May the LORD hold you in His mighty and gentle arms

In these times, we seem to be restrained in so many things we are used to doing. Simple tasks require thought; do we really need to go there? Is it worth the risk of entering a store? This puts a stain on us; our lives have been changed. Even if we don’t let these things bother us, they are still in the background, still on our minds.

There is no better time to practice waiting on God. Strain and fight as we might, there is nothing we can do about the situation in this country and the world right now; no-one can. No-one, that is, except God. God has everything right where He wants them, He is in control, things are working out according to His plan. Everything will work out in the best way possible.

The Bible tells us in Ephesians 1:9-10, “*He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth*.” In other words, God’s will is that all things in heaven and earth, all creation, will be gathered to Christ. Everything that is happening is bringing about this purpose.

*Cease striving and know that I am God*

Psalm 46:10

In Christ’s love

John

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Esther 9:20-32

In this section of the book of Esther, we learn about the institution of a Jewish festival. This is the beginning of the celebration of Purim. When Haman had first devised his plot against the Jews, he had cast the lot to determine what day the attack would take place. The Persian word for the lot was Pur. Purim is simply the plural of Pur. Thus, Purim became the name of this celebration and it is still carried on today, especially among the orthodox Jews.

There are a number of celebrations or feasts that the Jewish people observe. It is sometimes hard for us to keep track of them especially because several of them have more than one name. Seven were actually ordained by God in the Pentateuch. All seven of these feasts foreshadow Jesus in His life, death, resurrection, or return. Additionally, the Jewish people have made some of their own feasts in order to remember some important event in their history. For example, Hanukkah celebrates the successful Jewish rebellion during the reign of the Maccabees. Now, as we study Esther, we learn that Purim was instituted in order to remember how the Hebrew nation was saved from destruction.

The initial celebration began spontaneously throughout the Persian kingdom. What a relief it must have been for all the Jews to have that day done and over with. There had been a whole year of waiting, knowing the whole time that the thirteenth of Adar could be the end of them. Eight months of preparation to defend themselves against many enemies. This had to be heavy on their minds; it had to continuously occupy their thoughts. Every day, they would look at their children and know that someone would kill them if they failed to defend them. It is no wonder that celebration broke out when it was over; a tremendous weight would have been lifted from them.

The rejoicing took place throughout the empire, except in Susa, where they had been given another day to fight their enemies. But after that second day, celebration began. The time would have been no less stressful in the capital city.

We human-beings are a forgetful bunch. We need something to keep remembering important events in history. Mordecai realized this; he wrote down all that had occurred and then established the days of celebration. The people themselves had actually started it, but then Mordecai issued it as a royal command and the people were happy with the command. Because the people had celebrated on two different days, Mordecai established Purim as a two-day festival. This brought about unity between all the Jews, where ever they happened to live.

Mordecai showed himself to be a master diplomat. He placed all the blame on Haman, citing him as the adversary of all the Jews and being sure to include his lineage so that everyone would know that he was an Amalekite. Next, he gave the king all the credit for making it possible for the Jews to defend themselves and that he had Haman and his ten sons hanged on the gallows. In this way, honor was restored to King Ahasuerus who had allowed this whole mess to begin with.

After Mordecai sent his letter, another was sent by Queen Esther. She wrote to back up everything that had been written by Mordecai. Not only did the establishment of Purim have the authority of the king’s right-hand man, it now had the full authority of the queen; both of whom were Jews. The Hebrew people would fully accept this. Additionally, this proclamation and account of what happened had now been established by two witnesses; a requirement in Biblical law.

Purim is celebrated by feasting, sending gifts of food to each other, and giving to the poor. It is a time of rejoicing; a remembrance of mourning being turned into joy. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with thinking about Esther and Mordecai and their brave and wise acts; but it cannot be forgotten that God is the One who brought about deliverance for the Jews. His providence is seen throughout the book of Esther.

God is the deliverer of His people. There are many accounts in the Bible of God delivering His people; both individuals and the nation. Joseph, the son of Jacob, was delivered from slavery and prison to become second ruler in Egypt. Daniel was delivered from captivity and the lion’s den, to become advisor to the kings of Babylon and Persia. God delivered the nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt; He saved Judah from Assyria. The Israelites who were captive in Babylon were delivered by God once their allotted time was up. Now, He had delivered them from the hand of Haman, who tried to destroy the whole nation.

Even now, it is obvious that God still watches over His people. The fact that Israel is once again a sovereign nation after 1900 years is testimony to God’s care. Surrounded by enemies, Israel thrives, and the Bible tells us that they will continue throughout eternity.

