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## JESUS IS A BETTER MORDECAI

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### Part 11 of Esther

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Esther 9:20–10:3 | November 25, 2012

*My great-grandparents told me stories of a mighty dragon that descended on the Holy Temple. The people had rebelled against God. “I will declare my judgments against them, for all their evil in forsaking me. They have made offerings to other gods and worshiped the work of their own hands.” In his anger, God turned his people over to the fearsome enemy, King Nebuchadnezzar, the dragon of Babylon, through whom the fury of God burned against my people. “Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon has devoured me, he has crushed me, he has made me an empty vessel, he has swallowed me up like a dragon.”*

*The tears of my people flowed like a river, but they could not quench the fires that consumed our land. Into the wilderness we were led, defeated and destroyed. The God we’d forsaken, we thought he’d forsaken us. But even in our darkest moment, God would not leave or forsake his people. Once more, he made us a promise. “I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your guilt, that you rebelled against the Lord your God. . . . I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion.”*

*For seventy years, the people of God lived in Babylon. Over time, Babylon began to wither and a great lion rose from the east: Cyrus, the king of Persia. His armies consumed the world. He set his gaze on the remains of the great dragon’s lair, Babylon. There, Cyrus led a cunning attack and the kingdom fell. Cyrus was a great and good king and did not believe in keeping men as slaves. During the first year of his reign, he issued a decree that freed the Jews.*

*God stirred the hearts of his most devoted people to journey back to Jerusalem and rebuild his temple. “And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.” Cyrus went the way of all men. “Behold, three more kings shall arise in Persia, and a fourth shall be far richer than all of them. And when he has become strong through his riches, he shall stir up all against the kingdom of Greece.”*

*Behold, Ahasuerus, Xerxes the Great. Under Xerxes, the empire prospered and so did the Jews who did not return to Jerusalem. Among these Jews was a family of the Tribe of Benjamin. They gathered all they could scrape together and headed out from Babylon for the richest city the world had ever known, the Persian capital of Susa. During the journey, both the mother and father died, leaving a baby girl to Mordecai. Little did my cousin know that I would grow to be a woman the world would never forget.*

### SALVATION REQUIRES CELEBRATION

Salvation requires celebration. Salvation requires celebration. Now, what we’ve seen in the story line of Esther is salvation. Salvation for a man named Mordecai who was sentenced to die, and he experienced salvation. He was saved spiritually, he was saved physically. In addition, we saw the salvation of God’s people. They were under a death sentence that was reversed and their enemy, Haman himself, died that they might live. And what we see today in our last sermon in the great book of Esther is that salvation requires celebration.

If you’ve got your Bibles, go with me to Esther 9:20 through 10:3, and the first thing we’re going to look at is that Purim is a party. I don’t know if you have any Jewish family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, but they will have various feasts, festivals, holidays that they celebrate throughout the course of the year, one of which is Purim. If you’ve ever wondered, “When did that begin and what is that all about?” We find it right here at the end of Esther. As God’s people experience salvation, they respond with celebration, and that’s the great holiday, the Jewish feast and festival of Purim.

And let me say this, as we’re gonna read in a moment, we’re gonna read a huge text of Scripture, 12 verses altogether, and it’s a summary statement for the entire book, and it also gives us the history of this holiday. And some of the commentators will say that the book ends in a way that is, quote, “anti-climactic,” and it’s not that at all. Not only is God’s Word perfect insofar as the content is concerned, it’s also perfect in the way it is organized and delivered.

And the big idea is this, at the end of the book, a summary is given of God’s salvation so that there might be celebration. So it is with you and me. We need to make note of the history of God’s people. We are part of the great line of God’s people, whether it’s in Babylon, or it’s in Persia, or it’s in Egypt, or it’s in Nineveh. Wherever God should bring salvation, we are a part of that family history, and their salvation is our salvation, and their celebration is our celebration.

Similarly, church history is our story of God’s people at work and God at work to, and through, and for, and sometimes in spite of his people. And this is so important because we live in a day that is incredibly individualistic. People don’t know their family of origins, they don’t know their history, they don’t know their community. But in the Scriptures, we see the history of God’s people of which we are a part. We see how God brought salvation to them and that gives hope to us that the God who showed up in their day and has showed up in other days would show up today, for our children and our children’s children, that he will be there for them as well.

So as we’re reading this, this is God’s way of communicating that you and I have this great opportunity to recollect how he has acted in the past, that being God, to celebrate that in the present as an act of faith and hope for the future. And let me submit this to you practically: as we’re reading this, I want you to think about the particular ways that God has brought salvation into your life, that he has saved you from some terrible, horrible fate. Maybe it was sickness, maybe it was eternal condemnation and death, maybe it was from sin that plagued

you, or from ancestry that has haunted you.

I want you to know that unless you record that, unless you capture that, you won't remember that and others won't remember that either. How wonderful would it be if you had the history of your family, the first converts where salvation began? You could learn about how God worked in your family line and you could share that with generations to come.

This is why Christians practice journaling, this is why we have feasts, and festivals, and holidays, to celebrate, to remember, to make note of. It's why people do this nationally, trying to celebrate momentous occasions for them collectively. That's why we have Thanksgiving, it's why we have Veteran's Day, it's why we have the Fourth of July where we're made to belong to something bigger than ourselves and to celebrate any time redemption, salvation comes. We do this as well as the church, where at Christmas we celebrate the coming of Jesus, at Easter we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. These kinds of celebrations are momentous occasions for us to remember the past as we lean into the future.

## PURIM IS A PARTY

That's exactly what is happening here with this summary of salvation and then this recording of celebration, and we're gonna read it all together. If you're brand-new, this will catch you up on the last sermon in Esther. If you've been here awhile, here's a bit of review. Chapter 9, verse 20. Here we learn that Purim is a party.

"And Mordecai," right, the leader who was saved. He was saved. He was saved spiritually by God. He was saved physically from death. "Recorded these things and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus," King Xerxes, "both near and far, obliging them to keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same, year by year." So, this is the beginning of the feast of Purim. It's basically around March, as a general rule. "As the days on which the Jews got relief from their enemies." Salvation is going to result in celebration. "And as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday."

So this is a holiday. I need you to know that holidays are holy days, that's what it means. And we oftentimes celebrate apart from God or celebrate in defiance of God. We eat too much, we drink too much. But we can also celebrate with God, we can celebrate God. You learn a lot about a person by observing what they celebrate and by observing what they don't celebrate. A couple that celebrates their anniversary in a big way is saying something. A person who is celebrating the day of their salvation in a big way is saying something. Those who get more excited when their football team wins than when the resurrection of Jesus is proclaimed are, similarly, saying something. What do you celebrate? What do you get excited about? What do you cook food for? What do you invite people to? What gets you really excited to celebrate? That's a holiday.

"That they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor. So the Jews accepted what they had started to do, and what Mordecai had written to them. For Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them." So, their enemy is destroyed and they live. "And had cast Pur (that is, lots)." I'll explain that in a moment. That's why they call that holiday Purim. "To crush and to destroy them. But when it came before the king, he gave orders in writing that his evil plan that he had devised against the Jews should turn on his own head."

A great reversal. Haman was going to kill Mordecai, and then Mordecai lived and Haman was hung on his own cross, as it were, in his yard. God's people were going to be destroyed, and they were saved and God's enemies were destroyed. "And that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows," speaking of Haman. "Therefore they called these days Purim, after the term Pur. Therefore, because of all that was written in this letter, and of what they had faced in this matter, and of what had happened to them, the Jews firmly obligated themselves and their offspring."

It's about the kids, it's about the grandkids. It's not just enough that you would know Jesus; your kids need to know Jesus, your grandkids need to know Jesus, your great-grandkids need to know Jesus. It's not just enough for you to celebrate God's grace in your life; you need to capture that grace in written form, telling the story so that your children, your grandchildren, your great-grandchildren will know who the God of the Bible is, and when he showed up, and what he's done.

That's why I tell my kids all the time, "Dad was not a Christian when he was your age. I was living in sin, I was living apart from God. I lived foolishly and recklessly, and I was in danger, and Jesus showed up and saved me at the age of nineteen as a college freshman." I want them to know the story of my salvation, of their mom's salvation, of their family's salvation historically, and how God has worked in our midst now for some generations. It's important.

You're not just an individual. You're part of a community, you're part of a family, you're part of a history, you're part of a legacy, and God's grace to you, and God's grace through you, and God's grace in spite of you is part of your testimony to help others come to know, love, appreciate, and trust that that same God will be there for them and that same grace is available to them. Amen? This is important stuff. This is important stuff. You need to record God's grace in your life. Write it down and celebrate it.

"For your offspring and all who joined them, that without fail they would keep these two days according to what was written and at the time appointed every year." It's going to be an annual festival. "And these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation." It's now been going, friends, for over two thousand years. "In every clan, province, and city."

See, there's diversity across the globe for God's people, but there is unity around celebration. It's why now for thousands of years across every nation, culture, language, tribe, race, group, and culture, subculture of God's people, the Christian church, we celebrate Communion and baptism. A lot of things are different, but a few things are always the same, that salvation requires celebration and that leads to holy, godly tradition, doing the same thing that God's people have always done, because God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

"That these days of Purim should never fall into disuse among the Jews, nor should the commemoration of these days cease among their descendants. Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew," her adoptive father, "gave full written authority, confirming this second letter about Purim. Letters were sent to all the Jews, to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus," that's the Persian Empire, "in words of peace and truth, that these days of Purim should be observed at their appointed seasons, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther obligated them, and as they had obligated themselves and their offspring, with regard to their fasts and their lamenting. The command of Queen Esther confirmed these practices of Purim, and it was recorded in writing."

Now, let me explain some of this to you. First of all, it's called Purim, we just learned here why. Haman was a pagan man, Haman was a godless man, Haman was an evil man, and Haman was a spiritual man. See, we live in a day when people would say that being spiritual is in and of itself good. That's not true. The Bible teaches there is one God, and other religions that have other gods actually have demons that are pretending to be gods and goddesses. And so, if you will worship them, they will answer your prayers and show up in

powerful ways, but supernatural power is not indicative of the presence of the God of the Bible.

“There are counterfeit signs, wonders, and miracles,” the Bible says, that “Satan masquerades as an angel of light,” the Bible declares. That Satan is a great deceiver and his intent is to lead the whole world astray. All of that is biblical language. If you are here and you are just spiritual, you are in grave danger because in the spirit realm, there is not only God, there is Satan; there are not only angels, there are demons.

This man Haman was a very powerful man. His prayers were answered by demon gods. He became very affluent, very successful, very preeminent, and very powerful, and he wanted to decide whether or not he should exterminate God’s people, the Old Testament covenantal Jews. And what he did is he cast lots, they called it Pur, and the casting of lots was divination. This is witchcraft, this is sorcery. This is like consulting a medium, or astrology, or using a Ouija board, or going to some spiritual leader that is not Christian, trying to hear from the spirit realm what it is you are to do in the physical world.

Their assumption and presumption was if we roll the dice, then the spirit realm will decide the answer in the roll of the die, and then we will obey according to the decree given us by the demons. And the decree was given to assassinate, to eliminate, all of God’s people. And now God’s people called the holiday “Purim” because it is a great reversal. Proverbs says very clearly that we roll the dice, but God determines exactly how the dice fall, that over it all is the God of the Bible.

And the point here is that God is over Satan, and that God and angels are over Satan and demons, and Satan and demons can empower even powerful people to do horrible things, but in the end it is the sovereignty and providence of God that rules over all and can bring all to pass just as he decrees. And so they, in a bit of celebration, call it Purim. Yes, Haman rolled the dice, but our God, he controls the dice. Yes, Satan made a decision to destroy us as a people, but our God is more powerful than Satan, and he has protected us, he has delivered us, he has saved us, and that salvation requires celebration.

So, they title the holiday “Purim.” It’s usually around March, and like many holidays, they eat together. This is all foretaste, foreshadowing of the kingdom of God where we sit down with the Lord Jesus Christ.

In addition, they give gifts to one another as we do in the holiday season, and they are generous toward the poor, particularly those who are believing poor; those who are God’s people and struggling; the single mothers; the widows; the orphans; those who have been injured at work; those who are negatively affected, not by their own sin, or folly, or bad investment, or sense of entitlement, but because of circumstance that is, perhaps, beyond their control; people who have been injured on the job; people who are unemployed, underemployed; the single mom who is working hard but struggling to make ends meet. Great generosity.

I want you to see, particularly in this season, this is not politically motivated or required in the Scriptures. This is God’s people loving, this is God’s people caring, this is people who love God and have received the love of God demonstrating that with generosity toward others. Which means don’t overlook the opportunities in your Community Group, don’t overlook the opportunities in your church service, don’t overlook the opportunities in your local Mars Hill, don’t overlook the opportunities across Mars Hill to do good for the people of God as a sense of generosity, and love, and affection. “Because God so loved the world, he gave,” and our God is a giver, so we give as a demonstration of his affection. There’s a lot going on here and it’s all motivated theologically.

And what this is to be for us is a sense of ritual, not routine. Let me explain the difference between the two. I grew up, as many of you know, marginal Jack Catholic. I did not know Jesus. It is not the church’s fault, I was not interested. Some Catholics love Jesus, I wasn’t one of them. But as a kid, I can remember going to church. We called it mass. It was routine, not ritual. It was something I had to do, not something I wanted to do. It’s something I tried to avoid, and if I couldn’t, then I would try to endure. Communion meant nothing. A bad cracker, bad wine, it meant nothing. People would sing, it meant nothing.

And then I met Jesus, and all of a sudden, routine became ritual. Oh, Communion’s about Jesus, broken body, shed blood. That’s meaningful. Oh, going to church, that’s to be with God’s people, and to hear from God’s Word, and God inhabits the praises of his people, and when I’m with the people of God, I sense the presence of God. It’s meaningful. Oh, they’re singing. I love Jesus, the Holy Spirit lives in me, I want to sing too! It’s meaningful. The Word of God is opened, now my ear has been opened. This is not the droning of a man who is boring me, this is a herald of life from a man who is serving me. The difference between routine and ritual is oftentimes not what happens out there, but what happens in here. Ritual is where we do things repeatedly, but they have meaning all the time.

Every time I hug and kiss my kids, it’s ritual, not routine. Every time I hold my wife’s hand, it’s ritual, not routine. I promise you this, Mars Hill: every time I get up to teach the Bible, it’s ritual, not routine. I’m really glad to be here and it means something to gather together. And what God is instituting here is a ritual. I want you to do this, and do this as a family, and do it for generations, and do it together. But the big idea is that you’ve experienced salvation, so now have celebration. That’s the big idea.

And what’s sad is over time, the ritual has become a routine. And today, Purim is still celebrated, but it’s an interesting, curious holiday. You can ask your Jewish friends about it. It’s kind of like Halloween. They get dressed up, they go to the synagogue or temple and the entire story of Esther is read. And as Haman’s name is mentioned, they jeer and make all kinds of noise, and it’s very interactive, and pretty loud, and very different than usually how the services go at the Jewish synagogue or temple.

So, it’s kind of like Halloween. It’s kind of like Mardi Gras. Like, people drink too much, wear too little, and it’s not awesome. It looks more like the parties that Ahasuerus threw earlier in the book, where people are drinking too much, and bad decisions are being made, and it’s getting out of control. And it’s kind of like the Fourth of July, where they celebrate their deliverance and their liberation politically, and sometimes what’s overlooked is what this all means spiritually.

Should God’s people celebrate Purim? It’s not a sin to. If you want to, you’re welcome to, but if you do, just remember it’s all about Jesus. And if it’s not about Jesus, then it becomes routine, not ritual. You have the outward forms but not the inward joys.

What’s curious as well is the Bible never gives us a decree from God for the feast of Purim. If you look at the feasts, and festivals, and holidays, and holy days of the Old Testament, first of all, they’re all fulfilled in Christ, so as long as we celebrate Jesus we’re meeting the obligations of all of the holidays, that salvation requires celebration and all small salvations lead to the big Savior. But in addition, what I find interesting is that the other holidays and holy days that God’s people in the Old Testament celebrate, they’re all mandated, generally speaking, by God in the first five books of the Old Testament, called the Pentateuch (*penta* means “five”). So it’s the book in five parts, it’s the five books of Moses.

Well, many, many, many, many, many years later, the feast of Purim is added as well, but it's not through a divine decree from the Lord. What this was, this was the spontaneous celebration of God's people. And at this point in the history of the Scriptures, they'd already been celebrating Purim year after year for a while, and this gives us the history and explains what Esther and Mordecai did to encourage this as a national holiday.

Here's the big idea: if you love God and you're excited about something, you could throw a party whenever you want, okay? I don't know if you knew that, okay? You could throw a party whenever you want. You could cook food, you could have music, you could call people, you could throw a party. And what tends to happen is we throw parties in a way that they dishonor the Lord, and so much of the story line of Esther has been a series of banquets, and feasts, and parties that dishonor the Lord. Men are drunk, women are abused, things are out of control, and evil decisions are made.

Here, it's a great reversal. It shows us how to redeem feasting. It shows us how to redeem holidays. It shows us how to redeem food so that we're not gluttons, but worshipers; drink, so that we're not drunkards, but worshipers; to celebrate, not in defiance of God, but in the presence of God; to live *coram deo* in the face of God; and to invite God and his people to meet together and to celebrate his salvation.

Let me submit this to you, Mars Hill: most Christians are better at mourning than celebrating, especially in the Reformed tradition of which we are a part. It's find your sin, find your sin, find your idols, find your idols, you're horrible, you're wicked, you're a sinner. All true, but doesn't really lead to much of a party, amen?

God became a man, lived without sin, died for your sin, rose as your Savior, puts the Holy Spirit in you, gives you a new nature. This earth is as close to hell as you'll ever get. It only is going to get better. Jesus has gone before you. He's the King of kings, he's the Lord of lords. He loves you, he knows you, he seeks you, he serves you, he's prepared a place for you, he's going to set a table for you, he's going to rejoice over you with singing. Well, that's a party right there.

And so what happens is we tend to focus on our sin, sometimes more than our Savior. Sin doesn't lead to celebration, sin leads to damnation. Salvation leads to celebration. So, as Christians, we acknowledge our sin, but then we get to our Savior and then we realize, "Ah! Now we have something to celebrate: Jesus." Jesus.

And that's the big idea I want to impress upon you. You could throw a party whenever you want. Call people, cook food, have fun. Redeem celebration to the glory of God. Redeem celebration to the glory of God. And this can be informal, and this can be spontaneous, and that's what we see with Purim. There was no decree, a prophet did not speak, the Bible did not declare, a committee did not vote. God's people just decided, "We're alive, time to celebrate." I love, as well, that at our Redemption Nights, and our Redemption Groups tend to deal with deep sin and suffering in people's lives, that they always end with a celebration. All of this is deeply theological, deeply theological.

And sometimes, miserable religious people—and I put those two words together intentionally. Miserable religious people will become sort of critical. "Why are these people happy? Why are they raising their hands? Why are they celebrating? Why are they joyful? Do they not know how wicked they are?" That's why they're celebrating. They know how wicked they are and how great their God is, and that they're loved in spite of themselves, and it's all of grace which should lead to celebration because of the glory of salvation.

Some of you need to learn to sing, some of you need to learn to shout, some of you need to raise your hands, some of you need to throw parties, some of you need to rejoice with those who are rejoicing. And as we do, it becomes easier to remember who God is, and when God has showed up, and how God has worked. It's a lot easier than looking at your kids and turning the history of God's grace into a bunch of horrible facts to be memorized but never enjoyed.

## THIS AIN'T HEAVEN

It tells us about Purim, and then it transitions to tell us that even though things are wonderful, and amazing, and have changed, here's the big idea: this ain't heaven. Read with me, chapter 10, verses 1–3. "King Ahasuerus," who's still the king. Xerxes, good king, bad king? Bad king. Drunk, pervert, bad king. Bad king, still king. They're not celebrating, "Yay! New king!" Nope, same old king. "Did he get saved? Did he fall down on his face? 'What must I do to be saved?' Did he cry out to the Lord? Did he repent?" No, still drunken, pervert, Persian king. You could be excited, you could throw a party, you could worship God even if you're not super excited about the political leadership over you. Just so you know, just something to think about.

"King Ahasuerus imposed a tax." Okay, they throw a party during a tax increase. Okay, this is timely. This is timely. We don't tend to throw tax increase parties. I don't. Why are they celebrating? Well, because they have another King and they're part of a better kingdom. Now, the king, he gave Haman the decree, the legal right, to kill them all and plunder their goods, and they didn't die, so he taxes them. Do you get that? "Oh, you're alive. Taxes are going up." Okay, this is just government. They kill you or tax you. You've got two options, that's how it works. If you don't die, then you're going to pay in a different way, and that's how it works.

Now, here's what I find curious: they're still where? Persia, not Jerusalem. They're still under the king, not a new King; he's still a pagan, not converted; and their taxes have not gone down, they've gone up. And what do they do? Celebrate. If this is your home, it's going to be hard to celebrate. If this is not your home, you'll be able to celebrate.

It keeps going: "And all the acts of his power and might, and the full account of the high honor of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia?" He says, "Well, we do have Mordecai, and he's the second most powerful man in the most powerful nation on the earth, and he loves us, and he cares for us, and he serves us. So it's not all bad, there's a bit of hope in the midst of what, otherwise, would be hopeless."

It says, "You know, isn't it all written in this particular book, the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia?" Some of you say, "Man, I was looking in my Bible, I didn't see that Book of the kings of Media and Persia. I can't find it in there." It's because it's not a book that's in your Bible. You say, "Why is it mentioned in the Bible?" Here's why: sometimes the Bible will mention books that are not in the Bible. They're not divinely inspired, perfect, inerrant, sacred Scripture.

I think in Joshua it mentions a book called the book of Jasher. You're like, "I don't know a Jasher. I don't know, was he in one of those Steven Spielberg movies, *Star Wars*? I don't know who Jasher is. I don't know where he is." What happens is sometimes the Bible will reference a historical book outside of the canon of Scripture, and it's not that that's a perfect book, divinely inspired, without error, from the Lord, but it does have truth in it—some truth in it.

And here, it's the historical record. And they're saying, "We're not going to recount all the ways that, you know, Mordecai was used of the Lord for the salvation of his people, but, you know, we all know that, you know, in this book over here that we had to read in school and all the kids had to memorize the dates and the facts growing up, it tells us about Mordecai."

Here's the big idea: all truth is God's truth. The highest authority is the Scriptures. We believe that all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable, that there's nothing above the Word of God, there's nothing alongside of the Word of God. It's our proverbial Supreme Court. But what we do believe is under the highest authority, there are other authorities. Through general revelation and common grace, sometimes you'll find truth elsewhere.

This is why we're not scared of science, we're not scared of medicine, we're not scared of business, we're not scared of history. We want to be people who find God's truth anywhere we can find it, and we know that it's truth when we test it by the perfect Word of God. This is why we don't want you to be scared of learning. We also don't want you to be gullible, we want you to be discerning. And what's it's saying here is, "There's some truth over in that book." Now, it's not all true, it's not a book of the Bible, but there are some things there that will help your understanding.

"For Mordecai the Jew," verse 3, "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." Bad news: same king, same kingdom, and taxes are going up. Good news: God loves us. He hasn't dealt with all of our problems, but he's dealt with our biggest problem.

And why did they love Mordecai? He leads very differently. Ahasuerus leads through intimidation, Mordecai leads through affection. Ahasuerus is a very selfish man and all his decisions are self-serving and self-seeking. Mordecai is a very selfless man and his decisions are for the well-being of all the people. Ahasuerus wants to have the people glorify him, and Mordecai wants to help the people to glorify God. People fear Ahasuerus, but they love Mordecai.

This is really a great analogy. There's only, really, two ways to lead: from the strong hand of fear and control, and the stronger hand of love, and grace, and compassion, and affection. See, Mordecai is a stronger man than Ahasuerus. He has the one thing that Ahasuerus never receives, and that's the love of the people, because he loves them. At this point, Mordecai has become kind of like the George Washington. He's the founding father. People love him in a fatherly way and he cares for them in a fatherly way.

And it says here it's because he spoke peace to the people. That's a very important word there. It's actually a Jesus word. It's "shalom." Have you ever heard the word "shalom"? God made the world in shalom, and then sin comes to vandalize, to scandalize shalom. Shalom is the world without sin, shalom is the world without death, shalom is the world without terror, or fear, or oppression, or suffering. When God was done, he said that everything was very good, Genesis 1:31. It was all shalom, it was whole, it was peaceful, it was perfect, it was right. It reflected the character of God, and then sin comes to mar, to attack, to vandalize shalom. The result is we live in a world, friends, that's not shalom. It's shalom as altered, affected, marred by sin.

And Mordecai comes speaking shalom, speaking life where there is death, speaking truth where there is lies, speaking light where there is darkness. The Bible says that the power of life and death are in the tongue, and he is echoing the truth of God, he is echoing the love of God, and it says that he speaks shalom to the people. He gives them a vision of what life could be like, and, by the grace of God, will be like when the Prince of Shalom comes. It says in Isaiah 9:6, that Jesus Christ is the Prince of Shalom. You know why we do not have shalom? Because we have not yet been visited again by the Prince of Shalom.

It shows us, here, that even when there is salvation and celebration, there's still not shalom. The political leaders are not what they ought to be, and the financial systems are not what they ought to be, and everything is not right in the world, and we remain restless and frustrated. We become cause crusaders, we become those who put our hopes in politicians, or business leaders, or political leaders, or moral leaders, or spiritual leaders, and we try our hardest, we give our most, and then we lose hope because shalom never comes. It doesn't matter how many wars we fight, how many dollars we spend, how many prescriptions we purchase, shalom never comes because we need the Prince of Shalom.

And Jesus is the Prince of Shalom, and when he comes again, friends, he's bringing shalom with him. So, when Mordecai speaks shalom to the people, they love him because they hear the faint echo of the coming of Jesus in his voice. I have good news: shalom is coming, but it won't be here until the Prince of Shalom brings it. For all who are leaders, let me encourage us to, by the grace of God, seek to lead as Mordecai leads, not as Ahasuerus leads; to lead with shalom as our vision and our hope.

