

**THURSDAY:
CELEBRATING**
Read: Esther 9:20-23

What is your favorite holiday? All of us answer this differently. Why would you not love Christmas? And so many people love Thanksgiving (similar meal-no worry about gifts). As incredible (and important!) as each of those is, I really believe my kids would tell you they love Halloween the most. If it were up to each of them their costumes would be purchased or made on November 1 (which means they would try to buy 17 others before trick or treating actually got here). They are serious about costumes...and that is why they would love the Feast of Purim.

When Xerxes declared that the Jewish people were able to defend themselves, it changed everything. The feast of Purim was instituted as a conclusion to this war against the Persians. As a matter of fact, Jewish people still celebrate by Jewish people today. The feast is a huge party where everyone wears costumes in the same way that we do at Halloween. There are special cookies called Hamantaschen designed to look like Haman's hat (or his cut off ear according to some!). The story of Esther is read and every time Haman is mentioned, the crowd goes crazy so no one can hear his name. Simultaneously, they celebrate God's love for His people and justice shown toward the enemy.

I can't help but think of how love and justice are at the center of our story as well. At the exact same time, we are loved by God and deserve justice for our sin. We are both created by God and enemies of God. However, the intertwining of love and justice is displayed-both violently and victoriously-on the cross of Jesus. In the most well known verse in all of the Bible (John 3:16), Jesus tells Nicodemus that God so loved the world that He gave His only son. Paul tells the church at Corinth that "he became sin who knew no sin so that we may become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21)." The story of every believer is the story of God's unified love and justice.

In the Great Commandment of the Old Testament (Micah 6:8), we see the lives of those who follow after Yahweh do not just unify love and justice. God wants to bring the people to a place where we grasp the depths of His blessings. To do what is 'good and right' and walk with God, then, we seek to do justice out of merciful love. God doesn't just say he loves us through justifying us, He shows He loves us through Christ dying in our place. If we are going to follow after this Jesus, we are to live in a way that shows the same.

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- How often do you think of when you came to know Jesus?
 - Do you desire to celebrate God saving people in your life who do not know Him?
 - In what ways are you doing justice out of merciful love? In other words, how are you serving the Lord through serving others?

**FRIDAY:
LEGACY**
Read: Esther 10

Does it matter to you how you are remembered? As the book of Esther wraps up, there are only three verses in Chapter 10. While all of it is Mordecai, one sentence in particular stands out to me. It reads, "He continued to pursue prosperity for his people and to speak for the well being of all of his descendants (Esther 10:3, CSB). When we met Mordecai, He had a Persian name and had acclimated to the luxurious life of living in Persia even though the Persians had offered to

allow the Jewish people back to Israel. Even worse, he was planning to send his niece (in secret!) to a terrible situation where she had the slightest chance of becoming the queen. If not-she would live the rest of her life lonely in a Persian holding cell as a possible concubine of Xerxes. However, that is not the end of his story. He becomes a champion of the Jewish people. As we have examined Esther's story, we see much of the same. Both of them had adapted to their surroundings. However, there came a moment when they realized the importance of knowing who they actually were.

These remembrances should be an encouragement to us. Far too often, we are immobilized by our pasts. There is a chance that you made some terrible decisions that have caused you to not do all that God has empowered you to do. Maybe it dates back to high school and now (even as an adult!) you are still defined by what you did and not who you are in Jesus. Thankfully, the story of God's people is not a story of our bad decisions. It is a story of God's good redemption that He has shown us in His Son. As a result, we do not have to live overwhelmed by what we were. To do so is to disregard who (and whose) we are. So much of the New Testament is about our new identity. Peter tells us how God sees us. As we close out our time in the book of Esther, I want you to read these words of Peter's in a personal way.