These physical deliverances point to a more important deliverance: deliverance from the effects of sin and the eternal punishment of hell. This spiritual salvation is offered, not only to God’s chosen people Israel, but to all people of the earth. The way to salvation is the same for both groups: Jesus Christ. All of us are slaves to sin and we are unable to break free ourselves. We are incapable of being good enough to be in the presence of God. God had to make a way for us or we would have no hope of having eternal life.

Deliverance from the punishment of hell comes by admitting that we have offended God by sinning, and humbly and gratefully accepting Jesus as the One who took our place through the cross. The way of salvation is simple, but it is the only way. When we truly accept Jesus, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. He will work in our lives and change us from the inside; He will change our hearts so that we desire to please God. This change can bring about difficulties, but even the difficulties will be to our benefit.

One of the biggest problems we face as slaves to sin is spiritual blindness. We can’t even see that we have become enslaved; we believe that we have freedom. It seems as if we are making our own decisions and doing what we want to do, when in reality we are trapped. Satan has us and he won’t willingly let us go. He lies to us. He tells us that we are good enough; he tells us that God doesn’t mind a few little sins; he tells us that God is the one who enslaves us by not letting us do what we want to do.

Yes, Jesus tells us to take His yoke upon ourselves. But His yoke is light and His burden is easy, because He helps us carry it. Satan will heap weight upon weight and will do nothing to help us carry it. All that Jesus commands us is for our good. Following His ways leads to eternal life; following the ways of satan leads to eternal punishment.

Don’t let satan deceive you. God is not out to ruin your fun. He loves you more than you can imagine and wants you to have eternal life and joy with Him. But the decision is yours; He will not force you. As a Christian and one who studies the Bible, this messed up world begins to make sense. What we see are the effects of sin and satan’s influence. But everything is heading toward a predetermined end time and we can rest easy because we know that God is in control.

Purim was established so that people would not forget. God established His feasts so that people would not forget and so that they would worship Him. He wanted them to remember that it was He who provided the blessings they had and not some false god. He wanted the people to remember their history. In Deuteronomy 6:6-7, God tells His people “*These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up*.” In Joshua chapter 4, God commands the people to take twelve stones from where they had crossed the Jorden River and make a heap of them. This heap of stones was to be a reminder of how the LORD had parted the water so His people could cross into the Promised Land.

These kinds of reminders are good; they help us remember and they also give us reason to explain what is going on when our children ask us. Christians have important days like this also and it is our responsibility to explain these days to our children and grandchildren.

It can be difficult to get our children’s focus off the gifts and television shows around Christmas and onto the birth of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. But that is what we must do. It needs to be impressed upon them that God Himself, in the person of Jesus, became a human-being just like us but without sin. We must stress that He is real and not a fictitious character like Santa Claus. Our children need to know how much Jesus loves them, that He left a wonderful place like heaven to come here and be with us.

Good Friday has not been commercialized. But it is an important day that our children need to know about. In an age appropriate way, they need to understand what Jesus did for us. On the cross, Jesus took the punishment that we deserve. Because He did that, we can be happy forever, if we believe in Him.

Colored eggs and candy are fine for Easter; but again, it is our responsibility to teach our kids the real reason we celebrate this day. Jesus had been killed, but God raised Him from the dead and He now lives forever. This is what will happen to us also when we believe in Jesus. We will have a new life with Him. There will be no more crying or hurting or sadness; everyday will be better than the best day we ever have on earth.

These three are days that commemorate big events that we need to keep in mind, but we can’t forget our worship services. As we are told in Hebrews 10:24-25, “*and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near*.” Gathering to worship God must be a very important part of our lives; it keeps the memory of God and Jesus in the forefront of our minds. Obviously, there are some extreme circumstances such as are happening now where we may not be able to gather for worship, but each family can still set aside time for a worship service in their homes.

In establishing the Lord’s Supper, Jesus gave us the heartwarming request to celebrate the meal in remembrance of Him. Sharing a meal with our Saviour is a wonderful way to think on Him and everything He has done for us.

May the Holy Spirit keep Jesus forefront in our minds and lives that we may always remember Him and live for Him.

Prayer

Blessed Lord God; how amazing it is to think that while You hold the universe in Your hands, each and every one of Your children is on Your mind. You never forget us, we never slip Your mind, Your love and care for us is constant.

O Lord, if only we could be so faithful to You! Our minds are on so many things and we so often forget about You and about Your Son, Jesus. We try to handle things on our own, we worry about things that we cannot control, we pray for You to care for our problems and then we try to solve them ourselves.

We thank You Lord, that You remember that we are dust and that we are forgetful creatures. Thank You for Your great patience. We do ask Your help, that we depend on You more and trust You in all things; that we remember the love You have shown us in Jesus Christ, our only Lord and Saviour.

We pray this in Jesus’ most holy name

Amen