

Week 37 - King of the Darkest Night

Esther 2:21-23; 6:1-14

September 14/15

Summary & Goal:

God's people have been disobedient, many have turned from Him completely and now most have chosen to stay in the comforts of captivity than return to the land and life God desires for them. Even in the midst of their rebellion, however, God is at work and is faithful. He orchestrates and allows events to unfold in ways they could not have predicted but result in their salvation. God has not changed the way He works. He has and is working throughout history to accomplish His purposes for His people even when they do not acknowledge Him. Today, more than ever, we can see the work of His unseen hand if we have faith enough to look closely.

Main Passages:

Esther 2:21-23; 4:13-14; 6:1-14; 9:22-28

Session Outline:

- I. God's Providence Saves
 - A. Mordecai LISTENS and the king is saved (Esther 2:20-24; 4:13-14)
 - B. The King REMEMBERS and Mordecai is promoted (Esther 6:1-4, 8:1-2)
 - C. Esther ASKS and the Jews survive (Esther 8:5, 9:5)
- II. God's People See (Esther 9:22)
- III. God's Providence is Celebrated (9:26-28)

Session in a Sentence:

We can have faith that God is constantly at work protecting, intervening and providing because He is Good (not because humans acknowledge or deserve Him), even though we cannot always visibly see the works of His hand.

Kingdom Connection:

From the smallest detail to the greatest need, God knows what to give before we even have reason to ask. Even things that were intended to harm us, He works for His glory and for the good of those who love Him and are called by Him. (Romans 8:28) Nowhere is His providence more evident than in Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: **While we were still sinners**, Christ died for us."

Introduction:

There is something we are all experiencing right now, every single one of us, experiencing the very same thing. No one can see it, no one can hear it, no one can taste it, no one can touch it, no one can smell it, and yet without it, we would not be here right now.

Oxygen. Plain and simple, without Oxygen we could not exist. We could not be here together for this class, without Oxygen. We could not worship together, without Oxygen.

And, most likely, none of us woke up this morning and thought to ourselves, "I sure hope there is Oxygen in the kitchen....or, I sure hope there is Oxygen at church today." We tend not to think about Oxygen. And yet without it, we would not be able to live.

Oxygen is all around us and even though we do not acknowledge it, nor see it, do not hear it, nor taste it, touch it, or smell it, we are influenced by it every second of every day.

Today we are in the book of Esther which is a very unique book in the Bible. It is one of only two books in the Bible named for a woman - the other is Ruth.

The book of Esther does not mention God at all. There is not even a divine title or pronoun that refers to God. Prayer is not mentioned at all in the book of Esther, which kind of makes sense since God is not mentioned or referred to once in the 10 chapters of the book. The book of Esther does not even mention anything "supernatural."

Yet, even though God is not mentioned, God is not referred to or even prayed to. Like Oxygen, God is ever-present. Like Oxygen, God is a necessity of life. Regardless of whether or not we see God, hear God, feel God, taste God or smell God, regardless of whether or not we acknowledge God, God is ever-present and beyond that, God is in control.

Here is what Matthew Henry said about the book of Esther, "But, though the name of God be not in it, the finger of God is, directing many minute events for the bringing about of His people's deliverance." (Henry, Matthew; *Matthew Henry Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible, Esther*, Hendrickson Publishers, 1996).

The book of Esther never mentions the name of God. But the Providence of God is evident in all 10 chapters!

In our chronological study of the Bible, we have come to one of the darkest periods in Israel's history. Over and over, we have seen God's people deny Him, fail to obey and live opposite of how He instructed them to live. As a result, neighboring countries attack and overpower them and eventually, they are carried away to exile. While in captivity in Babylon, most Jews, like Daniel and Nehemiah, were intentionally assimilated to a culture and belief system different than the one their parents taught them.

Obedying God based on the covenant and commandments of old was a rarity. More often, the Jews behaved, believed and led lives that looked a lot like the surrounding culture. That's why after 70 years of captivity, when King Cyrus declared the Jews were no longer captive but free to return to their homeland, many chose to stay right where they were. Obviously, many were born in captivity and feeling more connected to the comforts and ways of their captors, they chose to remain in Babylon rather than face the difficulties of starting over and struggling in Israel. Yet...even though they were not living to honor God, He intervened on their behalf.