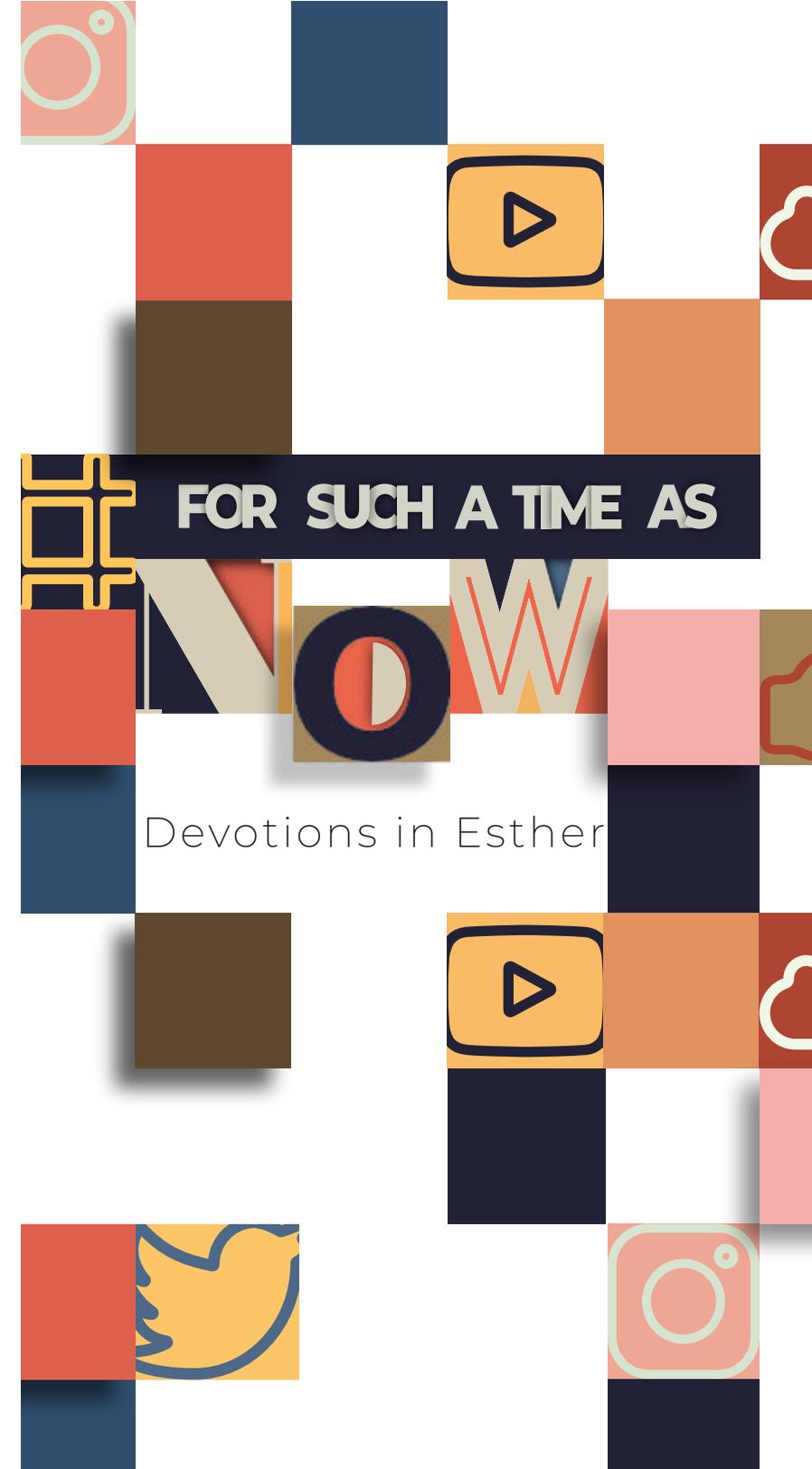
1 Peter 2:9-10

I am chosen by God from the foundations of the world.
I am a royal priest-I can enter into His presence through the shed blood of Jesus.
I am holy-God has set me apart.
I know His mercy-even though I fail and struggle, God is forever merciful to me.

We are no longer defined by what we were but by whose we are. Because of this, may we have a legacy like Esther and Mordecai and love Jesus by declaring his excellencies to those who do not know Him in the hope that one day they will.

**SATURDAY:
READ & PRAY**

1. Pray for Chad as he prepares to preach God's Word.
2. Ask God to prepare your heart to hear and obey His Word.
3. Pray that God would use the gathering of the church to encourage the saints and call the lost to repent and believe.
4. Pray for our worship team as they prepare to lead us.



MONDAY: CONSEQUENCE AND CONFESSION

Read: Esther 6-7

Xerxes was beside himself. His wife wanted to meet with him and the most trusted man in the Kingdom. Something was on her heart and mind and she was broken.

“Esther, tell me what is wrong. I will give you half of the Kingdom if you will just tell me what is wrong.” The thing is that she didn’t want half the kingdom. She just wanted to rescue a large portion of it from a narcissistic mad man.

“My people have been betrayed. There is someone in your kingdom who wants to kill everyone like me...all of my people...and it is the person in the Kingdom that you trust the most! It is Haman.”

As a parent, you can see it in your kids eyes when they are busted! On the other hand, you can tell by their reaction if an accusation (usually made by a sibling!) is false by the reaction of child. This not always the case. But I read my kids pretty well and Hope reads them like a book. You can tell when they are guilty by their reaction.

If we take that example and multiply it by a million, i think we have a glimmer into the situation with Haman and Esther. Haman has been arranging for an entire people to die because one man had wronged him. Some commentators point out that-based on the wording-it seems as if Haman was communicating that he only wanted to enslave the Jewish people (not that that is in any way better!). Xerxes angrily steps out of the room and Haman is on top of Esther begging for his life. Ironically, the King believes He is trying to harm Esther. This misunderstanding is his ultimate end. Sin leads us to a life ending trap.

When we read Proverbs 5:22-23, we see what sin does. In his commentary on on Esther, Landon Dowden points out that Haman is tangled up in the ropes of His own sin. Haman’s sin became his downfall-like all of us apart from the grace of Jesus. Choosing sin leads toward nothing good. It has consequences that reach are further reaching than we ever expects and its impact is greater than just us. Our sin affects everyone around us.

