

Set Up Your Monuments

- Esther 9:20-32
- You may remember in chapter 3 of this book that when Haman plotted to annihilate the Jews, he wanted to do it on just the right day. So they cast Pur, which means they cast lots, to get the luckiest day on the luckiest month to do this deed. That turned out to be the 12th month, Adar, and the 13th day of that month. If you think that's silly, that anybody would believe that one month or one day of the year will bring you good luck, then that must mean you are not among the millions in this country, even Christians, who read their horoscope every day and actually put any stock in what it says. I hope not! But this was the plan, that on the 13th day of the 12th month, all the Jews would be killed by their neighbors, and all of their possessions would be confiscated. I heard on the Eric Metaxas podcast this week that anti-Semitism is on the rise in Europe and is so bad in some places, like Paris, that a man wearing a yarmulke, walking on the Champs de Elyse, will be attacked, most likely by Muslims. A reporter recently tried this, wore a yarmulke though not Jewish, and he was attacked. As we have said all along, this book may be 2500 years old, but it is just as relevant today as it was then.
- You will remember that when the plot was uncovered by Esther, and the king found out that his wife was a Jew, a second edict was written, that would allow the Jews to defend themselves on the 13th day of the 12th month. And that's exactly what they did.
- We saw last week that the Jews fought against their enemies in Persia on one day in the villages, the 13th day of the month of Adar, and on two days in the capital city of Susa, the 13th and the 14th day of the month of Adar, and God gave them favor, struck fear in the hearts of their enemies, and delivered them into their hands. When the fighting was over and victory was won and the enemies of the Jews had been destroyed, they celebrated. In the villages they proclaimed the 14th to be a day of feasting and gladness. In the capital city, since they had to fight for two days, they pronounced the 15th a day of feasting and gladness. Mordecai now makes a move to establish something permanent for the Jewish people, so that this event in their history would never be forgotten. Let's talk today about this text with two main points: Mordecai established. The Jews accepted.
- **Mordecai established**
- I love the simplicity of verses 20-21: "And Mordecai recorded these things and sent letters to all the Jews...obliging them to keep the 14th day and also the 15th day, year by year..."
- Three things are important to note. First, Mordecai established unity among the Jews in exile by recognizing both days as important. He could have split the Jews into two camps by saying to the rural Jews, "This is what happened in Susa, and it took two days to conquer the enemy, so you need to celebrate with us on the 15th." Or he could have said to the Jews in Susa, "Your brothers in the villages got it done in one day, conquering 75,000 enemies, so we need to celebrate with them on the 14th." Instead, he said, we will celebrate BOTH days! He was a man of godly wisdom and saw it as a way to bring the people together by recognizing both days as important.
- Second, Mordecai gave them permission, no, even a command, to celebrate! Let's be honest, many of us have a hard time with that. Some people's heroes, let's be honest, are Eeyore and Puddleglum and they go through life making sure that they NEVER celebrate anything if they can help it. There's just too much badness and sadness in the world, and they are not going to trivialize that by celebrating anything. Or they have the attitude that the holiest person is the most depressed-looking. And let's admit it, sometimes when the phone rings or the email alert sounds off, we don't expect good news. We expect bad. One of my pastor friends told me recently it has gotten to the point that whenever a person calls and says, "Hey pastor, my wife and I need to meet with you this week. Could we take you to lunch on Tuesday?" that he says, "Let me tell you how this is going to go. You are going to tell me how much you love the church and me and the people and everything about it, and that there's nothing wrong and you don't know why, but you know for sure that God

is leading you to another church. Then I'll say I wish you wouldn't go, but what can I do if you believe God is leading you, and we will smile and nod and hug and walk away. I have an idea. Let's save each other some time and some money and not meet!" Usually he's been right on his prediction. But what about the times when the caller stammers and said, "But...we just wanted to celebrate pastor appreciation month by taking you out to eat!"

