

Gaining Mastery Over Our Enemies

- Esther 9:1-19
- We saw last week an amazing turn of events, as the day on which the Jews would be annihilated, by order of the first edict issued by the king, would now be the day on which the Jews would be able to overcome their enemies instead. As we have seen all through this wonderful story from God's book, though His name is not mentioned on any of the pages, His fingerprints are everywhere. It is a narrative illustration of the sovereignty of God, and once again, we see God acting on behalf of His people. The first edict condemned the Jews, but as we have said all along, that didn't slip past God, as if He took his eye off the ball for a second and Satan, using Haman, who used the king, was able to get a law passed and signed that would bring destruction to the people of God and the lineage of Christ. God ordained it to be so, for His own glory. You can't say that God orchestrated the second edict but had nothing to do with the first. He is sovereign over all or He is not sovereign at all!
- The second edict declared that the Jews in every province had permission to gather together for the purpose of defending their lives. The first verse says it very clearly. On the day when the enemies of the Jews "hoped to gain mastery over them, the reverse occurred: the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them." I don't think there is any accident in the way the Holy Spirit directed the author of this book to write this account. You could make the case on a macro level that this is a statement for all times, and all of Scripture. When all looked hopeless for the people of God, over and over in the Scriptures, that was when the reverse occurred. On the day when the serpent thought he had gained mastery over Adam and Eve, and indeed all of mankind, the reverse occurred. God made a promise that the heel of Eve's offspring would be bruised, but the head of the serpent would be crushed. Or what about Moses, and the children of Israel, backed up against the Red Sea? On the day when all looked hopeless for Daniel, and his enemies rubbed their hands together with glee that he would be destroyed, the reverse occurred. The mouths of the lions were shut until Daniel was pulled out of the pit and the enemies of Daniel and Daniel's God were thrown in. And meat was back on the menu. The same with Daniel's three buddies, Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego. The reverse occurred and the only thing the fiery furnace burned on these boys were the ropes that they had been bound with. And over and over we see the pattern in Scripture, until the greatest reversal of all time, when the Son of Man hung on a bloody cross, and cried out "It is finished." The enemy of our souls, that same old serpent from the garden, thought he had won the battle and gained mastery over Jesus and all who follow Him. But the reverse occurred as God, in the death of Jesus, cancelled "the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him." (Col. 2:14-15) That was the greatest reversal of all time, but there's one more monumental one to come. It will take place in the last days when the enemies of God, as Revelation 20 tells us, will have "surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city," and it will look like all hope is lost. But then the great reversal will occur one last time, as John writes: "But fire came down from heaven and consumed them..." (Rev. 20:9) The enemies of God hope to gain mastery over the people of God, and even God Himself, but the reverse has occurred once and for all. So, what do we say to this? Psalm 24: Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of Glory may come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle!
- Notice first of all, before we get to our two main points today, that God gave His people favor. Verse 2: "And no one could stand against them, for the fear of them had fallen on all peoples." The obvious question you have to ask that text is, from where did the fear fall? Were the Jews all of a sudden this superhero race of people with the ability to breathe fire and fly and walk through walls? No, they were just people; BUT they were people of whom the rest of the empire is terrified. This is yet another one of those not-so-subtle references to God, isn't it? The author is again

winking at the reader as if to say, “I know some reading this think it’s just historical fiction, or even truth, with four characters, but don’t forget the MAIN character who is never named and who never speaks. He’s in every scene. Center stage.” The fear fell from heaven; God sent it into the hearts of the people who up until that point, one can imagine, were excited about eliminating the Jews. They had circled the date on their calendars, and told Siri to remind them! But when the day came, their tongues stuck to the roofs of their mouths and their hands shook so hard they couldn’t hold onto their swords. Paul would say, “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”

