

Esther

ORDINARY PEOPLE, EXTRAORDINARY GOD

Esther: Ordinary People, Extraordinary God
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Introduction to the Study of Esther

Ordinary People, Extraordinary God

Not once do we find in the entire story of the Old Testament Book of Esther God mentioned.¹ What's more, the book appears to avoid "any obviously religious language..."²

These facts could explain why the great reformer, Martin Luther, found little to be admired about the book. He once wrote, "I am so great an enemy to the second book of the Maccabees, and to Esther, that I wish they had not come to us at all, for they have too many heathen unnaturalities."³ He apparently was not alone, for there were no commentaries produced on Esther for the first 700 years of the Christian church.⁴

With that being said, we must not ignore the Book of Esther for several reasons (though this is not an exhaustive list).

First, in spite of much opposition, the Book of Esther came to be accepted as a book of holy Scripture. We believe that all Scripture is from God, being breathed out of His own mouth. Therefore, Esther is a story from God, which means that "in a sense God is telling us the story" even if He is not explicitly mentioned.⁵

A **second** reason we cannot and should not ignore the story of Esther pertains to the fact that the events chronicled within paint a captivating portrait of God's providence.

Karen Jobes notes how God's providence refers to how "God, in some invisible and inscrutable way, governs all creatures, actions, and circumstances through the normal and the ordinary course of human life, without the intervention of the miraculous."⁶ In this story, we are reminded how an extraordinary God works in and through the everyday events and decisions in the lives of ordinary people to accomplish His pure and perfect will.⁷

Although God is never referenced, never addressed in prayer, never explicitly worshipped, and never said to perform a supernatural miracle or any explicit act, it should not be concluded "that he is not doing anything. God's work is not all slam-bang action; sometimes it is a quiet faithfulness to his promises in the seemingly ordinary providences of life, bringing about in the hearts of his people what he has purposed."⁸

Every follower of Jesus Christ today would benefit tremendously from studying the Book of Esther, which reminds us of how God rules the world through the normal, routine, and, yes, even ordinary events and circumstances of our daily lives. No matter how ordinary we believe our lives to be, an extraordinary God is at work. Through the story of Esther, the "author is suggesting that beneath the surface of seemingly insignificant human decisions and events, an unseen and uncontrollable power is at work that can be neither explained nor thwarted."⁹

Having stated that the primary focus of the story is the providence of God, we now see a **third** reason not to ignore

the Book of Esther. Terry Muck states, “Read correctly, the lead character of the book of Esther is not even Esther, but God.”¹⁰ The lead character is the unnamed God working in an unseen manner. By giving proper time and study to the Book of Esther, we learn more about God and His work, even though it is presented in a veiled manner. This fact only urges us to seek the presence of God and acknowledge His work, both in the story and in the ordinariness of our lives, when His absence seems so glaring.¹¹

A **fourth** reason we should not ignore the Book of Esther relates to the story of God’s mighty saving work. In the story of Esther, God did not abandon a sinful people in distress, but instead worked providentially to rescue them from annihilation. Israel had been led into captivity because of their sin. Even when they were permitted to return to the land promised and given to them by God, some remained in Persia instead. With their destruction looming, God rescued His people from their enemies. So, too, has God not abandoned our world that lies in sin and distress. God delivered us by a Savior better than Esther. Jesus Christ came to seek and to save the lost, reversing the declaration of judgment against us, and delivering us from our enemies of sin, Satan, and death.

Thank you for joining us in this study of Esther! The study guide you hold was created as a companion to the sermon series at First Baptist Church in Matthews, North Carolina. Through this study, we pray you will grow in the knowledge of the character, power, and grace of God, surrendering all the ordinariness of your life to His extraordinary power.

Week One | Day One | God's Providence

Hebrews 1:3, Nehemiah 9:6, Colossians 1:17

“The book of Esther,” writes Wallace Benn, “is a marvelous book to teach us the critically important truth of the providence of God.”¹

But what is the providence of God?

The word providence comes from “two Latin words: *pro*, which means ‘before,’ and *vide*, which means ‘see.’”² *Providence* literally means to see beforehand. The biblical concept of God’s providence means more than just God’s foreknowledge, though it does include His foreknowledge. God’s providence entails His continual work to sustain and provide for His creation. He fulfills His purpose through the people He created and placed in this world and the laws of nature He designed.³

God maintains all His creation and its properties by His providence.

According to Hebrews 1:3, what critical work does God continually do for the universe?

In Nehemiah 9:6, Ezra extols God and His handiwork. What does Ezra say God does with all that He has made (the

heavens, earth, seas, and all creatures)? What does it mean that God *preserves* them?

The Apostle Paul writes in Colossians 1:17 that in Christ Jesus all things hold together. *All things* in this verse refers to everything God has made and the order that governs those things. If all creation is held together in Jesus and continues to endure by His power, what would remain if God stopped doing this right now?

Reflection

What properties or constants in God's created order do you depend upon each day to be unchanging? For example, what if H₂O no longer formed water?

If God ceased to maintain one of the properties or constants from your list above, how would your life be impacted, altered, or diminished?

What things in your life are you responsible for maintaining or sustaining?

Considering our study today, would you claim that you are solely responsible for this work? Why or why not?

Spend some time in prayer in response to the reading of God's Word. Praise Him for His perfect order and sustaining power over all His marvelous creation. Acknowledge and give thanks that the things we have been entrusted to maintain, and sometimes believe we solely control, are under His sovereign, providential rule. Now lay at His feet your requests, knowing and trusting His providence.

Week One | Day Two | God's Providence

Genesis 22:1–14

God maintains His creation and its order. Scripture teaches that God actively works to provide for our needs. In His foreknowledge, God sees beforehand what we lack, and He acts to meet those needs in His time, according to His will. All of this God does by His providence.

We find the first occurrence of the word *providence* in the story of God commanding Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. Read the story in Genesis 22:1–14.

What did God command Abraham to do in verses 1–2?

How did Abraham respond to God's instruction in verse 3?

The internal anguish for Abraham must have been intense. Nevertheless, he obeyed God's command. As Abraham and Isaac traveled to the site of the sacrifice, what does Isaac ask his dad in verse 7?

How does Abraham answer his son's inquiry?

God's nature is so great that we cannot fully comprehend all that He is and does. The Scriptures reveal God's multi-faceted character and work through various names for God. In this story of Abraham offering Isaac as a sacrifice, Abraham calls God *Jehovah jireh*, which means "God will provide."

What does Abraham say that God would provide in verse 8? For whom would God provide this?

Would you add anyone else to the list of those who would benefit from God's provision?

In verses 10–14, Abraham obeyed God, placing Isaac upon the altar to sacrifice him. Yet before Abraham lowered the knife upon Isaac, God called out for him to stop. Abraham looked and saw a ram caught in the thicket. Who provided the ram?

Reflection

God provides the things we lack at the exact time we need them. God provided the ram not before Abraham obeyed, but at the perfect time of God's choosing and Abraham's

need. The ram God provided would be sacrificed so Isaac would not have to die.

R. C. Sproul points how “this passage looks forward to the ultimate provision [God] has made by virtue of His divine sovereignty, the supreme Lamb who was sacrificed on our behalf.”⁴

Jesus Christ, God’s Son, is the supreme Lamb. In Romans 3:23–25, how was Jesus the ultimate provision of God for us?

When Peter preached to the crowd in Acts 2:23, he stated that Jesus Christ died by God’s definite plan and what else?

According to Revelation 13:8, when did God in His foreknowledge plan for Jesus to die for the sins of the world?

Connect with God in prayer. Pray with thanksgiving that God in His foreknowledge knew that we would sin against Him. Celebrate the planned death of Jesus Christ for our forgiveness and salvation, even before the creation of humanity. Praise Him for being our provider and trust Him to continue providing for all your needs in His perfect time.

Week One | Day Three | God's Providence

Ephesians 1:11, Jonah 1:1–7

Nothing occurs in our world outside of God's providence. Every event and action serve the ultimate end of fulfilling God's plan.

In Ephesians 1:11, Paul states, "In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will".

What does Paul say God is working to accomplish?

What does Paul say God is using to bring about His will?

God sovereignly works all things to the accomplishment of His will, including those things often considered either random or the product of chance. Proverbs 16:33 reads, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord."

The act of casting lots would be most akin today to flipping a coin. "The casting of lots was a widely used method in the ancient Near East. The most common word used for 'lot' indicates that they were either stones or pebbles that were painted or colored. When the stones were thrown, if two dark sides landed up the usual interpretation was no. If two

light sides landed up, that meant yes. A light and a dark side meant throw again.”⁵

According to Proverbs 16:33 above, who determines the outcome of casting lots?

