May you have spiritual well-being in Christ Jesus

There is wonderful news for us today, that God will never leave us or forsake us. This is good news for the Christian; the person who has realized that they are not good enough to stand in the presence of God, that the penalty has been paid on their behalf by Jesus, who have repented of their sinful ways and depend entirely on Christ for eternal life.

When we truly accept Jesus, God, through the Holy Spirit begins to change us. He makes us like Christ. This process is called sanctification and it won’t be complete until after our life here on earth is done. Like all change, this process can be painful. God has to get rid of all the garbage that stubbornly clings to us. Sin is a leech that is very hard to get rid of: But Jesus has defeated sin.

This is the wonderful news that we have during all the hardships we endure. In these times, satan will try to convince us that we suffer because God has left us. Don’t be fooled. God is not a quitter. The life of Jesus has been invested in you and God will have a return. He is working on you and He will not stop until you are perfect.

*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*

 Philippians 1:6

In Christ’s love

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Esther 8

Haman has been killed and his body hung in disgrace. He can no longer cause any more problems for the Jews or anyone else. However, because of his actions, a great problem still remains. The edict he enacted that ordered the extermination of the Jews was not nullified by his death; it still remains in effect.

It is part of the Christian’s life to consider consequences of their actions. It is obvious that we need to consider the consequences to ourselves, but we have a much higher calling. We need to consider what effect our actions will have on others. Not only in the immediate, but also in the distant future. We must consider others even more than we consider ourselves.

This idea flies in the face of our current culture. In our society today, the self has become an idol. In 2 Timothy 3, Paul gives a list of things that describe how people will act in the last days. Among them are people who are “*lovers of self*”. We are in the last days. He says that it will be difficult in the last days; just think about how difficult it is to deal with selfish people. There have always been those who are selfish, but never to the almost militant point we see it now. There are a lot of Hamans running around.

It was Persian policy to confiscate the property of criminals. It was at the discretion of the king to decide what was to be done with it. King Ahasuerus gave the house of Haman to Queen Esther. By house, it means his entire estate. All his property and wealth would have been taken and it became the property of Queen Esther.

We see that all of Haman’s wealth and power and honor did him no good. He could take none of it with him. It could not save his life. If fact, letting it all go to his head cost him everything he had including his life. There is another unintended consequence to his actions: It negatively impacted his family. For all his failings, I can’t imagine that he wanted his family to be destitute. He certainly planned to leave his estate to his ten sons, who in turn would have cared for his wife, Zeresh. Instead, all were turned out into the streets. Even more, as we find out later, Haman’s actions cost his ten sons their lives.

The Bible is so very important. It tells us how to live so that we don’t cause these horrific consequences for others, and especially for those we love. It is full of wisdom for this life along with the pathway for the life to come. By reading the Bible, over and over; by studying what it says; its words become hidden in our hearts; they lodge in the forefront of our minds; we think in terms of God’s word. As followers of Christ, we have the indwelling Holy Spirit. He helps us to understand Scripture and to apply it in our lives.

King Ahasuerus found out that his wife of five years was a Jew. Next, he finds out that the man who had once saved his life, Mordecai, was her older cousin and father figure. Esther told the king how Mordecai had raised her properly, continued to keep track of how she was doing, and provided her with wise advice.

We see once again that the king is eager to give someone else responsibility for running things. He had had the presence of mind to get his signet ring back from Haman, and now he gives it to Mordecai. It doesn’t seem that the king is very wise: you would think that after what he had just gone through with Haman that he would hold onto that ring and its power for a while. But that’s not king Ahasuerus. What he’s heard from Esther is enough for him; Mordecai sounds like just the man for the job.

Fortunately for all concerned, Mordecai is the man for the job. The first new responsibility he receives is to run the estate of Haman. More than run it, it becomes his home. The irony is obvious in that Mordecai ends up owning everything that his mortal enemy had owned. But more importantly, see what Esther did here. Haman’s wealth was vast, and it had just been given to Esther. How tempting it would have been to keep it; to add to the honor she already had as royalty. But she remembered Mordecai.

Here she had an opportunity to show gratitude for the one who had sacrificed in order to care for her; for the one who still kept caring for her and her welfare, even when she had become queen. She now had an opportunity to care for him as he had cared for her. She didn’t simply give him a part of it, or even half of it. She gave him the whole thing.

Our king has given us great wealth. He has shared His immeasurable inheritance with us, his glory with us and even died for us; taking punishment on Himself that we deserve. We don’t really have much to offer in return for His goodness to us, but what we do have, we must give Him: our lives. Not just part of our lives, not even half of our lives, but all of our lives. We do that by following His commands out of gratitude, not compulsion. In everything we do, work as unto the Lord. Treat each and every person you come in contact with, with respect and kindness. It’s not easy, but easy was never part of the deal.

