UPC Family Devotional

June – Week 4

Memory Verse of the Week:

“on this day the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but now the tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them.”

-Esther 9:1b

June 20 Monday Esther 8: 1-10

Since the property of condemned criminals becomes the property of the king, Xerxes offers Haman’s estate to his beloved queen, Esther, who in turn appoints Mordecai as overseer of the estate. Xerxes also gives Mordecai his signet ring, a symbol of his authority. When Jesus saved us from the eternal condemnation resulting from our sins, he also secured for his bride every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. Then, he appointed us to a new task: to go into all the world with his authority and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19). Christ saved us, and enriched us, then appointed us to his Kingdom work. Let us receive his gracious gifts and joyfully obey his call.

How are you experiencing Christ's blessings in your life? How are you obeying his command to make disciples?

Haman is dead, but his wicked plan is still in effect. The royal edit to exterminate the Jews remains irrevocably in place. Once again, Esther pleads with her husband to save her people. Xerxes is sympathetic to her request, but not even he can revoke his own decree. Another edict, however, can be issued, and Xerxes gives his new Prime Minister, Mordecai, total freedom to write it using the authority of the King's signet ring. This is a stunningly clear picture of what God has done for us in Christ. God, because He is holy, must carry out judgment against sin. But through Christ, He brings us into a new covenant so that sinners who come to Him can be delivered from death.

What other hints of God's plan of salvation have you noticed in the book of Esther? Take time to meditate on how God planned our redemption and praise Him for it.

June 21 Tuesday Esther 8: 11-17

The new edict that goes forth in the name of the king empowers the Jews in every city to take up arms and defend themselves. They are authorized to destroy the armed men that attack their families and to plunder their property. The new edit does not guarantee peace and security, but it does give the Jews the opportunity to fight back in full force. Likewise, we must not be troubled when we go through hardships. Christ promises that in this life, we will have trouble. But he also gives us everything we need to resist the enemy’s attacks and be victorious. And let us not forget that he also brought us together as his church so that we can protect and defend one another.

What resources has God given us to resist the enemy? How have other believers helped you fight, and how will you help others?

Mordechai leaves the palace clothed in royal garments with a golden crown on his head. The tables are turned. The peril of God’s people has turned into privilege. To this new edict and at the sight of Mordecai, the city responds with joy because victory is secure, and many local inhabitants adopt Jewish identity out of great fear. Without ever mentioning God's name, the book of Esther clearly shows God at work. He may not always work in miraculous or even impressive ways, but He is surely at work, guiding His people and leading others to Him through them. We can be confident in His victory, even in the midst of His apparent absence. He will never abandon us.

What are some examples of God's faithfulness during times of testing in your life? How should our victory in Christ influence our perspectives on our current circumstances?

June 22 Wednesday Esther 9: 1-16

The fateful day of the first edict arrives, and we see that Haman was far from being the only one who hated God's people. There are many throughout Kingdom who might accurately be called the “enemy of the Jews.” But the king’s new edict makes all the difference: even the officials and governors who once sought to see the Jews destroyed are now helping them against their enemies. Proverbs 16:7 says, “When the Lord takes pleasure in anyone's way, He causes their enemies to make peace with them.” We do not need to fret when people turn against us. Let us faithfully walk in God's ways and trust that He can change their hearts as well as defend us.

How do you respond when others antagonize you? What does it mean to trust God when we are attacked?

The Jews destroy all those who are planning to destroy them, including the sons of Haman. However, we do not touch the plunder, which is theirs for the taking as a reward for conquest. They are not interested in the material benefits that they could gain according to the customs of war. They simply want to defend themselves and destroy the enemies of God’s people. In Christ, God has given us victory over sin, death, and the devil. Let us wage war in the spiritual realm, not for the mere feeling of victory, but to be free of lingering sin in our lives so that God can receive all the glory due His name.

What things are you still compromising with? How can you ask other believers to help you fight them?

