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by Ray C. Stedman

This closing study in Esther may seem an anticlimax to many, for the exciting part of the story is over. Our last study together unfolded the mighty victory that came to the king of Persia when Mordecai, now installed as prime minister of the kingdom, accomplished the deliverance of the Jews and thus saved the kingdom from destruction. But the last section of the book serves a very important purpose. It is designed to teach us the need to remember.

Even today the Jews celebrate this story of Esther in the Feast of Purim. They set aside two days for holiday, feasting, gladness and merrymaking. On the first evening they read through the story of Esther. This is the day when all Jewish children come into their own. They bring noise makers, little drums and horns to the service, and whenever the name of Haman is mentioned, they blow the horns and pound on the drums, booing and hissing through the reading of the book wherever Haman is mentioned. It is a most interesting service to attend! The second day is set aside for feasting and merrymaking, and for exchanging of gifts, very much as we would celebrate Christmas. All of this is in remembrance of the deliverance accomplished by Esther and Mordecai in the days of the Persian Empire, some 500 years before Christ. It is celebrated to this day because God wants the Jewish people never to forget this deliverance. It is to be forever a very important day in their history.

This is also true in the spiritual application of the story. The lessons of this book, once learned, mark the day of the beginning of deliverance in a Christian's experience, and it is never to be forgotten.

There are four things in this latter part that God wants us to remember. The first of them is **The Fruits of Victory**:

> **This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth day they rested and made that a day of feasting and gladness. But the Jews who were in Susa gathered on the thirteenth day and on the fourteenth, and rested on the fifteenth day, making that a day of feasting and gladness. Therefore the Jews of the villages, who live in the open towns, hold the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a day for gladness and feasting and holiday-making, and a day on which they send choice portions to one another.**

> **And Mordecai recorded these things, and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, enjoining them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same, year by year, as the days on which the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending choice portions to one another and gifts to the poor. {Est 9:17-22 RSV}**

Let your eye run back over that and note how frequently you find emphasized the character of the celebration of this day. It was to be a day of feasting and gladness and this is mentioned in Verses 17, 18, 19, and twice again in Verse 22. It was to be a day of rest. It was to be a day of holiday making, of enjoying what was accomplished. It was a day in which they obtained relief from their enemies. It was a day of showing generosity and deep concern for others, of sending gifts to the poor. All this indicates the results of the victory that was accomplished.

To you who have been following with us in this book it should be evident that this is the enjoyment of the fruit of the Spirit. We have been drawing a continual parallel between the conflict of this book and the problem in the Christian's life to gain victory over the evidences and manifestations of the flesh. That which we all long to come to is the freedom to enjoy what the New Testament calls the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faithfulness, self-control, the virtues of a truly Christian experience. Such freedom is a result of victory gained along the lines set forth in this book. This is what God wants us to remember. You can't have the fruits without the process, and, as we learn the process, we come to the actual experience of these wonderful truths.

As we come to the end of this book ask yourself, "How much did the kingdom of Persia experience of these blessings while Haman was in the prime minister's seat?"

He is the picture of the rule of the flesh, the self-life, the ego, the uncrucified self, in a believer. How much did they experience of joy and feasting and gladness and holiday while Haman was in power? None whatever! When Haman ruled, the result in the kingdom was confusion, mourning, weeping, dejection, and despair.

How aptly this describes the experience of a Christian who is struggling to do his best for God, earnestly, sincerely trying to do so, but has never yet learned what God wants to teach him in terms of a rest and dependence upon the indwelling life of the Lord Jesus to work through him. Until we learn this, Haman is in control, and our experience is one of confusion, bewilderment, and boredom – an up and down experience. There is much of dejection and despair, and sometimes awful depression of spirit.

Care needs to be exercised at this point for we are so used to looking to our circumstances as the source of happy feelings that when we hear that we can experience rest, gladness, and concern for others continually, we instinctively feel that somehow we will have happy circumstances all the time. We must be careful to understand exactly what is offered. The promised supply of peace, victory, joy, and a continual out-flowing river of love does not mean that there will be a change in the Christian's circumstances for these things do not come from circumstances. That is what we need to learn. Victory does not mean freedom from weariness, sickness, sorrow, heartache, pressure, defeat, or danger in the Christian's experience. Rather, in the midst of these things we shall, at the same time, experience an inner quietness of joy, of gladness, of peace and rest. It is an experience going on right at the same time that outward circumstances are troubling and making it difficult.

Now that needs to be made clear, for many Christians are confused and expect to be set free from all unhappy circumstances. By no means. The Lord warned, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world," {John 16:33b KJV}. There is a place of relief and release despite the circumstances. Deliverance comes not by a change of our conditions, but by another principle: the continual imparting to us by the Holy Spirit of the indwelling life of the risen Lord whose adequate resources maintain our spirits in strength, rest, and peace despite the circumstances.

