

Session 6

May 27, 2018

KEEP STANDING

Esther 8:1-8; 9:20-22

The final chapters of the book tie up the loose ends of this magnificent story of God's providential care of His people. Even though the Jews were living in a foreign land, God was faithful in protecting them. Because of this, the focus at the end of the story moves from the *providence* of God to the *faithfulness* of God. Psalm 119 reminds us that His faithfulness "is for all generations," and the story of Esther proves it.

God is faithful to those who honor Him (vv. 1-2). Finally, Queen Esther was able to reveal her relationship to Mordecai and all the details of what had happened were no doubt shared. There is no shame here or need to apologize as all the connections were made. In yet another ironic twist, the estate of Haman—who was once the king's most honored official—was awarded to the very people that Haman schemed to destroy. The scene is all about *honor*. Mordecai honored God by refusing to bow down before Haman. Esther honored her people, her cousin Mordecai, and her God by standing up for them all when it could have cost her her life. Esther was honored by King Ahasuerus for exposing the evil plan and selfish pride of Haman. And in the end, Mordecai was honored by the very God whom he honored from the start!

God is faithful to those who honor His people (vv. 3-8). All the way back in Genesis 12, God promised Abraham: "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; And you shall be a blessing." Then God spoke beyond Abraham regarding that nation (Israel): "*I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*" In contrast to Haman, whose cursed attempt to destroy God's people led to his own destruction, Esther's plea to the king led to their preservation and God's blessing. Ahasuerus honored Esther and her people with the king's signet ring. This was equal to giving Mordecai the king's authority. Beyond that, the king granted blanket permission to write whatever decrees pleased them regarding the Jews! (v. 8). In chapter 9, those who sought to destroy the Jews were instead slaughtered by the Jews, ridding the kingdom of the treacherous people who aligned with Haman. This was all done in full sight of the king, and with his permission (9:13-15). While King Ahasuerus would one day be assassinated, for the time being all was at peace. Those who honor God's people receive His blessing...even if they are pagan kings!

God is faithful to those who remember (9:20-22). Throughout the Old Testament, God's great deeds and marvelous works were written down. Special events were also marked by feasts and festivals, all to insure that the lessons and warnings God had provided were preserved for the next generation. These verses mark the inauguration of the feast known as *Purim*. The word comes from the local language of Persia, and means "lots" (as in the *casting of lots*). This commemorates the fact that Haman cast lots (a game of luck) to decide which day to implement his evil plan to destroy God's people (Est. 3:7). Ironically, it should remind us that there is no such thing as luck when it comes to God's providential care! While often overshadowed by Passover (celebrated the following month), Purim was instituted as a particularly festive two-day celebration, "because during those days the Jews got rid of their enemies...their sorrow was turned into rejoicing and their mourning into a holiday." These were to be days of "feasting, rejoicing, and of sending gifts to one another and the poor" (9:22). While the story of Esther and its subsequent feast is particularly Jewish, the great theme of God's ongoing care and divine deliverance applies to us all.