June 23 Thursday Esther 9: 17-28

Two days of spontaneous feasting and celebration follow the deliverance of God's people from their enemies. Mordecai wisely records these celebrations, encouraging his people to remember them annually in the years to come. Special days, celebrations, and observances should be a vital part of all our lives. As Christians we do this especially on Easter and Christmas. As families and churches, we ought to celebrate special seasons and important “holy days” in our lives, not so much because they are marked on our calendars or to follow the culture trend, but because they remind us of God's goodness, grace, and deliverance. We do this because Jesus has indeed turned our sorrow into joy and our mourning into celebration.

What are some ways you observe and celebrate special times and days in your life? How do these remind you of God's goodness to you and to your family?

The Jews establish the festival of Purim, named after the Hebrew word for “lots” - the dice that Haman used to determine the day on which the Jews will be destroyed by the king‘s edict. Through the grace and the Providence of Almighty God, it has become their day of deliverance and celebration. Centuries later, soldiers belonging to a new, Roman Empire would cast lots at the foot of a blood-stained cross for the garments of our Lord and Savior. And it is through that cross that Jesus accomplishes for God's people what neither Esther nor Mordecai could ever do: eternal deliverance from the inescapable certainty of death. His resurrection is the sure and certain sign of our victory. Let us celebrate him!

When has God turned a threatening situation into an occasion for celebration? What are some ways you regularly rejoice in your salvation?

June 24 Friday Esther 9: 29 - 10: 3

From obscure Jews living among a sea of Pagan Persians to the queen and second-in-command of the empire, Esther and Mordecai are exalted and used by God to bring about a great deliverance. The full authority to establish a holiday in the kingdom of Persia serves as a witness to God's sovereign will and work among his people. When we look at our background, status, or lack of talents, we wonder if God could ever use us. He can, He does, and He will! And just as we remember Esther and Mordecai not so much for who they were, but rather for how they gave themselves to serve their people, so we should seek to be servants of our Lord and of His church.

What are some ways, great or small, that God is using you to serve His people? Can you name some unassuming people who have impacted your life for Jesus?

These final verses of the book of Esther act as both a summary and a tribute to the greatness of Mordecai. He is described as “preeminent” among the Jews. But the most important quality of Mordecai, and the one the writer emphasizes, is that Mordecai’s status is both a result of and an opportunity for working toward the welfare of his people and speaking up for their peace. Through His son, Jesus, God calls us to do the same thing. We are to work to build up one another as members of His body and we are to speak up on behalf of our Lord and of all His people, in every culture and every nation.

What are some ways you can speak up for Jesus and his Kingdom? How are you working for the good of God’s people?

June 25 Saturday psalms 22: 1-18

Psalm 22 is one of several Messianic Psalms, where the author describes his circumstances in ways that foreshadow the life and ministry of the Messiah. David is torn between feeling forsaken by God and hoping that God will eventually rescue him. As he continues to wait upon God, he's despised and mocked by those around him. There are times in our lives when we feel as if a chasm separates us from God and He has left us to fend for ourselves. It is in those times that we must persist in the confidence that when the darkness of this world overwhelms us, God is with us and has promised to pierce the darkness with His light.

What are some ways God has answered your prayers this past year? What did you learn during your time of waiting?

It is important for us to know how to respond properly when God feels far away. In moments of deep vulnerability, we can be tempted to return to unhealthy coping mechanisms, disconnect from our spiritual family, and disengage from spiritual practices like prayer, Scripture reading, and worship. Here, David exemplifies for us what it means to be “real” with God. Rather than hiding his feelings of pain and isolation and pretending that everything is okay, David tells God exactly how he feels because he knows that God is listening, even when He seems silent or absent. Wherever you are in your spiritual journey, embrace of the authenticity with God, and invite Him into your struggles and disappointments.

What feelings or thoughts do you refrain from sharing with God? Take some time to be authentic before Him in prayer today.