## **CLOSING OBSERVATIONS ON ESTHER**

Some concluding, closing observations on Esther as we're nearing the end of an eleven-week study in a great book. Number one: kings rule over nations, but God rules over them both. We've seen the Persian Empire and the king, and we've seen above them both is the Lord. You need to see this and know this. When people lose all hope—"Oh, the nation is ending and the rulers are goddess." This is not new. I'm not saying it's right, but I'm saying it's not new. From Genesis 3 forward, the record is usually of sin not shalom, and God ruling and reigning to protect his people, to provide for his people, to be present with his people.

Number two: important ministry is often done by those not in vocational ministry. Esther was not a prophetess, Mordecai was not a priest. They're not in vocational ministry, they're in politics. Some of you don't need to go to Bible college, you need to go to business school. Some of you don't need to go to seminary, you need to go to medical school or law school. Some of you need to be teachers, some of you need to be attorneys, some of you need to be moms and dads, some of you need to be P.E. teachers, some of you need to be mechanics, some of you need to be plumbers. Whatever it is, if it's under the Lord, it's all worship, it's not in vain.

One of the great myths in the church is that those who are in vocational ministry are used for the Lord for the most important ministry. Not always true. At Mars Hill, only about 1 percent of the adults at Mars Hill are on paid staff in any capacity, part-time or full-time. That doesn't mean that only 1 percent have an opportunity to do something that matters. It means that all of God's people, wherever God should send you, that's the place where he has appointed for you to be to serve him.

We see that with Mordecai, we see that with Esther. Everything would have been destroyed if they would have quit politics and went to Bible college. They stayed in their positions and they used those to glorify God and for the good of others. I want that to be encouragement for you. You're not wasting time if you are pursuing vocational ministry, you're already in ministry. All of God's people, the priests to believers, are constantly in ministry. You're missionaries in the world, sent there on divine appointment by the Lord.

And in addition, some of you, yes, are going to be called of God to pursue vocational ministry, but most of you, quite frankly, shouldn't because what you're doing is so important we need you to do it really well. Praise God for good politicians, praise God for good business leaders, praise God for good doctors, praise God for good teachers.

Number three: ladies, women play important roles in God's kingdom. Esther is magnificently used of God, and she didn't come from a great family. Her parents are dead, she's an orphan girl, she doesn't have a mom, she probably grew up poor. She's living away from the presence of God. She's raised by a guy who's not the greatest dad. He gets a little better as he gets a little older, but early on it's not very impressive. She hides her faith. She doesn't start off super well, but God uses her, and she grows, and she matures. She becomes one of the most famous women in the whole Bible.

And as an observation, let me point this out: her primary contribution is not as a mother. See, oftentimes in the Bible, when a woman is mightily used of God, it's in the role of mother. So, Sarah becomes a mom, and Ruth becomes a mom, right? All leading to the coming of Jesus through this family line. Elizabeth becomes a mom, Mary becomes a mom, Esther, not a mom. No indication at all in the Scriptures that she was a mother.

Now, we know that motherhood is a calling, that motherhood is an honor, that motherhood is a ministry. We believe that, but here, God uses a woman who's not a mother. She doesn't even have a great marriage. Her husband's an unbeliever, she's a believer. Her husband's got a couple hundred maybe other wives and concubines. We've already learned in the book that sometimes he doesn't even speak to her for a month at a time.

Is it possible to be a single woman, is it possible to be a divorced woman, is it possible to be a woman who comes from difficult circumstances, is it possible to be an infertile woman who grows in relationship with the Lord and is used in a significant way? Absolutely. That's the encouraging story of Esther. That's the massively encouraging story of Esther.

So, for those of you women who are single, take this opportunity to do good. Maybe you'll be married, maybe you won't. For those of you women who are struggling with infertility, use this as an opportunity to do good. Maybe you'll become a mother, maybe you won't. For those of you who are infertile and you're hoping to adopt, use this as an opportunity to do good. Maybe you'll adopt, maybe you won't. Esther's marriage is never great. We don't see her with a converted, happy husband holding a baby, but we see her walking with God and doing much good. Amen? It's a great encouragement for us all, but particularly for you sisters in Christ.

Number four: God is relentlessly committed to caring for his people. He keeps loving, he keeps pursuing, he keeps saving, he keeps investing.

And number five: in the end, God wins and his people rejoice. If you forget everything, remember that. In the middle of the book, it looks dark. Horrible king, horrible Haman, death sentence. In the end, it's a party.

And let me say this: for us, the end is at the end of this life. At the end of this life, at the end of human history, God wins and we'll rejoice. Until then, we're in the middle of the story. It's dark, it's a death sentence, the bad guys are winning, God's people are losing, death is reigning, people are drunk, people are perverted, men are out of control, women are being abused, money's being misspent, it's marching off to war. All of that is under the backdrop and the rubric of this great story of Esther, and you get to the end, you're like, "Oh, that's awesome. We now need a party it's so fantastic." So it will be for all of God's people.

