

NAVIGATING DIFFICULT TIMES

(Book of Esther)

When God Turns the Tables

TEXT: Esther 9:1-10:3

INTRODUCTION: I hope our going through the Book of Esther this summer has been a blessing and not an ordeal, but Esther's living through the times and events we have studied was most certainly an ordeal.

From the time that lecherous Ahasuerus divorced his wife and dethroned her as the queen, commencing the forced enslavement of hundreds of young women and teenage girls by imprisoning them in his harem, to the day of vindication for Esther and Mordecai, was nearly nine years! At points it must have felt like 90!

For Esther there had been

- The fear accompanying capture
- The loss of freedom imprisoned behind the palace walls
- The humiliation of a contest she did not want to win, a contest to be the new bride of the king
- The despair of being chosen to be the wife of a man she probably utterly despised
- The loneliness and boredom of being the wife of the King, the Queen of Persia, but rarely being called into his presence to actually live with him.

All of this Esther endured, and her cousin Mordecai, her adoptive father, endured with her from afar for he knew her pain and agony.

But all of their sadness and despair for Esther's personal plight was made to seem small indeed when during the last year of these nine, the wicked right hand man of the king was successful in tricking his majesty into enacting a decreed allowing for the extermination of all the Jews in the Persian Empire.

Mordecai and Esther themselves would be killed, for they were Jews!

All of their relatives would be slain.

All of their friends, men, women, little children would be mercilessly slaughtered, with their murderers protected by the legalized sanction of the king.

The devil had enacted his plan to kill, to steal, and to destroy. And for a while it certainly seemed that the Serpent of Old would have his way through the evil hearts of some many willing accomplices.

But God had His plan also, and Esther and Mordecai were in the heart of it. God had brought each of them to their respective positions in the palace of King Ahasuerus for such a time as this. And my dear friend, male or female, young or old, see here a reminder of the importance of your place in the kingdom where God has placed you.

- You who are born again through faith in Christ, you are a citizen of the Kingdom of God.
- You may consider the role God has for you at this moment in the kingdom to be a humble one not worthy of note. That is what Mordecai could have thought about his role in the palace bureaucracy.
- You may not even like the role you feel like you have, preferring something else all together. That is without doubt how Esther felt.
- But Esther and Mordecai felt that way because they could not see as God sees; they did not know what God knows; and they did not have a clue what God was going to do and the role God had for them in the doing of it.
- And dear Christian brother and sister, neither do you! Neither do I!
- Like Mordecai and Esther we are called to just be faithful and obedient and trust the Lord.

And, oh my! How God caused the pieces of His plan to fall into their perfect places. How God made His plan to work, even in the heart of a wicked, pagan, irreverent king.

- God said to Esther, “Just ask the king to spare you and your people. Just ask him.” So after fasting and praying to the King of Kings for Him to touch the heart of this evil human king and stir him to once in his life do what was good and right and noble, Esther obeyed God.
- And Esther saw that the heart of the king, even her wicked husband/king, was in the hand of the Lord; and God could turn it wherever He wanted.
- And He did.
- The king said, “You want a law that the Jews can defend themselves when attacked by their enemies on the 13th of Adar? Write it yourself. Whatever you write, I will approve, and it shall become the law of the Medes and the Persians.”

And then came the critical day, the 13th day of the last month of the year, the month of Adar. Both of the edicts by King Ahasuerus shall be lived out that day,

- The first enacted at the instigation of wicked Haman that would allow the enemies of the Jews to slaughter every Jewish man, woman, or child anywhere within the borders of the Persian Empire.
- The second, put into place by the working of the Spirit of God, in, through, and around both Esther and Mordecai, saying that every Jew could defend himself and his family and in turn assault those who assaulted them.
- Both edicts, opposite though they were, were valid because no law of the Medes and Persians could be revoked.

So, what happened on that climatic day? Let us read from the Word of God. Esther 9:1.

And while I normally read to you from the New King James Version because it is usually both very true and literal to the original text while still being modern enough in its English expression as to be easily understood, this morning, I want to read this single verse from the New International Version, because it captures the meaning of the Hebrew in a way I think is especially significant.

Esther 9:1 (NIV) On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, the edict commanded by the king was to be carried out. On this day 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.

Did you hear that?

Esther 9:1 (NIV) On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, the edict commanded by the king was to be carried out. On this day 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.

And that is what I want to ask you to think about with me. What should we do when God turns the tables? What should we do...

- When we have been praying for months, for years for something, and it seems like God does not hear and nothing ever happens and then suddenly, GOD TURNS THE TABLES.
- When it seems like everybody and everything is against us, but then GOD TURNS THE TABLES.
- When things go from bad to worse to worser (You say, "Bro. Mike, worser is not a word." I know, but sometimes it's a reality! I've been there. Haven't you?) But you get to a place you just think it can't get no worser, and unexpectedly GOD TURNS THE TABLES.