Esther and her uncle Mordecai were among those who chose to stay in the Persian Land rather than return to Jerusalem, the Promised Land. In spite of their choice to remain in the foreign land, God was still at work. In spite of their reasons for not returning to Jerusalem when they were free to do so, God was still in their midst. Whether or not they saw, felt, tasted, smelled or heard God; like oxygen, God was ever-present.

God was not only present; God was at work. The theological term for this is *Providence*. J. Vernon McGee explains, "Providence is the means by which God directs all things towards a worthy purpose." (McGee, J. Vernon. *Exposition in the Book of Esther*. Wheaton: Van Kampen Press, 1951).

I. God's Providence Saves

In Esther chapter 1, King Xerxes (*Ahasuerus*) had risen to great wealth and power. When his wife refused a command from him, he removed her position and sought a new queen to replace her. Esther, a Jew who had kept her background and nationality as a Jew a secret, was being raised by her uncle, Mordecai when she was drafted into the king's harem. Esther eventually found favor with the king and was crowned queen - a position that would prove to be divinely beneficial.

A. Mordecai LISTENS and the king is saved

As a public official, Mordecai was at the city gate where business matters were conducted when he heard two of the king's officials plotting to kill him. He told his niece, Queen Esther, and the king sentenced the men to be hanged in the gallows.

Esther 2:20 Now Esther had not revealed her family and her people, just as Mordecai had charged her, for Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him²¹ In those days, while Mordecai sat within the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, doorkeepers, became furious and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus (Xerxes)²² So the matter became known to Mordecai, who told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name.²³ And when an inquiry was made into the matter, it was confirmed, and both were hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king. (*Chronological Bible, September 14th, p. 1222*)

There are some significant details we want to make sure we capture here:

- Esther and Mordecai were very close; she trusted Mordecai and did as he suggested, following his advice.
- Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate and heard two of the king's officers conspiring to assassinate the king.
- Mordecai shared the plot with Esther who is now the Queen.
- Esther shared the plot with the king and gave credit to her uncle, Mordecai.
- The king investigated and found it all to be true and the two officials were hanged.
- This situation was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.

The king's life is saved by the news that Mordecai had heard at the gates. The king literally owes his life to Mordecai, or so you would think. Mordecai's intervention is recorded but otherwise is forgotten by the king, until much later. This too proves to be providential.

In the meantime, in Chapter 3, the secret is out about Mordecai being a Jew. He refused to bow down to one of the king's officers, named Haman. This infuriated Haman to the point he wanted to kill not only Mordecai but all Jews young and old.

***Esther 3:8** Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus (Xerxes),, “There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all other people’s, and they do not keep the king’s laws. Therefore it is not fitting for the king to let them remain. ⁹ If it pleases the king, let a decree be written that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work, to bring it into the king’s treasuries.”**13** And the letters were sent by couriers into all the king’s provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions. (Chronological Bible, September 14th, p. 1223)*

We see that:

- Esther is the Queen, though her Jewish heritage is still a secret.
- Mordecai is a Jew, and everyone knows it now.
- King Ahasuerus (Xerxes), was willing to have Haman and his army destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, children and women.
- Though circumstances seem to be getting darker and more overwhelming, everyone is still breathing. There is oxygen all around, just like the providence of God at work in the midst of extraordinary circumstances.

Never underestimate that God is providentially working. There are times when God moves in ways you may not recognize at first, especially if you are not following Him closely. Esther had an inside track to the king. Unbeknownst to the king, his queen was a Jew. Mordecai reached out to Esther in a letter reminding her of the opportunity she had in the position she had been placed. This passage contains one of the most well-known verses from the book of Esther:

***Esther 4:13** And Mordecai told them to answer Esther: “Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king’s palace any more than all the other Jews. ¹⁴ For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Chronological Bible, September 14th, p. 1224)*

It's a famous phrase which has been used in both religious and secular settings. But here we have the context for these powerful and challenging words, “for such a time as this.”