Right now, friends, we're in the middle of the movie. Don't throw your popcorn on the floor, and scream, and walk out of the theater. "I hate—this is a dumb movie." Wait until the end, it gets better. Stay in your seat, wait until the end, it gets better. God's going to work it all out, and in the end, we'll rise from death, sin will be no more, the Prince of Shalom, the Lord Jesus Christ, will come again, and our enemies will be destroyed as Haman was, and we will live together as the people of God with something that is far more magnificent than Purim, and that's joining the angels and all of God's people from all the nations of the earth, singing the praises of the Prince of Shalom. In the end, God wins. In the middle, it's terrifying, it's difficult, it's complicated. But in the end, God wins and his people rejoice. That gives us hope to keep going.

## WHY SHOULD THE OLD TESTAMENT BE CONNECTED TO JESUS?

Let me close with this: here's a question I've gotten a lot in this series, and I wanted to end with this. Why should the Old Testament be connected to Jesus? I've been your teaching pastor for sixteen years. Today, we finish Esther. This will be the twenty-fourth book of the Bible I've taught in complete, verse-by-verse fashion. And sometimes, when we come to the Old Testament books and I start talking about Jesus, they're like, "I read the whole book. He's not mentioned in, you know, Esther, or Genesis, or Exodus, or Ecclesiastes. Why do we talk about Jesus in the Old Testament?"

Let me explain why, and let me say that when you come to the Scriptures, you will emphasize whatever you think is most important. So, let's say you're something called a dispensationalist. It's a certain team of theology. You're going to go to the book and you're going to say, "Ah, I see Jewish people. This is about Israel, this is about the nation of Israel. This is about their right to become a nation and to be protected from their enemies. And today, Israel has a right to nation status since they've had it in like 1948, and they're still being attacked by the descendants of the Persian Empire. And this is all political and prophetic, and let's connect it to the newspaper and the last days, and here's a chart, and we need to defend the national sovereign rights of the nation of Israel to fulfill the prophetic promises to the Messiah." I say, eh, okay. Your second option, we'll come back to that maybe. See, if you think it's all about the nation of Israel, then that's where you're going to go.

Now, let's say you're not a dispensationalist, you're a feminist. You're going to come to the book and say, "There's a woman, that's what it's about. It's about a woman rising up to be a ruler and a leader, to be powerful and used of God. This is about women's liberation and deliverance. Yay, Esther!" I say, well, you know what, there are some Jewish guys in the book, and there is a woman, but is that the big idea? Is that the main theme? Is that what it's all about? Is that the center of the universe around which everything orbits?

Now, if you're a liberal and you're into liberalism, you're going to come to the book and you say, "Oh, minority persecuted by the majority, women persecuted by men. This is like socialism. This is where there becomes parity in equality, and this is a story of justice." I say, yeah, that's sort of in there, but I don't know if that's the center and the heart in the entirety of the story. So, what is the center and the heart in the entirety of the story?

Some will just come to the book with good, old-fashioned moralism. "There are good guys and bad guys. What do the bad guys do? Don't do that! What do the good guys do? Do that!" Moralism. Be an Esther, don't be a Haman.

I say, you know what? Let me just say this: the nation of Israel and the Jewish people, they're in the book. A godly woman who rises up in power and is mightily used of God, she's in the book. Some people do some good things, some people do some bad things, that's also, truth be told, sitting right there, it's all present in the book. And the minority does overcome the majority, and those who were oppressed do become liberated. There is some justice in the book.

But all of that orbits around Jesus. All the stories of the Bible, all of the deliverances in the Bible, all of the promises and foreshadowings and types, what they are, they're all streams and tributaries that are coming together into a mighty river of redemption for the story line of the Bible that leads us to Jesus. Some of you say, "Well, where did you get this?" Jesus.

Here's what I'm going to suggest: the best Bible teacher who's ever lived is Jesus. Okay? If you're a non-Christian, you probably still agree with me, right? You're like, "Finally a point I concur with." Yeah, the best Bible teacher who's ever lived is Jesus. He was called a rabbi, which means "teacher." So, our goal at Mars Hill is not to impose a theological system on the Scriptures, but to learn from Jesus, and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to see the Scriptures in the way that Jesus wants us to see them, and whatever theological conclusions we have, they come from the Scripture, they're not imposed on the Scripture.

Here's what Jesus said, Matthew 5:17-18, early in his ministry: "Do not think that I," that's Jesus, "have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets," that's the Old Testament. "I have not come—" He says right there, "I have not come to abolish them but to," what? "Fulfill them." So, the whole Old Testament's about Jesus and he's come to fulfill them.

Oh, why do we not offer sacrifices? Jesus is our sacrifice. Why do we not go to the temple? Because Jesus is the presence of God, we go to Jesus. Why do we not have a priest? Oh, Jesus is our great high priest. Everything's fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus came and he said, "I'm not trying to get rid of the Bible, "I'm trying to fulfill it. In fact, I'm going to fulfill all of it."

"For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished." We talk about dotting the i's and crossing the t's. Jesus says, "The whole Old Testament needs to be fulfilled, and I'm here to do just that, all of it."

Number two: Jesus has an argument with religious leaders. These are scholars educated beyond their intelligence. In John 5:39-40, "You search the Scriptures." Let me ask you this: is that a good thing or a bad thing? What he's saying is, "You love to study. You have books, you have commentaries, you do cross-referencing. You're very devoted to studying the Bible." Good or bad? Good. But if you interpret it wrongly, bad.