The next point to remember is, **The Elements of Victory**:

> **So the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written to them. For Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is the lot, to crush and destroy them, but when Esther come before the king, he gave orders in writing that his wicked plot which he had devised against the Jews should come upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. {Est 9:23-25 RSV}**

It is important to give attention to the *how* of victory. Every Christian who knows Jesus Christ as an indwelling life within stumbles occasionally into victory. The Spirit of God puts us in circumstances where we are overwhelmed and in the moment of desperation we cry out to God for help. Inevitably, when we do that, we experience deliverance, victory. But we regard this as emergency help, available only when we get our backs up against the wall. But this is really the normal condition of a believer. We are meant always to be in this condition, always experiencing in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus that the power of Christ may rest upon us {cf, 2 Cor 4:10}. When we learn to walk in the consistent knowledge that this is our true condition then we become consistent in our deliverance, in our experience of victory.

Now these are the steps to such knowledge. We have them outlined briefly in the summary of this book:

1. The first thing was the exposure of Haman. His name is given to us in full, Haman the Agagite. Remember, Agag was the king of the Amalekites, against whom God has pronounced eternal enmity, for Agag was opposed to all God wanted to do. Here is Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of all the Jews, and his perfidy, treachery, and subtlety is now fully exposed. As we have seen, Haman is a picture of that enemy within, the ego, the self-life, the desire for preeminence and prominence.

   The first step in deliverance is to learn to recognize it. But this is far more difficult than it sounds. We justify the things that are destroying us and make excuses for them, calling them sweet sounding names and thus putting honey and syrup labels on bottles of poison. That makes them all the more deadly, doesn't it? No wonder it is difficult to recognize the voice of the devil in our experience.

   There was a time when Jesus said to his disciples, "Whom do men say that I am?" Peter, moved by the Holy Spirit, said, "Thou are the Christ, the Son of the living God," {Matt 16:15-16 KJV}. And Jesus said, "You are right, and you did not learn this by yourself. The Father has just spoken through you. When you said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,' it was the Father who taught you that," {cf, Matt 16:17}. Then he began to tell them that he must go up to Jerusalem, and he would be taken by the chief priests and the scribes and would be beaten and put to death upon a cross, and on the third day would rise again. Peter did not like this. Peter said to him, in effect, "By your own admission I have just spoken to you by the voice of the Father and now I have some other advice to give you. Don't talk like this. Spare thyself, Lord. This must never happen to you. You are too valuable to throw yourself away like this, to waste your life in such a manner. This must never happen to you." "Thank you," said Jesus to Peter, "for that sincere, well-intended, honest expression of what you think I should do, but I know that voice. I have heard it before. Get thee behind me, Satan, you are an offense unto me for you do not look at things from God's viewpoint but from man's," {cf, Matt 16:22-23}.

   That is the way to recognize Haman even though he comes disguised as unselfishly concerned for our best interests. *We must learn by the Word to recognize the voice of the flesh.* That is the first step in victory.

2. The second one is *the knowledge of a new decree* that has been issued. We read of it here,

   > **But when Esther came before the king, he gave orders in writing that his wicked plot, which he had devised**

> **against the Jews should come upon his** [Haman's] **own head, {Est 9:25a RSV}**

The new decree meant that the Jews were set free from the law of the old decree. What a picture this is for us of that law of a new life in Jesus Christ, dwelling within us, which sets us free from the law of sin and death in our experience. Christ is in us, and he, therefore, becomes our resource. It is no longer up to us to try to do our best; it is up to us now to trust him to do his best – through us. What a difference that is. It means the difference between trying to show the world how much we can do for Christ and letting him show the world what he can do through us.

- It isn't a struggle now to try to be good,
  - but by depending upon
    - the One who is good,
    - who dwells within us,
- we step forward to do what needs to be done,
- and his life becomes manifest in terms of our activity.

The *knowledge of this* is the second step to victory.

3. And then the third thing is the hanging of Haman and his sons on the gallows: The amazing thing is that, until we are willing to put the old life with its manifestations in the place of death, where God put it in Jesus Christ, we never can lay hold of that indwelling life. When we try to make both Haman and Christ live at the same time, keeping a portion of the ego as a pet area from which we exclude God, we find we cannot lay hold of his life in us. Victory comes when we are content to have our egos overlooked and humiliated if need be, that the life of Jesus may be manifested and expressed through us – that his self-giving may replace our self-seeking. When we are content to have it that way, not only in terms of words, but in terms of experience, then there is *an immediate experience of his risen life flowing through us*, working everything out.

   That is victory!

The third point God wants us to remember is **The Duration of Victory**:

> **Therefore they called these days Purim, after the term Pur. And therefore, because of all that was written in this letter, and of what they had faced in this matter, and of what had befallen them, the Jews ordained and took it upon themselves and their descendants and all who joined them, that without fail they would keep these two days according to what was written and at the time appointed every year, that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, in every family, province, and city, and that these days of Purim should never fall into disuse among the Jews, nor should the commemoration of these days cease among their descendants.**
>
> **Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew gave full written authority, confirming this second letter about Purim. Letters were sent to all the Jews, to the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, in words of peace and truth, that these days of Purim should be observed at their appointed seasons, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther enjoined upon the Jews, and as they had laid down for themselves and for their descendants, with regard to their fasts and their lamenting. The command of Queen Esther fixed these practices of Purim, and it was recorded in writing. {Est 9:26-32 RSV}**

All of that to say over and over again that this must go on continuously, that to be set free from the domain of self by a recognition of what God has done in Jesus Christ on the cross must now continue to be a process throughout the entire length of our life. This initial deliverance was intended to precipitate a process that goes on and on.

