

“ESTHER: Rest From Our Enemies”

Luke 6:20-38 • Esther 9:1-5, 16-22

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

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Do you have any enemies? I mean real enemies. Or are you someone else's enemy? And would you admit it to your pastor? An enemy is defined as a person who is *actively* opposed or hostile to someone or something. Maybe you're thinking, "I get along with everyone. I don't have any enemies." Winston Churchill once said, "If you don't have any enemies in life you've never stood up for anything." Or maybe you're more like Richard Nixon who famously kept a detailed "enemies list."

Throughout the Bible and throughout history we find that the Jews have faced a never-ending parade of enemies—people and nations determined to wipe them out. They fought for survival against the Amalakitites, the Philistines, the Egyptians, the Babylonians, and a long list of others. By the time of Jesus it was the Romans. The Jews have always been in danger. And the situation isn't really much better today. The story of Esther is another story of powerful forces attempting to eliminate the Jewish people.

But the real story is that despite incredible odds they have not been wiped out. God has protected them. Many times they had to endure God's punishment for disobeying. When they would abandon God and begin worshiping something else, God would allow them to be conquered and taken captive. But then when they repented and cried out to him, God would send someone to rescue them. This is the pattern over and over again in the book of Judges in the Old Testament. One of the things that kept them going all those years is God's promise to provide rest from their enemies.

As we've seen in Esther, the Jews were in trouble again. The evil Haman had devised a plan to have all the Jews in the Persian Empire killed on one day. He convinced the king to issue the edict. But God had arranged the circumstances so that Esther, the poor Jewish orphan girl, would become queen and would be able to save her people.

She did this by exposing Haman's plan to the king. As a result, Haman was executed on the gallows he had built for Mordecai. The tables had turned. But they still had the problem of being attacked and killed by their enemies throughout the empire. So once again Esther had to plead with Ahasuerus. The king told her that the decree could not be revoked. But they could issue a new decree allowing the Jews to defend themselves. This new decree used the exact same language as Haman's decree. It was a total reversal.

On the day that had been set by Haman, the Jews across the Persian Empire defended themselves against the attacks and they were very successful. King Ahasuerus was even amazed. Esther and Mordecai were able to secure rest from their enemies. The problem was that every time the Jews were able to secure rest from their enemies it didn't last. A few years would go by and they were under attack again. Each time God would send someone to rescue them, like Moses, Joshua, Gideon, and David. And yet none of them could secure the complete, lasting rest.

So the prophets began to say that some day the Messiah would come and give them that total, final, ultimate rest from their enemies. The prophet Isaiah said, "instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot; therefore in their land they shall possess a double portion; they shall have everlasting joy." The outcome of the coming of the Messiah will be everlasting joy. How do we know that's what he means? Listen to what comes just before this at the beginning of Isaiah 61: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those

who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.”

This is the passage that Jesus read in the synagogue in Nazareth and then claimed that this passage is about him. Jesus is the one promised in Scripture to secure that perfect rest from their enemies. That’s why his followers thought that at any moment he would rise up and overthrow the Romans. But he doesn’t do that. Instead, Jesus said things like, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.”

Not only does Jesus say this, but he demonstrates it. As he was dying on the cross, Jesus says, “Father forgive them.” He dies in order to forgive his enemies. Tim Keller says, “On the cross, Jesus loving his enemies, forgiving his enemies, dying for his enemies is the ultimate warfare on evil. And it brings the ultimate rest from our enemies.”

The important thing to remember here is that because of sin *we* were enemies of God. In Romans 5, the Apostle Paul says, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

That’s the gospel, the good news. You were an enemy of God. You rebelled against him. You actively opposed his will and were hostile to God. As a result you were under God’s irrevocable decree of death. “The wages of sin is death.” But as Karen Jobes says in her commentary on Esther, “God’s irrevocable decree of death and destruction has been

countered by his decree that all who believe in his Son should not perish under his wrath but be delivered into eternal life.” The tables have turned. Instead of condemnation you get mercy and grace and love.

Here’s why this matters to us today. Keller says, “The natural default response of the human heart is to respond to evil force with hurtful force.” You want to whack your enemy. When someone hurts us we want to hurt them back. Or if we *think* someone wants to hurt us we want to hurt him first. We see this playing out around our country right now. But that’s not the way of Jesus.

At the height of the civil war, Abraham Lincoln gave a speech where he referred to southerners as fellow human beings who were in error. After the speech a woman chastised him for not calling them irreconcilable enemies who must be destroyed. Lincoln replied, “Madam, do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?” On the cross Jesus changed us from enemies to friends.

And that’s how you and I will get rest from *our* enemies. You love them. You forgive them. If you believe Jesus had to die in order to save you it’s humbling. You realize that you are no better than the person who has wronged you. You are both sinners in need of a savior. When you love and forgive and actually pray and seek the best for someone, that person can no longer make you hate him. The truth is that if you hate your enemies then you don’t actually believe that *you* are a sinner saved by grace alone. But when you understand your own standing before God, you are able to “forgive your debtors.”

The other thing the gospel does to give you rest from your enemies is to show you your real value. As Keller says, “The Son of God thought you were worth dying for, worth losing everything for, worth experiencing infinite suffering and agony for.” Where do you find your sense of value? Is it in your money? Your possessions? Your job title? Your reputations? To the extent that you find your sense of worth in any of those things, you will find that your

enemies have power over you. But if your treasure is in heaven, if your identity comes from Christ's love for you, enemies can't touch you. And you get rest. And more than that, as you love and forgive them, more and more of your enemies will become friends. And that's how you change the world.

Amen.