- Hey, let's learn to live in the amazing grace of God, expect the best not the worst, and give ourselves permission to celebrate this incredible gift of life we have been given. Luci Swindoll wrote, "Our hurried, stressful, busy lives are unquestionably the most dangerous enemy of celebrating life itself." And Chuck Swindoll added, "I honestly do not believe God desires us to grind out our existence in a long tunnel of tasks and responsibilities and deadlines. God has given us joy rather than sadness. He has exchanged our tears for smiles." The Jews in Persia were displaced people. They were living in exile, away from their homes and their nation and the rest of their people. But they celebrated God's goodness.
- Third, Mordecai wrote these things down. If he hadn't, we may not have this book. If he hadn't written things down, the Jews may not have this feast. If the edict of the King that allowed the Jews to prepare to defend themselves had not been written down and sent out to every province in the language of the people, then the Jews would have been destroyed. The written word can be used by God as a powerful tool for good. Samuel Zwemer died in 1952, and was a missionary and seminary professor. Nicknamed the Apostle to Islam, Zwemer influenced many to go into missionary work in Islamic countries. He wrote this: "The printed page is a missionary that can go anywhere and do so at minimum cost. It enters closed lands and reaches all stratas of society. It does not grow weary. It needs no furlough. It lives longer than any missionary. It never gets ill. It penetrates through the mind to the heart and conscience. It has and is producing results everywhere. It has often lain dormant yet retained its life and bloomed years later." Write down the things God is doing and has done, as the Psalmist said: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." I don't know about your soul, but my soul is prone to forgetting.
- **The Jews accepted**
- You see that in verse 23. They had already celebrated with a feast, and now they accepted Mordecai's command to make it an annual two-day event. Not only did they accept it, but with even stronger words, they obligated themselves and their children to do it. Look at verses 27. Why did they do that? Verse 28. So these days should be *remembered, kept, and never fall into disuse, or ever cease among their descendants*. And here we are, 2500 years later, and the orthodox Jews still keep this feast, the only feast that is non-Mosaic, not established by Moses. When I googled it this week, I found some pictures and stories from this year's feast in March. They wear costumes. **(picture)** They dress up as one of the characters. They read the story and hiss or boo or use their graggers (noisemakers) whenever the name of Haman is mentioned. Or they shout out "May the name of the wicked rot!" when his name is mentioned. In some places the children walk through the streets and collect money for their schools. Or they collect money for the poor. They eat together and one report I read said the adults are obliged to drink until they don't know the difference between 'blessed be Mordecai' and 'cursed be Haman.' Not recommended, that last part.
- What does all of this have to do with us? Paul said this in 1 Cor. 10:11 about the events recorded in the Old Testament: "**Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down (there it is again) for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.**" We know that all through the Old Testament, whenever God did something wonderful in their midst, what did they do? Somebody wrote it down. (Thank you, Lord!) AND, often they built a monument. After God parted the Jordan River and Joshua led the people across into the Promised Land, God had them stop and build a monument. Why? "**That this might be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' then you shall tell them...**" The monument was a visible reminder of the grace of God. Vance Havner used to tell the story of a little town in Alabama where the main livelihood was cotton. Then tragedy struck in

the form of the devastating boll weevil. All of the cotton was destroyed and it looked as if the farmers were headed for the poorhouse. But they didn't despair. One man decided to plant peanuts instead, because boll weevils hate peanuts more than Chrissy Hahn does. Another farmer planted a different crop, and another and all of the farmers did the same. Before long, peanuts and other crops took over for cotton. The town later became known as Enterprise, Alabama. And do know what they did to commemorate that year? They erected a monument to the boll weevil! Vance Havner wrote this: "Sometimes we settle into a humdrum routine as monotonous as growing cotton year after year. Then God sends the boll weevil; He jolts us out of our groove, and we must find new ways to live. Financial reverses, great bereavement, physical infirmity, loss of position – how many have been driven by trouble to bring forth finer fruit from their souls! The best thing that ever happened to some of us was the coming of our boll weevil."

- What should we do, then? Build monuments as a visible reminder of the grace of God in your lives. Today our monuments to God's grace are often found hanging on the walls, as we put up pictures of our children, or we have videos of their baptisms and the events in the life of the family that we celebrate and don't want to forget. We have Bible verses framed on the walls, the Word of God set there to remind us daily, as frontlets before our eyes. Many have the verse from Joshua on their door that says, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." We have marked out our lives, as a reminder to ourselves and our children and grandchildren that our God is real, and that we belong to Him. But don't just build monuments to the great successes. Write down what you learn from your crop failures. Your sickness and surgery. The loss of a loved one. As CS Lewis said, "God whispers in our pleasure, but he shouts in our pain." I just heard an interview this week of Terri Roberts, whose son Charlie was the man in 2006 who walked into an Amish schoolhouse in PA and shot ten children, killing five and badly wounding the others. One of the five survivors has to be fed through a tube today, nine years later. Terri Roberts heard the sirens while on lunch break at her job at Sight and Sound Theater, and then got the news that her son was the murderer and had taken his own life as well. Can any of us imagine hearing that news about our son? Could any of us imagine doing anything except crawling into a hole as a parent after that and never coming out? But God's grace was poured out on those parents immediately through the Amish neighbors who came over and told them they loved them and forgave their son. Terri has just written a book called, "Forgiven," in which she talks about the tragedy and how God brought the community together through it. That's a powerful monument to something the world cannot even begin to understand without receiving the grace of God through Jesus.
- Finally, when we celebrate, we eat. That's what they did then, and that's what we do, now. Today, as we sit around tables in the fellowship hall and enjoy the food and the conversation, remember that we are all here because we have been rescued. We each have a story to tell about who God is and what He is doing in our lives and how He has taken the brokenness and brought His blessing through it. Let's encourage one another with those stories. For His glory!