

The God Who Turns Sorrow Into Joy

THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD #6 - Pastor Gary Combs - May 31, 2026 – Esther 9:20-10:3

INTRO: Good morning church! We're concluding our 6-week sermon series entitled: THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD: A Study of Esther today.

In previous chapters, we saw that even when God is not mentioned, He is not missing. We watched a Jewish orphan become queen, Mordecai uncover a forgotten assassination plot, and Haman devise a wicked plan to destroy the Jews. We watched Esther risk her life to speak up, a sleepless king reverse the course of history, and Haman fall on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Through every twist and turn, the hidden hand of God was quietly at work to preserve His people.

Now, in these final verses, the crisis has passed, the enemy has fallen, and the people have been delivered. The story ends with Mordecai and Esther sending out letters to establish a commemorative feast called Purim, a permanent reminder that what looked like certain destruction had turned their sorrow into joy. They established this annual Jewish holiday so that the people of God would not forget how He had rescued them.

Need: We are a forgetful people. We tend to remember our pain more readily than God's faithfulness. We remember wounds, fears, disappointments, and losses, but quickly forget the ways God has sustained and delivered us. If we're not careful, we'll misinterpret God's mercy and blessings as mere coincidence rather than His hidden hand at work in our lives.

Trans: Some have observed that the command to "remember" may be among the most repeated themes in Scripture because God knows how prone His people are to spiritual amnesia. The book of Esther reminds us that God not only works to deliver His people; He calls them to remember His deliverance.

BODY: In the final section of Esther, Mordecai and Esther established the annual festival of Purim to commemorate how God overturned Haman's decree of annihilation, turning their sorrow into joy. We can see how this points to the gospel of Jesus Christ, which turns our sorrow into joy. How does it point to the gospel of Jesus which turns our sorrow into joy? The text points to three gospel parallels that turn our sorrow into joy.

Text: Esther 9:20-10:3 (ESV) ²⁰ 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, ²¹ obliging them to keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same, year by year, ²² 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 gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor. ²³ So the Jews accepted what they had started to do, and what Mordecai had written to them. ²⁴ 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, cast lots), to crush and to destroy them. ²⁵ But when it came before the king, he gave orders in writing that his evil plan that he had devised against the Jews should return on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. ²⁶ Therefore they called these days Purim, after the term Pur. Therefore, because of all that was written in this letter, and of what they had faced in this matter, and of what had happened to them, ²⁷ the Jews firmly obligated themselves and their offspring 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, ²⁸ that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, in every clan, 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. ²⁹ Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihai, and Mordecai the Jew gave full written authority, confirming this second letter about Purim. ³⁰ Letters were sent to all the Jews, to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, in words of peace and truth, ³¹ that these days of Purim should be observed at their appointed seasons, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther obligated them, and as they had obligated themselves and their offspring, with regard to their fasts and their lamenting. ³² The command of Esther confirmed these practices of Purim, and it was recorded in writing. ^{10:1} King Ahasuerus imposed tax on the land and on the coastlands of the sea. ² 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? ³ For Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brothers, for he sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his people.

THREE GOSPEL PARALLELS THAT TURN OUR SORROW INTO JOY:

1. The parallel of the great reversal.

EXP: (9:20-25) Notice "turned" (22) and "return on his own head" (25). Both speak to the great reversal that God accomplished through Esther and Mordecai to rescue His people.

"Mordecai recorded these things and sent letters" (20) - Mordecai wrote this first letter alone, acting in his capacity as the newly advanced leader. It recorded the historical events of their deliverance and ordered the Jews to observe the **14th and 15th days of Adar** (In 2026: March 2-3) a new Jewish holiday.

"Turned... sorrow into gladness" (22) (הִפְּכָה, *hāpāk*) - to turn, overturn; to be reversed.

"For Haman the Agagite" (24) - The 1st letter summarized Haman's plot and its complete reversal.

"Cast Pur ... lots" (24) (פּוּר, *pûr*) - lot or piece.

"Return on his own head" (25) (שׁוּב, *šûb*) - to return, turn back. Haman's plots were poured out upon himself, onto his own head. Literally he was hanged on his own gallows.

ARG: In Christ, God reversed our sin and turned the plans of the evil one against him:

Colossians 2:13-15 (NLT) ¹³ You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. ¹⁴ He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.

The God Who Turns Sorrow Into Joy

THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD #6 - Pastor Gary Combs - May 31, 2026 – Esther 9:20-10:3

God is in the business of great reversals, of turning sorrow to joy:

Psalm 30:11 (ESV) You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness.

ILL: This reversal points us to the cross. At the cross, what appeared to be Satan's greatest victory became his ultimate defeat. God overturned our sentence of condemnation and transformed the instrument of death into the means of salvation. The cross became the place where sorrow was turned into everlasting joy.

APP: Perhaps today you are living in a season of sorrow, wondering where God is in your pain. Esther reminds us that God is still at work even when His hand is hidden. The same God who reversed the Jews' destruction and raised Jesus from the dead is able to bring redemption even in our darkest circumstances.

2. The parallel of keeping remembrance.

EXP: (9:26-32) The Jews "firmly obligated themselves and their offspring" (27) to keep these two days without fail every year. The writer stresses the weight of this habit: these days must be "remembered and kept throughout every generation" (28).

"Keep (kept)" (21,27,28) (עָשָׂה, 'āśâ) - to do, work, make. This is an active keeping of remembrance.

"Purim" (26) - plural form of pur. So the holiday commemorates the day the enemy rolled the dice and lost. In his book, *The Queen You Thought You Knew*, Rabbi David Fohrman, suggests a wordplay may be in view because the Persian word "pur" and the Hebrew word "par" (פָּר), which means to annul or cancel, sound similar. So naming the festival Purim was a double entendre.

However, Dr. Gregory says, "By naming the festival "Purim," attention is focused on something deeper. And it is this: the lot, or destiny, of God's people is not left up to chance and it is not determined by someone like Haman casting lots before his gods. No, only God determines the lot of his people" (Bryan R. Gregory, *Inconspicuous Providence*, 166). As the book of Proverbs says:

Proverbs 16:33 (ESV) The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

"Firmly obligated themselves" (27) (קָוַם, qûm) - to raise up, constitute; to cause to stand, establish

"Remembered" (28) (זָכַר, zākar) - to remember, recall, call to mind. They keep this holiday until this day.

"Never fall into disuse" (28) (עָבַר, 'ābar) - to vanish, to perish, cease to exist. A perpetual remembrance.

"Second letter" (29) - Mordecai alone wrote the first letter (20). But then, Queen Esther and Mordecai sent a second letter with 'full written authority.' Why a second letter? The second letter codified it into law so that future generations wouldn't treat their rescue as a fleeting memory.

"Command of Esther confirmed" (32) - As Queen of Persia, Esther gives it the additional weight of royal approval. Along with some more detail about the "practices of Purim."

ARG: **Jesus gave us a command to remember Him in the Lord's Supper.**

Luke 22:19-20 (ESV) ¹⁹ And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

Paul further commanded believers to remember Jesus and His gospel.

2 Timothy 2:8 (ESV) Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel.

ILL: Why do we celebrate birthdays and wedding anniversaries? What about Mother's Day or July 4th? "Scripture is fundamentally a remembering book for a forgetful people." — Eugene Peterson

The God Who Turns Sorrow Into Joy

THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD #6 - Pastor Gary Combs - May 31, 2026 – Esther 9:20-10:3

Walter Brueggemann argues that biblical faith is built on “acts of remembering that resist amnesia” and that worship is essentially “re-remembering.”

APP: Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly tells His people to remember. Why? Because forgetfulness is one of the great dangers of the human heart. When we forget God’s faithfulness, fear and anxiety begin to grow. But remembrance strengthens our faith. That is why worship, communion, testimony, Scripture reading, and gathering with God’s people are so important. They remind us that the God who has been faithful in the past will remain faithful in the future.

3. The parallel of the exalted Representative.

EXP: (10:1-3) The book closes with Mordecai elevated to “second in rank” (3) beside the king. He sought the welfare of the people and spoke peace to them. Mordecai served as a mediating figure who used his position to bring protection, peace, and relief to God’s people throughout the empire.

“**Imposed tax**” (10:1) - “The disastrous expedition to Greece must have taxed the resources of the empire” (Ellicott). Despite deliverance, the Jews remain dispersed under foreign authority (Iain M. Duguid).

“**All the acts**” (2) - According to Greek historians, Xerxes’ later reign became increasingly unstable, with revolts and internal political struggles. Around 465 BC, he was assassinated in his palace.

“**High honor of Mordecai**” (2) (הַגְּדֻלָּה, *g^edūlā*) - greatness, majesty, dignity.

“**Second in rank**” (3) - Mordecai’s advancement points to Christ’s exaltation to the Father’s right hand.

“**Sought the welfare**” (3) (טוֹב, *tōb*) - good, pleasant, agreeable. Mordecai is their mediator.

ARG: Mordecai points us to a far greater representative, our Mediator, Jesus Christ.

1 Timothy 2:5 (ESV) For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus

Christ intercedes for us as our Representative who intercedes for us.

Romans 8:34 (NKJV) Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

ILL: Contrast Mordecai’s suffering in 4:1 (Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes...he cried out with a loud and bitter cry) .to exaltation in 8:15 (Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white, with a great golden crown and a robe of fine linen and purple, and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced). This foreshadows Christ’s journey from suffering to exaltation.

APP: Many people are searching for peace today, but lasting peace is found only in Jesus Christ. Because He represents us before the Father, we can rest confidently in His care.

CONCLUSION: Today we’ve seen that God is the author of the ultimate happy ending. Over these past six weeks, we have traveled through a book where God’s name was never whispered, yet His presence was undeniable. We have seen that even when God is silent, He is never still. He works behind the scenes, He calls ordinary people to speak up, He goes ahead of us, He turns the tables on evil, He delivers us from death, and today, we’ve seen how He turns our deepest sorrow into everlasting joy through His great reversal, His call to remembrance, and His provision of a perfect Mediator in Jesus Christ.

The story of Esther reminds us that even when God seems silent, He is still working behind the scenes for the good of His people. And the gospel assures us that through Christ, our greatest enemy has been defeated, our deepest sorrow has been overcome, and our future joy is secure.

Let’s pray.