Interestingly enough there is a tradition among the Jews that the Feast of Purim is the only feast that will be observed after the Messiah comes. The feasts of Tabernacles and Passover and all others will cease, they say, when the Messiah comes. But the Feast of Purim will go on even in the days of the kingdom. This reflects the truth that to walk in the Spirit is normal for both time and eternity. We must teach it to our descendants as well, that our

children may see what it means to walk in victory over resentment, jealousy, impatience, envy, lust, self-love, self-seeking, pride, self-pity, and all other experiences of the self-life. When they do, there will be a recognition of the reality of deliverance in that home that will make those children sit up and take notice that here indeed is a life worth living.

Is this the reason, perhaps, why so many of our children grow up in Christian homes and yet go out bewildered, bored, frustrated, unhappy, not enjoying what they have because we who are parents have not learned to walk in the Spirit? It is a walk, a continual process of taking the same steps, over and over, every time conflict comes, until there is a manifestation of continual victory.

That is what Enoch learned. We are told that Enoch lived 65 years before he learned to walk with God. I wonder if it will take some of us that long. After he learned to walk, he walked 300 years with God and one day he walked along until, as a little girl said, "God just said to him, 'Come on, Enoch, come on home with me. It is too far to go back.'" So "he was not, because God took him," {cf, Gen 5:24}. He walked on into glory. That is the picture of what God would have for the believer in Christ.

The book closes on the fourth point God would have us remember, **The Secret Of Victory**:

> **King Ahasuerus laid tribute on the land and on the coastlands of the sea. And all the acts of his power and might, and the full account of the high honor of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? For Mordecai the Jew was next in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brethren, for he sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his people. {Est 10:1-3 RSV}**

This book began with King Ahasuerus as the prominent figure and it told of the story of the display of his power and might. But as we read on we learn of a hidden cancer at work within that kingdom, eating away, certain to destroy all this power and manifestation of might. Had the story not taken the course we have recorded here, that would have been the inevitable end. But the book ends with the king prominent again and the story of the display of his power and might, but we now realize there is a power behind the throne, which is now publicly recognized. That power, Mordecai, is always subject to the will of the king, for he never forces the king to do his will.

In your life this is true too. Your will is supreme in the final decision of what takes place in the kingdom, but there is a power behind the throne, and, through the will of the king, the Holy Spirit works to bring power and peace to the kingdom. What a picture this is of the Spirit-filled life. This is the open secret of every successful Christian:

- His will is still dominant.
- He can still do wrong if he chooses.
  - Ah, but he has learned a lesson.
- He has learned that it is only through the yielding of that will
  - in a continual sense of dependence
  - upon the One who dwells within
- that there can come any manifestation of power or peace in his kingdom.

And when he learns to walk in such dependence, he becomes a man under authority, under power, who brings about in his kingdom peace, and joy, and all that is longed for.

We learn to reckon this: This is what makes a Christian able, figuratively, to fall in a cesspool and come up smelling like a rose. Every circumstance works for good. This is the explanation of Romans 8:28 – "All things work together for good," no matter how evil and difficult they appear at first. This is why, to a Christian, his disappointments make him better, not bitter. His heartaches become sources of joy. The hard circumstances of his life produce in him the choicest of virtues, the very things that he longs to have manifest in his character. The weaker he feels, the more impact his life has on others. He becomes sweeter, mellower, filled with an inner beauty – driven to this by the very unpleasantness he goes through.

This is the secret.

This is the Spirit-filled life: A human instrument counting on an indwelling Spirit to meet every demand with wholly adequate resources, therefore

there is no tension because tension comes from living out of inadequacy.

There is nothing more complicated about it than that. It is that simple, and yet that profound. The problem all along was how to end the old life without killing the man. This problem was met on the cross.

As we come to the Lord's table, all the glory of the Spirit-filled life flows from this experience of the victory of our Lord upon the cross. As we celebrate this marvelous mystery, we recognize anew that it was in this manner that his life became our life, that in this way the old life, permeated with defeat, came to an end and his new life became our new life. We are joined to the Lord, we become him, in a sense. We become him!

Think of that!

This is made possible by the marvelous mystery of his death. We can then say with Paul,

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live;
yet not I, but Christ liveth in me:
and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God,
who loved me, and gave himself for me.
{Gal 2:20 KJV}

Prayer:

Our Heavenly Father, we cannot really begin to comprehend these marvelous truths, but we sense them. We know they are true. We know there is deliverance in them, power for us and glory for you. We pray that your Spirit may enlighten our understanding to lay hold of this so that we who have walked in defeat, barrenness, bitterness, resentment, and all the frustration of the flesh may in this quiet moment of acceptance of his life in us, rise up to walk in victory and fulfillment. In his name, Amen.

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