Thankfully, God reminds us that confession is-literally-good for the soul. When the nonbeliever confesses sin and trusts Jesus, God is faithful to save. God reminds us that confessing our sins to one another helps fellow believers to grow in godliness. Even as we interact with other those who don’t trust Christ, sharing God’s amazing grace in the face of our shortcomings helps to build bridges for them to know of our great God. In Christ, God takes messes and makes masterpieces (Eph 2:8-10).

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- What makes it so hard to admit when we are wrong?
 - Why is it so difficult to admit our sins to others? Have you shared the story of God’s grace to you with a non-believer? If not, why not?
 - How has God used your confession of sin to help you to grow as a follower of Jesus?

TUESDAY: WAITING

Read: Esther 8

We are in a hurry. Think about all of the ways we are allowed to expedite the various processes in our lives. For years, we’ve had instant oil change and fast food. If we travel, there are multiple ways for us to get from Point A to Point B faster (TSA Pre-check, CLEAR, Uber, etc.) With the right memberships, we can get packages faster, bypass lines at the movie theater and amusement parks, and have any food we want delivered. In a world where ‘time is money’, waiting is out of the question. For better or worse, we are able to claim to be the busiest, least patient people in the history of history.

Mordecai did not have the option to be impatient. One of our first encounters with Mordecai comes in chapter 2 of Esther when he saves the life of the King by foiling a plot. In any world-regardless of the point in history-this person would (and should!) be celebrated. In Persia, to not honor the person who saves your life is to dishonor the kingdom. Mordecai should be celebrated for his bravery-but he isn’t! He also has to watch as his enemy seeks to kill everyone like him. However, in Esther 6, the King finally remembers Mordecai and celebrates him. In Chapter 8, he is dressed in royal robes and celebrated throughout all of Susa.

This is an idea that reverberates through the pages of Scripture. In one of the most beloved verses in all of Scripture-Jeremiah 29:11- we hear of God’s wonderful plan for our lives:

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

People love this verse so much. It is on social media and graduation invitations and koozies. However, we miss God’s good plan for His people involved 70 years of captivity. We have made passage about God’s longstanding faithfulness fully about us. As Peter tells us, our understanding of timing (among so many other things!) is unlike God’s. I pray we would trust in this truth rather than ignore it.

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- Is there a moment you remember in your life where God’s timing was not exactly what you wanted? In what ways do you find comfort when God’s timing doesn’t line up with your own?
 - Last week, we started fasting and praying over people in our lives. What are you praying for God to do in the life of this friend?
 - How do you use your experiences of waiting on the LORD to minister to struggling friends?

WEDNESDAY: PLEADING

Read: Esther 8

Remember two weeks ago about Mordecai grieving only so far as the city gates? The reason was simple enough. King Xerxes would not allow mourning in his presence. Even at the city gates, Esther tried to cover her cousin’s sadness so that he would not be punished. Xerxes wanted to have nothing to do with mourning. Obviously, mourning had no place in Persia.

Think about how things have changed. In Esther 6, the King sees that his wife is distraught and offers her half the kingdom. In chapter 7, Esther has dinner with her husband and the man who wants to kill all Jews everywhere. She shares of her ‘affliction’ about worrying the King for anything less than the death of her people. It does not take a professional counselor to know that, without a doubt, Esther would be distraught as she shares this news with her husband. His response-fury. However, this will not be the end of it. Esther pleads with the King to care for the Jewish people. In chapter 8, we see Esther approach her husband again-in a place she does not belong according to their customs-asking for the only person with the power to stop the mistreatment of the Jews to do something...anything.

The transition we see in the life of Esther is something to behold. Early on, she wants to cover up the faults and flaws of her uncle. Near the end of the book, she has entered into His throne room without permission twice to speak on behalf of her people. People that she knew. People that she loved. People like her Uncle.

Have you noticed a transition in your own life in the way you approach the Lord? It is easy for us to be like Esther early in the story. It is much simpler to cover up and ignore the fate of people that we know and love who don’t know Jesus. However, the reality of separation from God should break our hearts causing us to weep. When I am the most honest with myself, it is discouraging to think that I am not more broken for lost people than I actually am.

Yet we have a God who wants His name to be known. He wants us to talk to Him and become part of His grand plan of redemption. In the Garden we see Jesus pray for those who were close to Him and those who would hear God’s message of hope and redemption through those followers. We see Paul pray strategically for believers to live a life worthy of the Lord that pleases Him in every way! And, thankfully, we see this major difference in our situation and Esther’s. She had no clue as to how Xerxes would respond-there was no promise she would live long enough for him to even hear her. Our King is slow to anger and abounding in love and patient in ways that we could never imagine. Not only does He hear us-He wants us to talk to Him asking for Him to do what only He can.

- As you evaluate your life, do you believe you boldly approach the LORD? If so, how? If not, why not?
- How do you pray strategically for yourself? For other believers? For lost people?
- In what ways have you asked God to work in the lives of the people you have been praying for over the last two weeks?