Listen friend, **God is a TABLE TURNING God!**

- God told Abraham He was going to give him a son and make him a great nation and then God was going to use Abraham's Descendant to bless all the families of the earth. And Abraham waited and waited and waited, and no son came.
 - He tried to get a servant raised in his household to be accepted as a son for God's plan. God said, "I'll send you a son."
 - He had a son by his wife's servant and said, "Here's my son God." God said, "I told you I would send you and Sarah a son."
 - And Abraham and Sarah waited and waited and waited until they were so old that to suggest they would have a child born to them was a laughing matter.
 - Then GOD TURNED THE TABLES, and Abraham and Sarah had a son.
 - And God said, "Remember Abraham, one of your Descendants will bless every family of the earth."
- A lot of people forgot that promise across the years, but the devil did not forget. That is why he stirred up this plot of murder in the mind of wicked Haman to exterminate the Jews. They were the descendants of Abraham. If the devil could wipe out all the descendants of Abraham, he could wipe out the promise of God! When King Ahasuerus bought into the scheme of Haman and put the decree of murder into the laws of the Medes and the Persians, the devil celebrated. But GOD TURNED THE TABLES, and instead the enemies of God were destroyed, and God's people were blessed, and ultimately that descendant of Abraham, Jesus of Nazareth was born, the One promised by God the Father to bless all the families of the earth by purchasing salvation through His death upon the cross and offering it as a gift to anyone and everyone who would trust in Him.
- When Jesus was born, the devil tried again, and through the raging jealousy of King Herod tried to kill Jesus by destroying all the baby boys two years old and less in the region of Bethlehem. But GOD TURNED THE TABLES and told Joseph to take the child to Egypt to protect Him.
- When the devil entered the heart of Judas to betray Jesus, and when he got the priests to falsely accuse Jesus of blasphemy and treason, and when the devil persuaded Pilate to compromise what he knew was right and send Jesus to the cross, the devil thought he had won. But GOD TURNED THE TABLES and made the cross the very place where His Son would purchase the gift of eternal life that would be the blessing He would offer to every man and woman on the face of the earth.
- And when they put Jesus' body in a tomb and sealed it with a huge stone and guarded it with soldiers, GOD TURNED THE TABLES again and raised Jesus from the dead to ascend back into the heavens to reign as King of Kings and

Lord of Lords, offering that blessed gift of eternal life to all who will trust Him as Savior and Lord.

God is a TABLE TURNING God!

Have there been times in your life when God has turned the tables for you?

How many of you remember how God did that for our church beginning back in 2008?

- On Sunday morning, Oct. 12, 2008, I and other elected leaders of this congregation handed out to the people a packet of papers recommending that the church move two sets of portable buildings being used by our teens and preschoolers and that we simultaneously build a new Student Center with a gymnasium and a Kid Zone Building for our children and preschoolers at a cost of 2.9 million dollars, to be raised by over and above contributions of our members.
- Do you know what had happened the week before? The Dow Jones had its worst week ever in its 112 year history, losing \$8.4 trillion off of the previous year's value. The US economy cratered.
- How could the timing be worse from a human perspective?
- But we as a church were convinced that this was God's time and unanimously we decided to obey and move forward.
- AND GOD TURNED THE TABLES!
- Over the next three years we moved those portables out, built both of those buildings which now are used constantly by our children and teens, and added more parking.
- When we finished that, we said, "It's time to put our Jerusalem Ministries in adequate facilities." God gave us a group of buildings across the street, and again God's people gave over and above their regular tithes to the Lord and we rebuilt those buildings inside and out to make the wonderful Center of Hope we have across the street.
- Because GOD TURNED THE TABLES!

So here's the question: When God does that, when God turns the tables for you individually or corporately, what do you do?

Well, do you know what Esther and Mordecai and all the Jews whose lives were spared did, when God turned the tables?

Let me read it to you.

Esther 9:27- 28 (NKJV) 27 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, 28 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.

- **They celebrated the great work God had done.**
- Even as time passed, **they remembered His gracious action.**
- **They retold the accounts** to those who did not experience them **so the memory would not be lost.**

These are things we Americans are not very good at. Other cultures do better at this than we do.

We Americans often take blessings for granted, and if we celebrate at all, we do so very briefly.

And our memory of past blessings is exceedingly short.

We do not take the time to recount to others the blessings, the miracles, the times God turned the tables for us, so that as new generations rise up, the memory is lost.

We probably are not going to change American culture at this point.

But we can and should do much better as believers and followers of the Lord Jesus.

- We need to celebrate more!
 - Our own salvation!
 - Salvation of others!
 - Salvation parties in Brazil
 - Successes that come by the grace and power of God
 - I don't mean we need to pat ourselves on the back or trumpet what we have done. I mean we need to celebrate with thanksgiving what we know God has done.
- We need to remember the great works God has done in our lives, our families, our church – and that should elicit great expressions of gratitude.
 - I do not claim to be good at any of this.
 - I'm not preaching to the choir – see they're gone!

- I'm preaching to myself.
- But there are three things I thank God for every day of my life, sometimes more than once a day.
 - I thank God for my wonderful, godly wife.
 - I thank God for my two sons and what God has done in each of their lives.
 - I thank God for letting me come pastor St. Andrew Baptist Church.

Now, my list ought to be a lot longer than that. Like I said, this text is probably aimed more at me than you.

- We need to tell those who were not present about the times God turned the tables for us, so they will be watching in faith for the times God turns the tables for them.

I wonder if you would join me right now in starting to do those things?

Would you stand just very quietly before the Lord?

- Would you think back to a least one time, God turned the tables for you.
- One time God really just blessed your socks off.
- Would you just think back about that time and remember it?
- As you remember a time like that would you just lift your hand before the Lord and acknowledge that you remember God doing that in your life?
- Now would you spend a few minutes here before God just thanking Him, just celebrating what He did? Would you just give Him glory, express the gratitude of your heart?

INVITATION

If you want to just lift a hand or even two just expressing your gratitude to the Lord, do you know that is all right? Did you know God will even let Baptists do that?

There may be someone who says, "I am ready for God to turn the tables in my life personally by saving me. I want to trust the Lord Jesus today." You may come and we will help you put your faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior.