

April 12

Real Resurrection

Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept (1 Corinthians 15:20, *KJV*).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 12-14, 20-23, 42-45

Song: “The Day of Resurrection”

“One man’s junk is another man’s treasure” was never truer than for Michael Sparks. Sparks was garage-sale shopping and paid around \$2 for what he believed was a cheap, mass copy of the Declaration of Independence. However, after much research, he discovered that his document was a rare reprint of the original Declaration and worth over \$400,000! Even though Sparks had originally dismissed the document as not authentic, it was a genuine treasure.

Some in the Corinthian church were spreading the heresy that there is no bodily resurrection. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul denounced this false idea. He asserted that if there is no resurrection, then Christ could not have been raised, Christians’ faith would therefore be in vain, and they would still be dead in their sins. Paul emphasized that Christianity was not simply an idea but a reality. God had redeemed believers’ souls and would one day redeem their fleshly bodies as well. The resurrection was genuine, regardless of what false teachers said.

Likewise, there are many in the world today who deny the reality of the coming resurrection. Yet if a resurrection for believers is not possible, then Christ could not have been resurrected either. In fact, Paul describes Christ as the “firstfruits” of the resurrection. Because He was resurrected, we will be resurrected one day as well.

Dear Lord, help us trust that because You were resurrected, we will be resurrected as well someday. In our risen Savior’s name, amen.

Standing Upright

The royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?" (Esther 3:3).

Scripture: Esther 3:1-6

Song: "Stand Up"

A friend had wisely counseled me when I moved into private-school administration that the position would bring me a wider view of human brokenness. In that role I frequently mediated conflicts between individuals. Still, I was occasionally surprised by those whose perspective of justice was skewed by their own desires. A demand for what we perceive to be our rights is, at times, self-promotion or self-protection cloaked in sinful indignation.

Just as Mordecai did with Haman, we must remain steadfast in anchoring our perspective of justice in God's definition of right, and not our own, when we experience conflict or face difficult experiences. Keeping our eyes centered on the one who stands above all other authority enables us to remain humble, even when confronting the evil created by the kingdom of darkness.

Haman perceived Mordecai's disobedience as a personal affront to his delegated authority, as if Mordecai's refusal was his own claim to authority. For Mordecai, however, refusing to kneel was a declaration that God alone is the supreme authority and only He is worthy of worship. Mordecai appealed to an unseen kingdom and to the God whose justice he was confident would prevail.

Father, thank You that we can ask for Your discernment, that we might see beyond our circumstances to stand firmly on the truth of Your eternal kingdom. By Christ's authority we pray. Amen.

April 14

For Our Good

The king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews (Esther 3:10).

Scripture: Esther 3:7-11

Song: “No Outsiders”

Writer Flannery O’Connor didn’t always feel welcome in the South, though it had been her home for most of her life. Devout in her faith, she boldly called out religious form that lacked the fervor of devotion, especially as it related to racism. Her unique style often left her insights about grace misunderstood. Some even went so far as to declare her an outsider to the community of faith.

O’Connor’s story reminds us that our sense of purpose, our value in existing, cannot be based on others’ opinions. Sometimes we encounter a “Haman”—as in someone who overtly seeks to create chaos in our lives. Equally destructive, however, are those who simply see us as not worth their time.

Haman’s request to annihilate the Jews brought about a perplexing response from King Xerxes. The king gave Haman permission, but not because of the money Haman had promised (since Xerxes told Haman to keep his payment). Instead, King Xerxes simply seemed uninterested, without concern for the fate of an entire group of people living in his territory. God, however, continued to work on their behalf.

We too can know that when others are dismissive of or unconcerned for us, God hears our cries and answers for our good.

Father, remind us that You hear us. Keep us from lacking interest in the heartfelt concerns of others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Consistent Hope

Haman went out that day happy and in high spirits. But when he saw Mordecai at the king's gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage against Mordecai (Esther 5:9).

Scripture: Esther 5:9-14

Song: “Desert Song”

The early-twentieth-century race to the South Pole between Robert Scott and Roald Amundsen demonstrates the power of consistency. Though not the favored team, Amundsen and his men reached their destination by maintaining a 20-mile pace each day, regardless of the elements. But Scott and his men allowed the environment to dictate their daily treks—and ultimately perished because of that decision.

