's holiness demands this from us. God's holiness demands that we are willing to give up all things to the LORD in self-denial to display the immeasurable worth of God in our lives.

It looks a little different today, we aren't burning cities to the glory of God, but since God's holiness does not change, his demand of our radical obedience does not change as well.

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That being said, we know that nobody can carry out God's holy war perfectly.

### **Verses 11-15 – We aren't holy, and don't fight perfectly**

There is great moral ambiguity here.

Esther asks for another day of carrying out the edict in Susa. The rest of the kingdom is done, but for some reason that we are not told, Esther wants another day just for the Jews in Susa to carry out the edict. So on top of the 500 men who slain on the first day, 300 more men are slain now on this second day in Susa.

There is a nonchalant attitude displayed by the king at the events in his kingdom.

Why is Esther asking for another day specifically for Susa? Haman did not give 2 days. Why is Esther doing this?

Why is the king so nonchalant about all this? Why does he not seem phased at 75,000 enemies of the Jews dead, as we will find out later?

If this is for cold-blooded revenge, why do we again get the comment that they did not lay their hands on the plunder?

These verses are a bit of a mystery I'll admit, but perhaps that's the point. We already have seen how moral ambiguity is a theme throughout this book. The author never gives us any comment on the rightness or wrongness of any of the actions of the characters. Perhaps this is intentionally leading to consider that if morality was left up to humans, it is always a moving target.

Our hearts are deceitful!

Death and destruction, or "Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD, how much more human hearts." Proverbs 15:11

Everything we think, say, and do us under the watchful eye of God.

“All a person’s ways seem right to him, but the LORD weighs motives” Proverbs 16:2

Nobody will carry out God’s holy war perfectly as we should and as God demands.

[My grandmother is a painter. A few years ago I asked her to paint me a picture of a piano that is sitting in a room. She did and it’s wonderful. I love it. She’s a great painter, but more than that I like the fact that it was painted by my grandmother, whom I love. Now, in all honesty, she did make a mistake. The black keys on a piano follow a pattern of 2 black keys, 3 black keys all the way down. As she was painting she lost track of this pattern and painted 2 sets of 3 black keys in a row. Now I think it’s still beautiful, but her standard is higher than mine. She mentions it every time I bring it up. She cannot let it go because her standard is perfection.]

The reality is that we are imperfect human beings. Our best efforts are always imperfect.

The fact of the matter is we cannot fully plumb the depths of the laws of God, because if we could we would know God fully and be God. And because of our indwelling sin, we cannot even fully obey the laws of God perfectly even if we did know them better.

So if we cannot fully understand God’s commands, and we cannot fully obey God’s commands, we really are kind of useless in this holy war aren’t we?

If we cannot fight the war for our souls perfectly, we’re going to need someone who can. We have someone who did.

There is only one human who is without sin, and he is without sin because just as much as he is truly and fully human, he is truly and fully God.

Christ is the perfectly obedient one. He is the obedient second and better Adam. He is the obedient nation of Israel, whereas Israel disobeyed God in the wilderness, Jesus resisted temptation and emerged victorious. He is the true and better king from David’s line. He is the branch growing from the stump of Jesse. Being obedient to the point of death on the cross, he was raised to life again and now sits at the right hand of the father ruling and reigning over all things.

Revelation 19:11-16.

We cannot be victorious in our struggle against evil unless we follow the one who is.

If you have not trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and the safety of your very soul, then the battle for you is already lost. Turn to Jesus and follow him, and know that he fights the battle for you.

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**Verses 16-17 – There is justice, rest, and joy at the end.**

As the account of this holy war comes to a close, we are assured that the enemies of God are destroyed. Haman has no descendants because they are hanged, and the Jews rest and feast.

An event that was meant to scatter and destroy them, has unified them and brought salvation and joy. I'm getting some heavy Joseph vibes here in this story. What you meant for evil, God meant for good. We saw throughout this book God orchestrating every event, as awful as the events may have seemed at the time, God was orchestrating each and every event for his glory and the good of his people.

I take great solace and hope in the fact that the enemies of God's people ultimate only serve to bring glory to God. When the day comes where justice is fully realized and sin fully dealt with, God's people will be vindicated and we will be eternally grateful for everything that God allowed to happen in our lives because it allows us to see his sovereign provident hand over all things.

[I have some artwork on the walls in my study. There are a few Daniel Tiger colouring pages, and some drawings. One is of me and one is of a cat. No nowhere on those colorings and drawings is there the name of the artist. But I take one look at those beautiful works of art and I know who made them. The artist is evident by the work.]

The Book of Esther is like that.

God's name is nowhere painted on the book of Esther, but oh how his name is everywhere in the work.

We may not be able to see the artist, but as we grow in our faith we learn to recognize his work, and even in the moments where God seems silent and absent, we see the beauty of his artistic provident hand in and over our lives.

Why do I have pictures in my study that my kids made? Do you think it's because it's the art itself that is so spectacular? Not exactly. But it reminds me of the artists, whom I love dearly and long for.

The struggles in this life are indeed painful. Do we love those struggles because they are fun? No! Those struggles remind us of the artist of all creation.

And isn't that what we long for? We don't just long for being free from sin, or free from hardship and suffering. Those things will be wonderful for sure, but what the Christian truly longs for us just those superficial things, we long for the presence of God himself.

This day will come when the justice of God is fully realized, the enemies of God destroyed, and his people enter into his presence, never to leave.

Look at what it says after the battle was won. It says "they rested and made it a day of feasting and Joy". Christian, our battle is almost over. With each passing day we are one day closer to our everlasting rest. As the Jews completed this holy way, they rested and feasted for a day. When the Christian has gone through the valley of the shadow of death which is our holy war, we will rest and feast with our God and with each other for an eternity.

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