Apparently, some time had passed and nothing else had happened with King Ahasuerus. No further mention was made of Haman’s edict. So, Esther once again took her life in her hands and went uninvited into the king’s presence. As you recall, this meant the death penalty unless the king found favor with you and offered a reprieve. The last time Esther had done this, she quietly appeared at his doorway and waited for the king to notice her. This time was very different. She had realized that Ahasuerus didn’t intend to do anything to help the Jewish people and this broke her heart.

She fell at the king’s feet, crying and begging him to stop what Haman had started. King Ahasuerus took pity on her and held out the golden scepter. Esther rises, composes herself, and once more masterfully speaks to the king. Twice she honors him by letting him know that the power of decision is his. Twice she appeals to how he feels about her. It is apparent that she cannot reason with him on the basis of righteousness. He has no concern for many thousands of the people in his kingdom dying. She must ask with regard to his honor and as a personal favor to herself.

Mordecai is brought in and the king replies to them both. There is a small hint of exasperation in his answer. He has seen to it that the problem, Haman, has been executed in a most humiliating way and he has given Haman’s great wealth to Esther. What more could he do? Besides, he couldn’t overturn the law because the law of the Medes and the Persians could not be revoked. He wanted to be done with the whole affair. In true form, he gave them the authority to solve the problem as they saw fit.

Next, we see a flurry of activity that is very much like we read in chapter 3. Scribes are called, an edict is prepared, and it is translated into all the languages of the Persian Empire. One important difference is that this includes the language of the Jews. Whereas Haman’s edict was sent by couriers, this one is sent by messengers on royal horses, which would have been stronger, faster, and far more impressive when delivering the edict.

Verse 11 gives the details of the new command in the name of the king. The solution to the problem is to give full rights to the Jews to form their own fighting force to defend themselves and even to attack those who were their enemies. If nothing else, the Israelites were warriors. They would be more than happy to defend themselves and also attack those who were their enemies. It was one edict against another.

In verse 13, we read that the Jews were to be ready to avenge themselves. This is difficult for us as Christians, because we are used to the idea that vengeance is God’s and we are told to leave it to Him. Let’s consider this for a moment. The first thing to remember is that this is all under the old covenant. One of the precepts of the law was “*an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*”. The whole idea behind this law was to make the punishment fit the crime and not go overboard in revenge. If you were caught stealing someone’s sheep, you had to pay the person back a sheep plus a little more for the aggravation caused; this was the punishment fitting the crime. On the other hand, for stealing a sheep you weren’t hanged and have your house burned down; this would have been revenge.

Notice that the actions allowed by the new edict are exactly what was allowed in the old. This was eye for eye. But there is also the idea of revenge and even in the Old Testament, God said that revenge was His. There are many accounts of God taking His revenge on groups of people who had reviled God or cursed His people. God has many ways of doing this: He used plague, fire and burning sulfur from the sky, hornets, foreign armies. But sometimes He used the people of Israel. This was very much the case when God had the Israelites invade the promised land with the command to destroy every living person. In the case of this edict, the Israelites would have seen their action as God’s vengeance.

Mordecai went out from the king wearing royal robes and a crown. Haman had sought this honor for himself when the king told him he wanted to honor someone. He grabbed for honor that was not his; even for honor that was fleeting and temporary. How much better it is, to quietly live and do what is right in the eyes of God. God will see to it that you are honored. Maybe in this life, but definitely in the next if you are a follower of Christ.

This is what we see in the story of Esther in the physical. This is our spiritual reality now under the new covenant in the blood of Jesus. Mordecai received honor while he lived and he used it wisely. But even this honor would come to an end one day. If we receive honor and power in this life, we must resist the temptation to let it go to our head. We must use it for the glory of God and for the good of others. By doing this, under the discipleship of Jesus Christ, we will receive an everlasting honor. And with that will be just what there was for the Jews then: light and gladness and joy and honor. We will have it forever.

Prayer

O Lord, keep us from being a Haman. Keep self-centeredness far from us; protect us from the desire for honor that would make us grab for it; may pride be far from us, remind us that we have nothing that we have not been given; shield us from arrogance, because we are dust and to dust we shall return; let greed be repulsive to us, lest it become our god and we harm ourselves by turning from You.

O Lord, keep us from being an Ahasuerus. May we never seek to simply indulge ourselves in pleasure, for earthly pleasure doesn’t last; let us not shirk our duties, You have given us work to do; help us, that we don’t pass off to others what we need to do ourselves; protect us from turning a blind eye to those whom we could help.

O Lord, make us like Jesus. Let us look to the needs of others; give us love for our fellow mankind; may we be generous with time and money, which are both gifts from You; keep us in gratitude for the many blessings You have bestowed upon us; strengthen us to do the work You have for us; keep our eyes focused on eternity with You and not this temporary life; bestow Your Holy Spirit upon us that we seek Your glory and the glory of Your Son and our Saviour, Jesus the Christ.

It is in the name of Jesus we pray

Amen