

An Enemy Destroyed

Esther 7:9-10; 8:11-12; 9:1-17

Sermon preached by Rev. Joshua Flinn, 29 October 2023, AM Service.

Christianity is easily the most mocked religion on the face of this planet. Even a man as famous as Joe Rogan observed this recently. The world gives respect to Hinduism, and Buddhism, and Māori animism, and even Islam... ironically... but there's something about Christianity which draws the ire of every unbeliever on the face of the planet.

Our God is ridiculed regularly on television, particularly in comedy. His name joined with curse words in common conversation.

Those who follow him are considered, by definition, weak of mind, and morally eccentric. They must be crazy to remain virgins until they're married, deny abortion, and believe in the male headship of a family. That we would lose a job rather than work on a Sunday... that we would obey to his call to worship and go to church, instead of watch the rugby world final. Ludicrous.

Christianity is a laughing-stock.

But... anyone who knows the biblical God, knows he is not to be mocked. God will vindicate his most holy name. In fact, so important is it that he is worshipped (and worshipped appropriately), that, when he redeemed Israel from Egypt, he did so with the explicit intention that they would worship him.

God will elevate his great name.

This makes sense. He is, after all the creator and the preserver of all things.

What's staggering, though, is that he loves a rebellious people such as Israel. A people who, having rescued them from Egyptian slavery, were so weak, that they couldn't even protect themselves from the Amalekites.

The Amalekites sought to attack the weakest of them... the tired, the elderly, the women and children... those lagging behind the rest.

And God declared that because of this, he would wipe them from the face of the earth.

He would work, not just to protect his own name... which as we've established, makes sense... but he promised to take vengeance for a people he loved.

And here we see that judgement finally fall.

The Amalekites attacked the Israelite stragglers, and it was an Israelite straggler that God used to crush them. They attacked the women and the children, and God raised up an orphaned and dispossessed girl to destroy them.

There are two things we learn from this theme, coming to a head here in chapter 9.

1. God's judgement doesn't come immediately, but it does come

Hundreds of years had passed since the Exodus. Depending on when you want to date that book, it is upwards of 800 years prior to these events.

But the Amalekites... now known as the Agagites... represented by Haman and his sons, are now dead on the gallows.

God was faithful to his promises... and notably, in this instance, it was not a promise to **save** a group of people, but, having condemned them, to destroy them.

It's also significant, that in his sovereign will, the 10 sons of Haman were not only dispossessed of their possessions, and not only killed, but hung on the gallows just as their father was. Significantly, the word for gallows here is simply the Hebrew word for tree... and for the Jews, **they** at least understood that to hang on a tree was a sign that you had been cursed.

The judgement of the Agagites is a foretaste, in an earthly way, of the final judgement that all will face. All of us will be held accountable for our actions. And there are only two outcomes... heaven and hell.

And, perhaps, more to the point here, nobody knows when this will actually happen save God himself. It's been 2000 years since Christ died. That kind of timeframe breeds complacency, doesn't it? And forgetfulness...

And yet the timeline, by no means, undermines the prophecy:

Proverbs 24:19-20: *"Do not fret because of evildoers, Nor be envious of the wicked; For there will be no prospect for the evil man; The lamp of the wicked will be put out."*

Brothers and sisters, there's a stark warning here for all those who draw breath on this earth. God is incredibly patient with those he has made... those who deny him. And yet his patience should, by no means, cause the unbeliever to be slow to repent.

God hates sin. And he has promised to crush his enemies under the seed of the woman.

The judgement against the Amalekites is a testimony of God's strength.

A strength which is present and active, even while nobody acknowledges it, and everyone presumes it doesn't exist. His name is still not mentioned here... in worship, or anger.

And as the people of God, we need to take this seriously. Some of us... I think it's probably fair to say, all of us, take sin more lightly than we should. Which is perhaps why we, in turn, take unbelief more lightly than we should. And we take spiritual warfare more lightly than we should.

Case and point: Halloween. Congregation, as a side-note: this is not a celebration that is fitting for Christians. It's Satanic, and undermines the seriousness of the battle we have with him. Do not allow your children to participate in this wickedness.

We think that us causing offense to someone else is a greater crime than them causing offense to God. And so we don't talk to people about their standing before him.

John MacArthur was asked at one point whether he was worried about offending people with some of the things he was saying... and he said: *"If the truth offends, then let it offend. People have been living their whole lives in offense to God; let them be offended for a while."*

Warn people of the wrath to come. If they are not right with God, they will face it without a saviour.

Sobering... but just as true now as it was in the 4th century BC.

2. God's judgement is only escaped by his grace

Haman was a righteous man according to Persian law. Ironically, he, and his family in turn, suffered as a result of that righteousness. The command he gave earlier in the book was done only in conjunction with Achashverosh...

And yet, Achashverosh, in another drunken rage, condemns his second in command for his own failures.

Our God is not like this. He is perfect and longsuffering and just. He will only punish the evil doer... and such a person is defined as evil by his own laws... laws which are, incidentally, drawn from his own character. They are more timeless and binding than even the laws of the Medes and Persians.

And so we have passages like Psalm 34:16 *"The face of the LORD is against evildoers, to cut off the memory of them from the earth."*

The implication here is that just as the Amalekites were deserving of judgement, and faced it here at the hand of Israel... so too are all those God has defined as evildoers.

And that isn't arbitrary. It's grounded in his Law. It doesn't change from generation to generation.

But that makes us wonder, does it not? We see here finally the Amalekites, crushed under the seed of the woman. But no less deserving of judgement are the exiled Jews. Those who have denied their God and abused his love.

Israel will also be subject to judgement.

Again, this is the question that Esther begs to have answered... why is it the Amalekites on the gallows and not Israel?

This is an especially powerful question to consider when we realised that 450ish years later, Israel is now found hanging their Redeemer on a tree. Crucifying the Lord of Glory and the Prince of Peace?

How much greater is this sin than that of the Amalekites? To those who rise up in support of the Devil, and work, not to crush the serpent's head, but to celebrate the crushing of the Son of God?

Haman and his sons were not the only ones worthy of facing the curse of a tree... hanging on the gallows...

The Jews were not free from their own sin... All men deserve that end. Israel was not somehow more righteous than the other nations. Their hearts were, by nature, the same...

As Paul says in Romans... all have fallen short.

Congregation, we pray this way for the persecuted church sometimes, don't we? That God would preserve their lives... that he would stop the killing and the torture and the pain.

We pray the same, even for more mundane matters... that God would heal someone from cancer, or pneumonia, or some other terminal disease.

But the question we see in this passage is that Israel deserved destruction... which is why they were in exile... but they avoided the gallows because of God's grace and patience. Haman and the Amalekites ended up on the gallows, because God's patience came to an end. And his judgement would inevitably fall.

And so the question becomes: How long will God's patience towards Israel last?

And by implication, how long will God's patience be to nominal Christians, who go through some of the motions of Christianity, and yet have the same heart as the pagans... ?

500 years after the events recorded here, the house of Judah was destroyed in AD 70. Judgement fell upon the house of God.

And congregation, there was only one way they could have avoided this. Had they heeded the warning of the book of Esther. Repent and throw yourself upon the mercy of your God.

Why is anyone? Jew or Gentile, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, man or woman... why is anyone able to be free of God's hand of judgement? Not because you are born into a particular family... and not because you are on a membership role or have given money to the church or whatever it may be...

But because in the grace and kindness of our God, he would send his son to hang on the gallows in your place. To take your sin upon his shoulders and pay the price for it in full.

The Egyptians thought they could crush the growing nation of Israel... the Amalekites thought they could crush the weak stragglers of God's people... the Babylonians and the Persians and the Greeks and the Romans, all thought they could dominate and control the bride of Yahweh.

And the Devil and all the forces in the heavenly places thought they could crush under their heel the Son of God himself.

And yet they failed... and he is risen.

Congregation, though the world stands against God and his anointed, he sits in the heavens and laughs at their foolishness. He calls them to kiss the Son lest he be angry and they perish in the way. Israel needed to learn the same lesson as the Agagites...

And we need to learn that same lesson.

If you are a Christian here this morning, do not take lightly the justice of your God. Do not take lightly the Law by which you know your sin. And do not take lightly the death of your saviour on the cross to pay for that sin in full.

We can only come into the throne of grace because of his work. And we should be in awe of his long-suffering and his patient love.

How deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure, that He should give His only Son... to make a wretch his treasure.

I will not boast in anything, no gifts, no power, no wisdom; But I will boast in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection. Why should I gain from His reward? I cannot give an answer; But this I know with all my heart – His wounds have paid my ransom."

What a wonderful love... what a wonderful saviour.

May we worship him well.

Amen.