Turn to the Old Testament book of Jonah and read Jonah 1:1–7.

Jonah deliberately disobeyed God’s command to go proclaim to Nineveh the message of God. Instead, he chose to board a ship to sail as far from where God called him to go. Who sent the storm upon the sea according to verse 4?

When the storm did not pass, what did the sailors do in verses 5–6?

And when the storm continued to rage on, what solution did the sailors discuss in verse 7?

To whom did the lots fall and why?

Reflection

Do you chalk up life's circumstances and events to chance or randomness? From the reading and study today, how should we see the planned and seemingly random events of life, whether big or small, evil or good?⁶ Can you give an example?

As you go about this week, ask God to help you to see all things as the result of His providence. Ask God to help you to keep in clear view that He is using all things to accomplish His eternal will both for the world and for you personally. Pray that in all things you will give thanks knowing He is ultimately in control (1 Thessalonians 5:16).

Week One | Day Four | God's Providence

Genesis 37:1–28

When studying the providence of God, some individuals deeply struggle. They find it difficult to see how their decisions or actions as human beings are real and consequential if God is in sovereign, providential control.

Wayne Grudem encourages those who experience such turmoil, saying, “...God’s providential direction as an unseen, behind-the-scenes, ‘primary cause,’ should not lead us to deny the reality of our choices and actions.”⁷

In fact, the Bible includes a number of stories that show us that God accomplishes His purpose and will by His providence and through the real, conscious, act of the will decisions of human beings.

One clear account of how God’s providence works through human action can be seen in the story of Joseph at the end of the Book of Genesis. Take some time to read Genesis 37:1–28.

Why did Joseph’s brother harbor such hatred toward him?

How did they plan to deal with their problematic, little brother according to verse 20?

In verses 21–28, what ‘new’ plan did they ultimately decide upon and carry out?

Were the actions of these men of their own choosing? Did anyone force them to do what they did?

Joseph’s brothers never forgot what they had done. Yet they believed their actions successfully rid them of Joseph forever. They relished never having to hear of his dreams again, nor having concern that those dreams would be fulfilled. When famine struck the land, however, and Joseph’s brothers were sent to get grain in Egypt. There in Egypt they came face to face with Joseph, who provided an abundance of grain for them. Upon learning Joseph’s true identity, the brothers feared retaliation and revenge for what they had done. Instead, what does Joseph say to them in Genesis 50:19–21?

Who does Joseph say was at work even through the brothers’ angry, evil actions against him?

What was God accomplishing by moving Joseph to Egypt through the malicious and sinful decisions of his brothers against him?

How should we think, speak, respond, and act, knowing God providentially works to accomplish His will in our lives and the world even through the evil and harmful actions of others toward us?

Reflection

A New Testament parallel to Joseph's grand declaration in Genesis 50:20 about God's providential work comes in Paul's words to Christians in Romans 8:28. What does Paul write?

What does Romans 8:28 teach you about the providence of God in the world generally and in your life specifically?

Week One | Day Five | God's Providence

Acts 2:14–36

The central event in human history remains, and always will be, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the rescue of humanity. The New Testament teaches us that Christ's work of salvation occurred by the divine providence of God through the deliberate decisions and actions of the very flawed humans He came to save.

On the day of Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, God the Father sent the Spirit of God to indwell and empower the disciples of Christ. Having received the Spirit, Peter stood with the other eleven apostles to verbally witness to the person and work of Jesus.

Read Luke's record of that message in Acts 2:14–36.

As Peter proclaims the message of Jesus, he says in verse 23 that Jesus was "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God." From this, who does Peter say was responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus?

Reading further in verse 23, Peter charges the crowd with responsibility for Jesus' death. He says "this Jesus...you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." Then again, in verse 36, Peter declares, "...God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." From

these verses, who does Peter pin responsibility upon for the death of Jesus?

From what Peter preaches, did the “lawless men” act against their wills? What does Peter say that leads you to either think Peter did or did not believe God held those who crucified Jesus responsible for their actions?

Reflection

Peter’s sermon highlights the providence of our sovereign God. Rebellious humans willfully chose their actions against Jesus, but these actions were predestined by the foreknowledge of God. Though this be true, “the apostles clearly attach no moral blame to God, for the actions result from the willing choices of sinful men.”⁸ God accomplished His work of redemption according to His plan albeit by the willful acts of those who physically punished and crucified Jesus Christ.

