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Keep Standing



What are some of your favorite ways to celebrate?

QUESTION 1

Don't become complacent—maintain vigilance.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Your parents probably celebrated some pretty big milestones in your life.

- » Your first words
- » Your first steps
- » Your first day of school

And why not celebrate? These events—small victories, perhaps—show that you were growing up. But your parents were not content with that. Even as they celebrated, they worked with you so that your words became sentences, your baby steps developed into walking and running, and your daily trips to school led to an education and a diploma.

As we celebrate each milestone, we continue moving forward to reach the next milestone—and another reason to celebrate.

During Ahasuerus's reign in Persia, the Jewish people achieved a great victory through the prayers and efforts of Mordecai and Esther. One great victory, yes, but their work was not complete. Haman had been defeated, but his edict still stood. They had no time to settle into complacency! We see in the lives of Esther and Mordecai great examples of persistence against injustice.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Esther 8:1-2 (CSB)

¹ That same day King Ahasuerus awarded Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. Mordecai entered the king's presence because Esther had revealed her relationship to Mordecai. ² The king removed his signet ring he had recovered from Haman and gave it to Mordecai, and Esther put him in charge of Haman's estate.

Mordecai and Esther had taken a stand and it paid off. When Esther revealed Haman's evil plan to wipe out the Jews to King Ahasuerus, he had Haman killed. As a result, honor came to two people in two ways on the same day.

- » **Esther.** On the same day Haman was executed, King Ahasuerus granted to Queen Esther all of Haman's estate and fortune. It was customary for the property of criminals to be seized by the crown. As the king, Ahasuerus could have taken these new spoils and enriched himself, but he generously gave them to his wife, the queen. We don't know what motivated the king to honor Esther in this way, but perhaps he felt a twinge of guilt at signing his own wife's death sentence. Esther wisely delegated the management of this newfound estate to Mordecai.
- » **Mordecai.** Mordecai, once marked for the gallows by Haman, was promoted to Haman's former post. The king had taken his signet ring from Haman in dishonor; now he gave it to Mordecai in great honor. Mordecai would essentially be the prime minister of Persia. The king chose a man of great faithfulness and personal integrity to replace one who possessed neither.

Will we be honored as Mordecai and Esther were—with public acclaim and material wealth—when we stand against injustice? Some falsely teach this, but we should never assume or even expect this kind of *quid pro quo* from God. While Scripture does portray the lives of those such as Mordecai and Esther who received honor and wealth in that moment, we also find in God's Word descriptions of those who suffered and even died for their faithfulness and integrity.

The Bible doesn't promise material rewards, but it points to the life to come when Christ will make all things new. What God has waiting for us far surpasses earthly glories, as we live forever with Christ.

What do you find significant about the events in these verses?

QUESTION 2

Esther 8:3-8 (CSB)

³ Then Esther addressed the king again. She fell at his feet, wept, and begged him to revoke the evil of Haman the Agagite and his plot he had devised against the Jews. ⁴ The king extended the gold scepter toward Esther, so she got up and stood before the king. ⁵ She said, "If it pleases the king and I have found favor before him, if the matter seems right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let a royal edict be written. Let it revoke the documents the scheming Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the king's provinces. ⁶ For how could I bear to see the disaster that would come on my people? How could I bear to see the destruction of my relatives?" ⁷ King Ahasuerus said to Esther the queen and to Mordecai the Jew, "Look, I have given Haman's estate to Esther, and he was hanged on the gallows because he attacked the Jews. ⁸ Write in the king's name whatever pleases you concerning the Jews, and seal it with the royal signet ring. A document written in the king's name and sealed with the royal signet ring cannot be revoked."

Esther and Mordecai had cause to celebrate. Their enemy, Haman, had been executed. Mordecai held the second most powerful position in the palace, and Esther had more wealth than she could use in a lifetime. However, they could not rest until all their people were fully under the protection of the king.

Haman was dead, but the edict he instigated was very much alive. King Ahasuerus could not simply overturn his previous decree. Unlike today's modern democracies, Persian laws could not be rescinded or overturned by a court or repealed by a legislative body. When a law was written in the king's name and sealed by his signet ring, it could not be cancelled.