Even though the name of God or LORD is never used in the book of Esther; even though there is not even a divine title or pronoun used in the book of Esther; even though the word “faith or worship” are never mentioned in the book of Esther; even though there is not even a single prayer recorded or referred to in the book of Esther; we see a glimpse of Mordecai's faith.

If Esther chose to stay silent, which is one of her options, Mordecai firmly believed that there would be relief and deliverance (*vs. 14a*) but it would come from somewhere else. He did not know the details, of who, how, when or where, but we see his faith displayed here without ever using the word “faith”. His faith was like oxygen, he just breathed.

There is confidence when you use the word “will”; not “maybe”; not “wishful thinking”; not “perhaps”; not “crossing my fingers.” But “WILL ARISE from another place,” those words are saturated with confidence. In the darkest of circumstances with death on the line not just for him or Esther, but for all Jews young and old, something had changed in Mordecai. Mordecai began to breathe the oxygen of faith. And then he exhaled into action in the midst of the providence of God.

Esther realized this was a providential time; she was in a position of power and influence not by accident but with purpose. She was living in the palace of the king for such a time as this.

When each of us looks at our lives, we each have a purpose. God is moving and working in subtle and not so subtle ways in our lives every single day, for such a time as this.

B. The King REMEMBERS and Mordecai is promoted

Mordecai’s intervention that saved the king from assassination was recorded in a log of daily happenings, but it was otherwise forgotten; until one sleepless night when the king requested some boring reading material to help him fall asleep. Of all the daily logs that could have been chosen, his attendants read to him from the log of events when Mordecai’s warning saved his life.

Esther 6:1-4 That night the king could not sleep. So one was commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. And it was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king’s eunuchs, the doorkeepers who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. Then the king said, “What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?” And the king’s servants who attended him said, “Nothing has been done for him.” So the king said, “Who is in the court?” Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king’s palace to suggest that the king hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him. (Chronological Bible, September 15th, p. 1225)

The king realized that Mordecai had not been rewarded and sought to bestow some kind of honor on him. His closest adviser, Haman, happened to be near, so the king asked him for ideas. Haman hated Mordecai and was planning to kill him for not bowing to him, but thinking that the king wanted to honor him (Haman), he suggests a lavish display and revelry. That lavish display Haman sought for himself was then given to Mordecai. Adding fuel to his already flaming anger, Haman expanded his plan to eliminate not just Mordecai but all Jews still living in Babylon. He began tormenting and persecuting the Jews. The place where they sought a more comfortable life became dangerous and they lived in constant fear.

Once again, Esther’s position was a source of deliverance when she went before the king, explained Haman’s evil plans and asked the king to spare her people. This resulted in Haman’s execution and Mordecai’s appointment to Haman’s royal position.

Esther 8:1-2 *On that day King Ahasuerus gave Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her. So the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai; and Esther appointed Mordecai over the house of Haman. (Chronological Bible, September 15th, p. 1227)*

What a turn of events for Mordecai! Esther realized she was queen *for such a time as this*. She realized she had a voice to speak the truth and make a stand for what was right. You can almost picture her breathing in the oxygen of faith just before she told the king about her uncle!

C. Esther ASKS and the Jews survive (Esther 8:11, 9:5)

Although Mordecai was protected and promoted and the king was willing to spare the Jews from Haman's plans, there was a complication. There was a legal issue with the paperwork - a loophole in the system that prevented the king from halting the plans completely. Because a royal decree had been made to kill the Jews, it could not be undone. The king could not negate the mandate that Haman made, so Esther asked, and he issued a new one that allowed the Jews to defend themselves.

Esther 8:11 *By these letters the king permitted the Jews who were in every city to gather together and protect their lives—to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them, both little children and women, and to plunder their possessions (Chronological Bible, September 15th, p. 1227)*

God could have wiped out the enemy and saved His people many times over. But, as He often does today, He worked in the natural unfolding of events and gave them the opportunity to be part of the solution. He acted on their behalf but required that they, themselves, take a breath and take action.