Wayne Grudem writes that God is the primary cause of all things “but that he does so in such a way that he somehow upholds our ability to make *willing, responsible choices*, choices that have *real and eternal results*, and for which we are *held accountable*. Exactly how God combines his providential control with our willing and significant choices, Scripture does not explain to us.”⁹

Although God will always carry out His will, our decisions matter and have real consequences. Therefore, our desire and commitment as followers of Jesus ought to be to walk in His way, by His commands, deciding and acting in ways that align with His expressed will for our lives.

Jesus instructed us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil [or the evil one]” (Matthew 6:13). Are there choices you are making and actions you are taking that do not align with God’s word and will? If so, what are they?

Spend time confessing your faults to God and committing to turn from the error of your way. Receive and give thanks for the abundant grace of God to forgive your sin. Ask God for wisdom and power to obey His commands. Pray for God to continually show you, day by day, where your decisions and actions do not align with His commands.

Week Two | Day One | The Pride of Man

Esther 1:1–8

This week begins our journey of exploring in the Book of Esther how the lives and events of ordinary people serve to advance and accomplish the work of an extraordinary God.

Begin today's study by reading Esther chapter one.

In the opening chapter, we are introduced to Ahasuerus (Xerxes), the 35-year-old King of Persia, who is hosting a series of parties. These parties are believed to have been a means to rally support from leaders for an attack on Greece.¹

Write down some of the ways from the text that the king displayed his wealth and power before these leaders?

Do you think wealth, splendor, and majesty can lead to a prideful heart over time? If so, how? If not, why?

Do you think these possessions led King Ahasuerus to have a prideful heart? Why, or why not?

Reflection

What are some good things you possess and treasure? How did you obtain them?

In James 1:17, we are reminded that our heavenly Father is the giver of all good gifts. The word of God tells us that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof (Psalm 24:1). Nothing we possess has been obtained in our own strength or because of who we are. The good gifts we possess are because of whose we are. A heart of gratitude that recognizes our possessions are God's gift to us may be our best defense against pride.

Spend some time thanking God for all the many blessings he has given you. List some of them below as a reminder of His goodness in your life.

Week Two | Day Two | The Choices of a King

Esther 1:7–11

King Ahasuerus knew how to throw a party! He hosted numerous parties across multiple days, generously making sure his guests had plenty of alcohol to drink.

How much alcohol was made available and consumed according to verses 7–8?

Can you think of a time or circumstance in which being encouraged to drink as much as you desire coupled with an abundance of alcohol present would be a good idea? Why or why not?

God commands us in Ephesians 5:18, saying, “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit...” Why do you think God has given us this command and warning?

Our actions are based on a series of decisions and choices that we make. Our decisions have consequences that

Week Two | Day Three | A Queen's Response

Esther 1:10–17

Yesterday we considered how our decisions and choices impact our lives and the lives of those around us. Every decision sets into motion a consequence, either good or bad. This truth appears vividly in the text today.

King Ahasuerus ends up making decisions in what was most likely a drunken state. What is the first decision he makes?

What other factors may have influenced him to command his Queen to come before him and his guests?

Though the text never explicitly tells us, why do you think Queen Vashti may have refused to appear before the king and his guests when summoned?

Is there a reason that would justify her disobeying an order from the king, her husband?

When Queen Vashti refused to go, do you think she counted the cost of her disobedience?

Reflection

Queen Vashti rejected the king's summons, and the king burned with anger.

Has someone disappointed you in a decision they have made? What did they do and how did it anger or hurt you?

In what way(s) can you show grace to them despite the hurt or frustration you feel over their choice?

Think about the significant relationships in your life with a spouse, friend, child, coworker, teammate, etc. What are some ways you can strengthen those relationships so that, when a decision is made that may disappoint or hurt them, it will not destroy the relationship?

Week Two | Day Four | The ‘Wise’ Men

Esther 1:13–22

King Ahasuerus had a council of ‘wise men’ that he consulted to advise him in matters of law and justice.

Begin today by reading verses 13–22 to find out more about these men and their influence on the King.

What do we learn was the custom for the king?

Was Vashti’s refusal of the king’s command a matter of ‘law and justice’? Why or why not?

In verse 19, Memucan suggests the king replace Queen Vashti with someone who is ‘better’. What do you think he may have meant by ‘better’?