- Let’s take a few minutes and unpack two points about the text, before we take communion. Let’s look at their restraint and their unity. I am addressing them in reverse order of how they first appear in the passage.
- **Their Restraint**
- I take my cue for this point from one phrase that is repeated three times in the text. Do you see it? At the end of verse 10. Then again at the end of verse 15. And again at the end of verse 16. Remember the edict and how it was written? Look at chapter 8, verse 11b: “and to plunder their goods.” They had every right to not only kill the people who were trying to kill them, but also to take everything they owned. After all, that’s what the Persians would have done to them. Right? Had the first edict been successful, every Jew in the entire kingdom would have been killed and all of their property confiscated. The Jews could have walked away with houses full of stuff. But they didn’t. And it was so consistent, this “no hands on the plunder” routine, you almost think it was planned. It seems like when the Jews gathered in Susa and in every province, the decision was made: we will not take any of the plunder. No, we will not even lay our hands on it. This is another great reversal, and takes us back to the story of Saul and the Amalekites. Remember? Saul was told by GOD to destroy all of the people and take none of the plunder. INSTEAD, Saul killed most of the people, leaving King Agag alive, and kept the best of the plunder. You know, to sacrifice to God. Here we have the exact opposite: of those who were trying to kill them, the Jews left no one alive. And they took NO plunder. By the way, why did they have a second day of fighting in Susa? Esther asked for it, and it is believed that Esther asked it at the prompting of Mordecai, as he may have known of pockets of resistance that had not yet been found and taken out. He was right, apparently, as 300 others who wanted to kill the Jews were found and eliminated on that 2nd day. Some believe that all of those killed were Amalekites, as the command God had given hundreds of years before was finally completed. But we cannot say that for sure. One thing we know: the Jews killed ALL of their enemies, and the Jews took NONE of the plunder.
- **Their Unity**
- Again we take our lead on this point from a phrase that is repeated three times in the passage as it describes how the Jews fought together. Verse 2, “The Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces...to lay hands on those who sought their harm.” They killed 500 men, 510 including the ten sons of Haman. And verse 15, when they were given a second day to fight, “The Jews...gathered” again and they killed 300 more men in Susa. And then in reference to all the Jews in the other provinces, we see in verse 16, “(they) also gathered to defend their lives,” and they killed 75,000 of those who hated them.” They GATHERED. There are no Rambos here. No individual acts of bravery are mentioned. They gathered together for the purpose of fighting together for a single cause: to defend their lives and the lives of their people. **They were much better together than any one of them could ever be alone.** That’s true of us as well, isn’t it? That’s why Paul writes to the church in Philippi that he wants to hear that they are “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents.” (Phil. 1:27-28). Let me make a couple of applications, if I may.
- **First, we cannot afford to isolate ourselves from the body.** We gather together because we need each other and as Paul said in Ephesians, when each part is working properly, that makes the grow so that it builds itself up in love. It’s not good for you to isolate yourself, and if you only make

it to one out of 3 or 4 Sunday morning services, that should be a warning sign. Like the red light that lights up when your engine is out of oil, there should be warning bells going off in your head if you are not fully engaged with the body. Not just because you need something the rest of us have when we gather, but because we need something YOU have! We are better together than we could ever be alone.

- **Second, we cannot afford to judge the body improperly.** Let's be careful not to see the rest of the body through the eyeglasses the Lord has given to us as individuals. If I handed you my contacts this morning, especially my right one which is 20/850, you wouldn't be able to see a thing unless you're as blind as I am. Neither would I be able to see through your glasses. I am sure that when the Jews fought in Susa on those two days, they were organized according to gifts and abilities and callings. The biggest, toughest guys were maybe on the front line, because they were great in close combat. But there were skillful archers who weren't good at all in a fistfight but they could take the right eyelash off a gnat from 100 yards with their bow and arrow. Swap those two guys, and put the tough guy who cannot shoot a bow to save his life in the back, and put the little guy who is an incredible archer but couldn't win a fistfight with his little sister in the front, and you have disaster. Read 1 Corinthians 12 again and be reminded that we all have different callings and different gifts, but we serve the same God. We are not all called to the same ministries, but we are all called to love the same God. And to love each other.
- The Jews gathered together and fought as one. We must do the same: by showing up when the body gathers, and by using your gifts and pursuing the ministries God has called you to in this church and in this community, and allowing your brothers and sisters to do the same.
- Let's pursue that unity even now as we prepare our hearts to take communion together, as one body.