Esther 9:5 *Thus the Jews defeated all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, with slaughter and destruction, and did what they pleased with those who hated them. (Chronological Bible, September 15th, p. 1228)*

What could have been a complete annihilation of the Jews, turned into victory and deliverance. But notice it took action and faith by the Jewish people. It took faith that God would be with them, even if His name was never mentioned. Remember they were still living in a foreign land, though they had been set free to return to Jerusalem. They took a breath of oxygen and stood for what was right, and God honored their effort and faith.

II. God's People See (Esther 9:22)

Esther 9:22 *[they should celebrate] the days on which the Jews had rest from their enemies, as the month which was turned from sorrow to joy for them, and from mourning to a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and joy, of sending presents to one another and gifts to the poor. (Chronological Bible, September 15th, p. 1229)*

It's one thing for God to do something great. It requires faith to look close enough to recognize that it is Him. Mordecai knew that even if they could not see Him physically, it was God who orchestrated the protection of the Jews. He was adamant that they recognize and praise God for their salvation.

So often we miss God in the ordinary. We tend to look for the parting of the Red Sea and forget to thank God for the bridge across the water. We tend to look for the lame to walk and forget that sometimes God provides a crutch or a wheelchair to relieve the pain. We tend to look for big things and neglect the small things in life that are not always obvious to our eyes, such as Oxygen.

Sometimes we need to celebrate life simply for life's sake. God absolutely does the extraordinary, sometimes He simply chooses to do it through seemingly ordinary means, which should be celebrated.

III. God's Providence is Celebrated (9:26-28)

Mordecai insisted that the Jews not only recognize God's provision but also that they acknowledge and celebrate it. He instituted a feast so that these Jews, although they had chosen to live outside God's best, were saved by a loving God. Even when they were not faithful, He was faithful.

Esther 9:26-28 So they called these days Purim, after the name Pur. Therefore, because of all the words of this letter, what they had seen concerning this matter, and what had happened to them, the Jews established and imposed it upon themselves and their descendants and all who would join them, that without fail they should celebrate these two days every year, according to the written instructions and according to the prescribed time, that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city, that these days of Purim should not fail to be observed among the Jews, and that the memory of them should not perish among their descendants. (Chronological Bible, September 15th, p. 1229)

As Mordecai wanted, the Jews celebrated God's goodness, and they told their children so it would be remembered. They got word to those who had returned to Israel, and they passed the story on for generations. So much so that Purim is still celebrated today.

God moves in miraculous ways every day. Sometimes the miraculous and mysterious; other times the miraculous is as mundane as oxygen. Whether mysterious or mundane, it is life-changing.

Mordecai's life was changed. Esther's life was changed. The Jews living in a foreign land were still living because God was still moving in subtle and ordinary ways. His ways are not only life-changing but truly life-giving.

We each are here today in our respective lives *for such a time as this*.

Perhaps God has brought you to this place, with this responsibility, with this knowledge, with this opportunity; *for such a time as this*.

God had a purpose and a plan for Mordecai and Esther, just as He does for you and me. We can be confident that God has positioned circumstances in our lives *for such a time as this*.

In Luke 17, Jesus heals a group of 10 men. They run off to tell others, but only one turns back to thank Jesus. All we have is from Him - the jobs, the houses, the cars, the kids. As much as we would like to think we are responsible for those things, it is only by God's allowance and provision. Have you stopped long enough to SEE God's provision and providence? Have you CELEBRATED, praised and thanked Him - not in a quick kind of way but in a real, honest, pass-it-on-so-everyone-around-you-knows kind of way? God is Good. He is working in ways we see and ways we do not. Let us be like the one who turned back. Let us take a breath of the oxygen of faith and praise Him for His providence, even when we cannot see.

God speaks through providence. Though His voice is silent, His hands are never still.

God acts by placing people in influential positions and by interrupting the sleep of a powerful king to change the course of history.

God reveals His covenantal care for His people.