Given the little that we know about Queen Vashti, in what ways could another woman have been better than her?

Reflection

It is important who we seek for counsel and that we ensure the counsel we receive is good, right, and pleasing to God.

Psalm 119:105 tells us that God's "word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path." Write down three important or difficult decisions you are presently facing. Search the Bible for 1–2 verses that instruct you as to what God would have you do in those situations. Write down those verses here.

Take some time today to pray those verses back to God. Ask Him to give you wisdom and strength in how to handle those situations in a way that is in obedience to His word and will be pleasing to Him.

Week Two | Day Five | Seeing the Unseen

Esther 1:1–22

Let us examine some of the ordinary, even odd events and decisions, that took place throughout chapter one as we wrap up this first week.

We noted how the author carefully tells us that copious amounts of wine were consumed during the king’s party. Karen Jobes points out that there was an intentionality behind getting drunk and making decisions while intoxicated during these “war councils”. Within the Persian culture, they believed being inebriated allowed them access to the spiritual world.²

What does this tell us about where or from whom they were seeking guidance and answers?

Queen Vashti refused to obey the summons of her husband regardless of how dangerous it was to disobey the king. Then, Memucan suggested to the king that Vashti be replaced in favor of identifying and taking someone “better” as queen. Influenced by his counsel, the king did as Memucan suggested. This whirlwind of events—misguided seeking, defiance, and manipulation—were all part of a greater plan.

If the king had not partied, gotten drunk, and summoned his queen; and, if Queen Vashti had not refused the king's summons; and, if the king had not taken the advice to remove and replace the queen, would there ever have been a need for a new queen?

While we must not make light of the sin here since God states in Scripture that these things are displeasing to Him (drunkenness, unrighteous anger, etc.), we observe plainly how God can work in all things to bring about His will and plan, no matter how evil or sinful.

There is an adage that says, "The devil is in the details." What if we flipped that to say, "God is in the details"? What if we began examining each day to see where God is and how he's moving even in the smallest details and most ordinary aspects of our lives? Can you imagine how seeing God at work from that perspective could be life changing?

Reflection

Think back over your week. Write down any moments that were hard, difficult, or even strange. Write down as well any moments where things seemed to come together perfectly; times that you might have thought to be coincidental.

With these things in mind, spend time in prayer asking God to help you see Him as he works in your life and all around you. Thank Him that he is always at work bringing into fruition His good and perfect will.

Week Three | Day One | Later

Esther 2:1–4

Begin this week by reading Esther chapter two.

The chapter begins with the word *later*. Four years had passed since Vashti refused the summons of the King. In this chapter, King Ahasuerus is encouraged to move on from Vashti and Esther replaces her as Queen.

What insight do we get from verse 1 regarding how King Ahasuerus may be feeling or thinking four years later?

What do you think the king felt or thought when he remembered Vashti? Why?

What advice is King Ahasuerus given in verses 2–4 by his personal attendants to help him move on?

Was this the best advice? What advice would you have given the king?

Reflection

Although it can be difficult to admit, we are imperfect beings that make mistakes that lead to regrets. What are some decisions you've made—past or present—that you regret making?

What have you learned from those mistakes that has changed you for the better?

Have you repented and accepted God's forgiveness for those mistakes? If not, take a moment to do that now. Don't let another day go by holding on to something that cannot be undone. Allow God to bring restoration and healing to that which has been broken. Peter writes, "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast" (1 Peter 5:10).

Week Three | Day Two | Introductions

Esther 2:5–18

Two significant characters in God’s unfolding story appear in this chapter.

Who do we meet in verses 5–6, and what do we learn about him?

We meet a young lady in verse 7 whose life is about to drastically change. What two names are given to her? What else do we learn about her?

How are Mordecai and Esther related? How would you describe the dynamics of their relationship with each other?

There are three different times in this chapter that it is mentioned that Esther found “favor” with someone. List the three people with whom she found favor and the three verses where see this.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Why do you think Esther received so much favor?

Reflection

Throughout the Bible we find that God allows ordinary men and women to receive “favor” from both Himself and from other people. Esther was not the only one to be shown favor. The Bible tells of Joseph (Acts 7:9–10), Mary (Luke 1:28), and others who received the favor of God and people.

God desires to bestow his favor upon His followers. This includes you! In the verses of Proverbs 3 listed below, underline the conditions found that tell us how to gain favor with God and humanity.