Like an explorer gauging his effort based on weather and changing variables, we face the temptation to allow our hope, and our emotions, to rise and fall based on what happens around us. When events appear to be in our favor, we find it easier to believe all will be well, but an unexpected frustration can just as quickly send us on a course of despair.

Haman's emotions catapulted into rage when he didn't get his way, but Mordecai remained consistent in his hope, despite Haman's threats. One lived by what could only be temporary, while the other fixed his eyes on the one who is eternal. When times of testing come, God's Word and His character determine the direction and guidelines for our actions and emotions.

Father, we praise You for Your character that does not change, and that no matter what transpires in our lives, You can be trusted. Teach us to keep our hope rooted in You. In Jesus' name, amen.

April 16

Asking Without Fear

Then the king extended the gold scepter to Esther and she arose and stood before him (Esther 8:4).

Scripture: Esther 8:3-8, 16, 17

Song: “Salvation Belongs to Our God”

When we were kids, my sister and I would strategize when it came to asking our parents for permission regarding anything significant. Working together, we would first try to figure out which of the two of us had a better chance of securing the desired answer. Then we would decide which parent seemed more likely to be on our side. Inevitably, our parents saw through our tactics; and their teamwork, rather than ours, usually prevailed.

In a scene more significant than childhood antics, Esther carefully discerned her interactions with King Xerxes before making her appeal. She had seen God work in her previous requests, but asking for Xerxes to counter his own ruling was laden with even more political import than his decision to punish Haman. Because she knew that God gave her influence, Esther looked past any fear of danger and interceded boldly for her people.

Esther knew her position in the palace would not exempt her from the precarious situation threatening the Jews' well-being. She could feel their crisis as she too was at risk. Like Esther, we are called to use the influence God has given us to act with His heart of love on behalf of those around us, feeling what they feel, wherever we may be.

Father, thank You for making a way through the blood of Jesus for us to come without fear into Your presence. May we be faithful to intercede for others with our prayers, our words, and our decisions. In Jesus' name, amen.

God Sets Us Free

The Jews agreed to continue the celebration they had begun, doing what Mordecai had written to them (Esther 9:23).

Scripture: Esther 9:18-23, 29-32

Song: “Burn the Ships”

As church planters, my husband and I have faced varying challenges, from financial stretch to difficult relationships to ordinary fatigue. In times of struggle, we have been deliberate not only to be honest with others but also to recount, as many times as we needed, the testimonies of God’s faithfulness to us.

Esther, Mordecai, and the Jews living in Persia petitioned God for justice by fasting when their enemies planned to destroy them. God answered with miraculous intervention through His servants. There are no direct references to the name of God in the book of Esther, but we clearly see His deliverance for the Jews because “righteousness and justice are the foundation of [His] throne” (Psalm 89:14). Their intended-but-prevented demise became not only a testimony of preservation but also a celebration to be marked through the generations.

When we feel vulnerable because of the challenges we face, God is always present with us. Whether we feel as if we are captive and out of control in a foreign land or struggling with the consequences of our own choices, we can set our hearts on this truth: God never fails. He will prevail with justice and deliverance for all who seek Him.

Jesus, thank You that we can trust You, no matter how fierce the battle we face. Thank You that we can find safety, great joy, and provision when we seek Your name above everything else. Teach us to live completely invested in You and Your ways. With Your authority, we pray. Amen.

Beyond Our Story

All [the king's] acts of power and might, together with a full account of the greatness of Mordecai, whom the king had promoted, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Media and Persia? (Esther 10:2).

Scripture: Esther 10:1-3

Song: “Our God Reigns”

Going to lunch together after working on a project at the church, my husband and I had a chance to spend time talking with one of the high school students in our congregation. We asked him about his future dreams. Like many his age, he sees the glamour of social media and questions his ability to accomplish what he defines as significant.

We live in a noisy world, one in which people desperately cry out to know their lives are more than a blip on the radar of time. In everything from Instagram posts to YouTube videos, people are desperate for an audience.

A previously unknown man, Mordecai, became so influential that his days were recorded in “the annals of the kings of Media and Persia.” His journey began with his willingness to love well the orphaned relative left in his care. He made history one faithful choice at a time.

When we remember that God exists above time and beyond mankind’s accomplishments, our ordinary moments and day-to-day choices become opportunities for history to shift.

Jesus, remind us that living out step-by-step obedience is a powerful rendering of Your kingdom here on earth. May Your will be accomplished in our day-to-day decisions. We pray this by Your authority. Amen.