Ahasuerus could, however, propose a new law that would essentially counteract the previous one—and that is what Esther hoped to accomplish. She again risked the anger and ire of the king by making her bold request to "revoke the documents the scheming Haman . . . the Agagite wrote to destroy the Jews" (v. 5). This truly was a bold move, but Esther again received the king's favor as he raised his scepter to allow her to proceed.

Mordecai and Esther's boldness and commitment paid off: the king essentially gave them free reign to "write in the king's name whatever pleases you concerning the Jews" (v. 8). A new edict now would

How would you describe the role of persistence in the Christian life?

QUESTION 3

stand alongside the old one. Permission still stood to kill the Jews, but the Jews were now given the right to protect themselves. If anyone held animosity toward the Jews, he would think twice because (1) genocide had been changed to a fight; and (2) the king and his Jewish queen stood on the other side of that fight!

Esther 9:20-22 (CSB)

²⁰ Mordecai recorded these events and sent letters to all the Jews in all of King Ahasuerus's provinces, both near and far. ²¹ He ordered them to celebrate the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar every year ²² because during those days the Jews gained relief from their enemies. That was the month when their sorrow was turned into rejoicing and their mourning into a holiday. They were to be days of feasting, rejoicing, and of sending gifts to one another and to the poor.

Once Mordecai wrote and sealed the new decree in the king's name that gave the Jews the right to defend themselves against their enemies, the Jews did just that. They stood up to everyone who hated them, and as a result "not a single person could withstand them; fear of them fell on every nationality" (Esther 9:2). Admittedly, verses 1-16 sound harsh and vindictive, but the Jews were defending themselves against those who "had hoped to overpower them" (v. 1). The Jews were fighting for their own protection.

Once the fighting stopped, Mordecai, Queen Esther, and all the Jews could finally celebrate their freedom. This was marked by feasts, gift-giving, and festive ceremonies. This celebration became known as the Feast of Purim. *Purim* is the plural form of *Pur*, the Hebrew word for the lot that was cast before Haman to determine which





***What are the benefits
of celebrating what
God does in our lives?***

QUESTION 4

day he would carry out his massacre of the Jewish people (3:7). But what was intended for destruction became just the opposite, and the Jews used the occasion to celebrate victory—and they still celebrate today.

Today, Jews still celebrate Purim a month before Passover. They fast on the eve of Purim to commemorate Esther's three days of fasting; then, on the day of the feast they exchange gifts and the rabbi reads the Book of Esther in the synagogue. As the appropriate passages are read, the people shout "Curse Haman!" and "Bless Mordecai!" Purim helps the Jewish people recall God's sovereign care for his people; it fits with Passover, Israel's other feast that celebrates God's deliverance (Exodus 13:6-8).

Mordecai and Esther's story is our story, for out of the Jewish people came our Savior. Although Christians do not celebrate Purim, we do have a celebration of deliverance; through the Lord's Supper, we remember the deliverance Christ brought to us through His death. When we put the bread on our tongues and lift the cup to our lips, we are celebrating our own deliverance from sin and death. Once alienated from God, we are all—Jew and Gentile—now invited to dine at the King's table. "For he is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians 2:14).

We still have much to do for the kingdom of God. Our work will not be fully complete until Christ returns—but we have much to celebrate. We will frequently have opportunities to stand up for others in the face of injustice. God is at work in your life, and He is at work in mine. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, God has set you free. He has set others free. Through our words, actions, and prayers, people can find hope and grace no matter what injustice they face.

Let's keep standing for others—and let's keep celebrating! God is at work.

What principles have stood out to you throughout this study from the Book of Esther?

"Mordecai and Esther's story is our story, for out of the Jewish people came our Savior."

DANIEL DARLING

QUESTION 5

GOD IS AT WORK



When have you recently seen God act in your own life or someone else's? Draw, list, or describe your response in the space below.

Write a one-sentence prayer of thanksgiving and remembrance to God for what He has done.

LIVE IT OUT

How can you remain committed to standing against injustice?

- » **Express thanks.** Reflect on how God has rescued you from death through Jesus Christ. Pray and give thanks to God for the victory you have in Christ.
- » **Stay vigilant.** If you have previously committed to helping an organization fight injustice, stick with it. Continue to look for ways you can help and make a difference.
- » **Invite a friend.** Who needs to know that Jesus is the One who delivers us from sin and that God is continually at work in our lives? Invite him or her to Bible study next week and any fellowship gatherings your group may have. Pray for them to experience the freedom we're offered in Christ.