"You search the Scriptures," the Old Testament, "because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me," Jesus says, "yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." Here's what they do: they come to Jesus, the religious scholars, and they say, "You're not biblical." It's just funny, right? But if Jesus showed up at Bible college or seminary, you know, it would still happen. "You're not biblical." "Actually, I'm aware of the Book to which you refer. And you're studying it a lot, but here's the problem: you don't know what it's about." "Oh really, what's it about?" "Me."

Now, let me say, this is either the most truthful or the most arrogant statement that he could possibly make at that moment, right? If I came to you and I said, "You know what the Bible's all about?" You said, "What?" I said, "Me." You'd say, "That's—you're a cult leader."

Here's the big idea: the Bible's not about you, the Bible's not about me, the Bible's not about us. The Bible's about Jesus. Now, the Bible's for you, and the Bible's for me, and the Bible's for us, but the Bible's about Jesus. You get the difference? That's what Jesus said. You can know a lot of Scripture, but if you don't know Jesus, you don't understand any of Scripture.

"You refuse to come to me that you may have life." Have you come to Jesus? Have you come to Jesus? Some of you say, "But I'm philosophical, I'm moral, I'm theological, I'm studious." Have you come to Jesus? See, more than a high IQ, it takes humility to be a Christian, because you need to receive the truth that you are a sinner, that Jesus is a Savior, and that you need to come to him to have life, spiritual life, a new birth in your soul, eternal life, resurrection from death. Scholarship never saved anyone. Good scholarship helps you get to know the Savior who saved you.

After he dies, after he rises, Jesus hosts two Bible studies. Amazing. There are a lot of places in the Bible I wish I could have beamed in, you know? A little *Star Trek* moment. Just get me there. I'll be back in a—I just want to go. Two of the places near the top of my list are in Luke 24. After the resurrection from death, Luke 24:27, "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets," that's the Old Testament, "he," Jesus, "interpreted to them in all—" What Scriptures? All. He went to Esther. Yeah, he went to the other books, but he went to Esther. Yeah, if I could have been there, this would have been such a better series, right? "He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." "Okay, go to Genesis, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me. Exodus, more me. Leviticus, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me. Deuteronomy, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me." Oh, by the time he got to Esther, that would have been awesome.

When it says in I Corinthians that when we see Jesus face-to-face we'll know as we're fully known, and it says in Isaiah that in the kingdom of God, we won't need a teacher because the Lord will be our teacher, I wonder if we'll get to go to this Bible study. That would be awesome. Please! I will take notes. But Jesus said that the whole Bible was about him.

Last Bible study that Jesus taught that we have record of, Luke 24:44-45, "These are my words that I," Jesus, "'spoke to you while I was still with you, "'that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, the Psalms,'" those are the entirety of the categories of Old Testament books, "'must be,'" what? "'Fulfilled.'" Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures."

You know what it takes to understand the Scriptures? The Holy Spirit opening your mind. The same Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of Scripture illuminates our understanding of Scripture. And here's how you know that you're understanding the Scriptures: you love Jesus. You love Jesus, and his salvation leads to your celebration. If you open the Bible, and you start studying, and you end up anywhere other than Jesus, you took a wrong turn. There are other things that are secondary, but what is primary is that the whole Bible is about Jesus.

Mars Hill, it's why I would ask you to pray for me and all of our leaders, that as we open the Scriptures we would get to Jesus, not in an allegorical way or a mystical way, but in a faithful way and in a biblical way. So, when I see a kingdom, I think of the kingdom of God. When I see a king, I think of Jesus as the King of kings. When I see a gallows where people are crucified, I think of the cross of Jesus. When I see missionaries like Mordecai and Esther, I think of Jesus crossing cultures to come into human history to seek and save the lost. When I see great deliverance and salvation, I think of the greater deliverance and salvation that Jesus brings. When I see someone like Mordecai speaking shalom, I think of Jesus, the Prince of Shalom.

## JESUS IS A BETTER MORDECAI

So, let me close with this: Jesus is a better Mordecai. Mordecai saved people from one nation, but Jesus saves people from every nation. Mordecai was only able to serve God's people in his generation, but Jesus serves God's people in every generation. Mordecai saved people from premature death, but Jesus saves people from eternal death. Mordecai was a godly ruler in a godless kingdom, but Jesus is God, the King, whose kingdom rules over all kingdoms. Mordecai ruled over a kingdom that came to an end, but Jesus rules over a kingdom that never ends. Mordecai is celebrated every year at Purim, but Jesus is celebrated every week at Communion. And Mordecai brought peace between God's people and King Xerxes, but Jesus brings peace between God's people and God. Let's pray.

Father God, I thank you for the eleven-week opportunity I've had to study and be studied by the great book of Esther. I thank you for the opportunity to teach at Mars Hill Church, where I preach without restriction, or limitation, or inhibition. I thank you, Lord God, that our people love the Scriptures, and they love Jesus, and they get excited about opening the Scriptures to learn about Jesus. Lord Jesus, I pray for us as a church that we would always love the Scriptures and love learning about you, because we become like the people we love. So, Lord Jesus, help us to love you the most so that we become more like you. And Lord God, I pray for those who have not yet come to Jesus, that they would come to Jesus now, that they would receive the life that he gives. And Lord God, I pray for us as a people that salvation would demand celebration, spontaneous singing in our car, in our home, praying, rejoicing, calling friends, texting, posting updates talking about the ways in which you've showed up in our life and the lives of others, that we might share in your joy and we might share it with others. And so, Lord God, now we come to celebrate salvation in Jesus' name, amen.

*Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.*