

**THE SOWER
ARTHUR CHURCH OF CHRIST
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PURIM AND EASTER

The Jewish holiday of Purim was observed March 9-10 as a day of remembrance.. For Christians, Easter is a day our nation and culture have set aside to remember our deliverance from death through the resurrection from the dead of the crucified Christ. For Jews, Purim is a day Jews have set aside as a day to remember and celebrate the deliverance of the Jews from the sentence of death imposed by King Ahasureus during their captivity in Persia—known today as Iran--an event portrayed in the Old Testament book of Esther. On the Jewish calendar, I understand it is the beginning of the 13th day of Adar. While neither day is set aside by authority of Scripture as “holy days,” lessons can be learned from the events commemorated.

The book of Esther is a book that gives the remarkable story of God’s providential use of Esther, a Jewish girl wedded to the Persian king, Ahasuerus, historically identified as King Xerxes, while God’s people were held captive about 2500 years ago. While the book is unique in that there is no direct mention of God, yet God’s unseen hand is quite evident throughout. We

see Satan's desire to destroy the Jews, the people chosen of God to bring forth the Messiah (Christ) into the world—and salvation for mankind through Him. Esther's uncle, Mordecai, reminded Queen Esther that she alone was "brought into the kingdom for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14). She alone would have the ear of the king, to plead for their deliverance from the pending slaughter, which had been allowed by his edict, a law that could not be reversed (8:8). Esther went before the king, daring to approach him in spite of the fact that to approach the king without his request could mean her own death, willing to risk her life to deliver her people. Esther revealed to the king that she, being Jewish, would also be targeted for death, and the king granted to the Jews the right and means to defend themselves against their attackers, thus delivering them from death. The sentence of death was given instead to the enemies of the Jews.

The message that should be celebrated at Easter—as well as every day: The true believer in Christ is delivered from the "law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). As King Ahasuerus had, by his unchangeable law, put the Jews under the sentence of death, so in the world all stand condemned, for "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23), and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). As Esther, the king's bride, was granted access to the king, Christians, as the bride of Christ, are granted access to the divine King. The king, whose edict had brought the Jews under condemnation, also provided them with the right and means of protecting themselves from slaughter; and so also while God's law condemns us, yet through the death and resurrection of Christ He has equipped us with "the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand

in the evil day...” (Eph. 6:13). Our warfare, in contrast to that in Esther’s day, is “not with flesh and blood” but against “spiritual wickedness in high places” (v. 12). For the enemies of God’s purposes, the fate of the enemies of the Jews was death, but God’s people were spared. While the destiny of believers is deliverance and life, for those who “know not God, and obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ” there is “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power.” (2 Thess. 1:6-9). Such is the message of the gospel: God has granted life in Christ to those who stand condemned. CHRIST IS RISEN! What more glorious message than that could there possibly be?
--Ron

“Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.” (Oliver Goldsmith)

JESUS’ RESURRECTION—OUR RECEIPT

Think of Christ’s resurrection as a store receipt. If you’re in a department store and you buy some clothes, you should always ask for a receipt. Why? Because if you’re still walking around the store a plainclothes security person could stop you and ask, “Excuse me, can I look in your bag?” And if you don’t have a receipt, you could get into trouble. So if somebody stops you, you want to be able to hold up your receipt, and say, “Oh,

plainclothes security person, trouble me not, because this proves that this has been paid for, and I do not have to pay it again.” The resurrection is a giant receipt stamped across history for all people to see—a receipt that allows you to know that your future is certain if you believe in Jesus Christ.

Editor’s note: In the same sermon, Tim Keller said, “If someone goes to jail because the law says that ten years in jail is the punishment for the crime, the day that man comes out of jail he has paid for the crime. That law doesn’t have a claim on him anymore. He’s a free man. The wages of sin is death, and when Christ went down into death, He paid for our debt. When He came up out of the grave, that meant it was paid. Christ’s resurrection proves that it was fully paid.”—Adapted from Tim Keller, “Jesus, Vindicated,” Preaching Today, com

AM I STILL HERE?

Yesterday I was able to hear David Sargent tell the story of an elderly lady who was on her death bed. She was a faithful Christian, and she looked forward to realizing the promises made to her by her Lord. When her family gathered at her side, the day finally arrived when she slipped into unconsciousness. The vigil then began as her family awaited her death. (Continue next column)

However, quite unexpectedly this elderly Christian woman regained consciousness. When she opened her eyes and saw her family sitting around her bedside, her disappointed response was, “Am I still here?”

Isn't it wonderful to have something to look forward to that can conquer our fear and dread of death? Every child of God has just such a blessing. It's the anticipation that enabled the Apostle John to say, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 2:20).

If you returned from the brink of death, would you be disappointed by the delay, or grateful for another chance to get right with God? Give it some thought.

—Steve Higginbotham, *MercEmail*

12 THINGS TO LEARN

The value of time—

The need of perseverance—

The pleasure of serving—

The dignity of simplicity—

The true worth of character—

The power of kindness—

The influence of example—

The obligation of duty—

The wisdom of economy—

The virtue of patience—

The nobility of labor—

The teachings of Him who said, “Learn of Me.”

--Copied

“Valor lies just halfway between rashness and cowardice.” (*Carvantes*)

PRAYER LIST: Ron McConkey (reportorial problems); Ruby Bradd (Clinton; cancer); Wayne Polk (Shelbyville minister; health problems); David Ferguson’s (Mattoon minister) mother (Mason Point N.H.); Gavin Harlin (in Iraq); and those affected by the Coronavirus; praying also for its quick resolution. **“O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. For his merciful kindness is great toward us; and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. Praise the Lord.” Psalm 117)**