In a time of great injustice against their own people, Mordecai and Esther rose to the occasion and took a stand. It was a potentially costly stand, but it was the right one. **As we look at their lives, we see a model for how we can live for Christ as we stand up for others.**



My thoughts

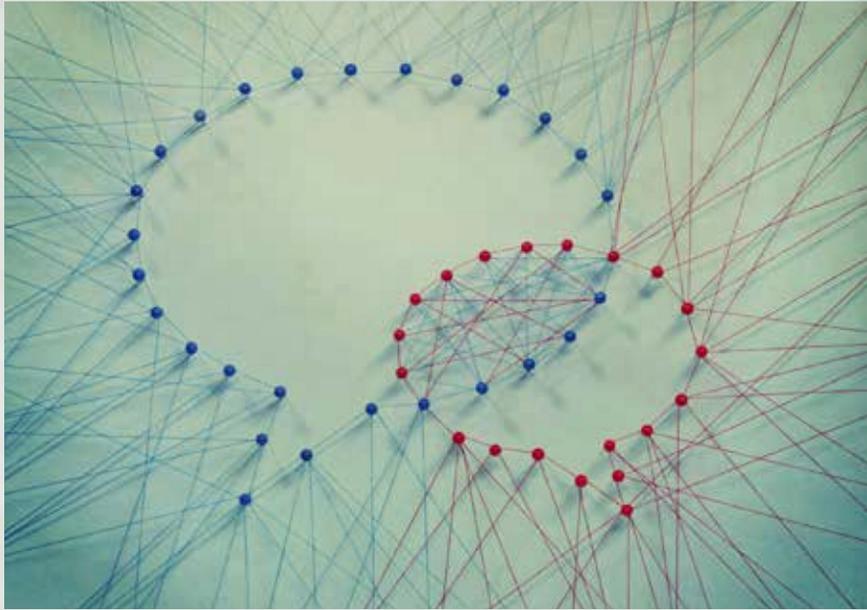
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Endnotes

1 Thomas Arnold, *Christian Life, Its Hopes, Its Fears, and Its Close*, 6th ed. (London: T. Fellowes, 1859), pp. 15-16.

2 "Harvard Law Professor Examines the Evidence of Jesus' Resurrection," *Y-Jesus: The Facts about Jesus Presented by Scholars* [online] [cited 28 March 2017]. Available from the Internet at: <http://y-jesus.com/simon-greenleaf-resurrection>.

3 "Forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking," *International Labour Organization* [online] [cited 2 August 2017]. Available from the Internet at: <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm>.

4 "2016 World Hunger And Poverty Facts And Statistics," *Hunger Notes* [online] [cited 2 August 2017]. Available from the Internet at: <http://www.worldhunger.org/2015-world-hunger-and-poverty-facts-and-statistics/>.

5 Nick Morgan, "Why We Fear Public Speaking and How to Overcome It," *Forbes* [online] 30 March 2011 [cited 24 August 2017]. Available from the Internet at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nickmorgan/2011/03/30/why-we-fear-public-speaking-and-how-to-overcome-it/#32c779f7460b>

Coming in Summer

Why Are We Here?

Why Are We Even Here?	Genesis 1:1-5,26-31
Why Are We in This Mess?	Genesis 3:1-7,14-19
Why Can't We Fix It?	Deuteronomy 5:32-33; Galatians 3:10-12,19a,24-25
Why Did Jesus Come?	Luke 1:68-79
What Should We Do Now?	Acts 2:37-47
What Happens Next?	Revelation 21:1-8

Tithing: An Obedient Response to a Gracious God

Tithing: An Obedient Response to a Gracious God Malachi 3:7-12

Nehemiah: Building a Life of Service

Pray	Nehemiah 1:1-11
Plan	Nehemiah 2:1-8,17-18
Persist	Nehemiah 4:1-3,6-9,14-18
Protect	Nehemiah 5:1-13
Prioritize	Nehemiah 6:1-3,15-16; 8:1-3,5-8
Praise	Nehemiah 8:9-12; 12:27-31a