“My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man” (Proverbs 3:1–4).

Next, circle the promises that are attached to those commands you just underlined.

Spend some time in prayer asking God to help you to be obedient to His word, not just to get something in return, but to please Him as He transforms your life by His Word into who He has called you to be.

Week Three | Day Three | Secrets

Esther 2:10–23

Yesterday we were introduced to Mordecai and Esther and the uniqueness of their relationship.

What additional insight do we gain about the relationship between Mordecai and Esther in verses 10–11 and 19–20?

Why do you think Mordecai forbade Esther from revealing her nationality and family background? Do you think Mordecai was right to instruct Esther in this way?

What did Mordecai do according to verse 11? Do you think Mordecai may have had any ulterior motives in this action? If so, what might they have been?

Esther's identity was not the only secret. What other secret do we learn about in verse 21? What benefit or harm would come from keeping this secret?

Reflection

Is it ever good to keep secrets? If so, when?

In chapter two we learn of two life altering secrets that were being kept. Make a list of five things that you are keeping secret or have kept secret from others in the past. List the reason why you kept it a secret or continue to not share that information with others.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Psalm 44:21 tells us that God knows all our secrets, and Ecclesiastes 12:14 reminds us that all secrets, good and evil, will be judged by God. What would be God's judgment regarding the secrets you are holding? Where necessary, pray to confess any secret sin and to repent of it. What should be your next step now? Spend time in prayer seeking God's wisdom and committing your way to Him.

Week Three | Day Four | The Process

Esther 2:2–18

A plan has been formulated to begin the process of replacing Vashti as Queen.

What is involved in this plan according to verses 2–4?

What do we learn about Esther in verse 9? How do you think she must have felt becoming a part of a harem?

How long was the process of preparation before going to see the king, and what all was involved in the preparation according to verses 12–13?

What do we learn in verses 16–18 is Esther's outcome in the "Beauty Pageant"?

Reflection

Can you imagine what type of feelings Esther must have been experiencing? Was it not enough that she had been orphaned and was being raised by her cousin in exile, that now she had become part of a harem? Take a moment and write down an experience or time in your life when you may have felt abandoned, lonely, or in a situation you did not seek or want.

What did you do then? What would you do now in a similar situation?

What passage of Scripture provides comfort or direction for us in such times?

The word of God reminds us that no matter what situation we find ourselves in as His followers, we can take comfort in knowing, like Esther, we are not alone. In Joshua 1:5b, God makes a promise to Joshua "...Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you". We find that this promise was not only made to those in the Old Testament, but this same promise has been made to us in the New Testament in Hebrews 13:5 and Matthew 28:20.

Week Three | Day Five | Seeing the Unseen

Esther 2:1–23

Once again, many seemingly strange events took place in Esther chapter two.

Esther, one of the Jews who remained in exile in Persia instead of returning home to the land of Israel, had been registered in a beauty pageant! This beauty pageant took young ladies, virgins, from their homes and made them part of the king's harem for the rest of their lives. Esther, being compelled to keep her ethnicity a secret, was shown incredible favor by those around her. Most importantly, she won the favor of the king himself and became the next queen to replace former Queen Vashti.

How did any of this truly come about? How does an orphaned, Jewish girl living in exile become queen of Persia?

Only by the hands of an extraordinary GOD at work in the lives and circumstances of ordinary people!

Esther was more than just in the “right place at the right time.” Many “beautiful” young ladies were sought out according to Esther 2:2. Esther's beauty was mentioned several times throughout this chapter, and she was ultimately found by the king to be most beautiful of all the ladies. Her beauty and the king's attraction to her were not by accident. God gave the king a desire such that he would

be drawn to Esther and find her more desirable than all the other young ladies. God used ordinary physical attraction to place a queen on the throne as a means to accomplish His purpose in and through the life of Esther.

Reflection

Take time to read through Esther chapter two again. However, this time look for other events, encounters, or conversations that point to the handiwork of an extraordinary God who, although unnamed, is always present and active.

What did you discover?

Who or what ordinary person or circumstance do you most identify with in this chapter and why?

Week Four | Day One | Haman

Esther 3:1–2

Once again, begin this week by reading Esther chapter three.

Last week, we were introduced to two new characters—Mordecai and Esther. This week the author presents us with another new character.

What do we learn about Haman in verses 1–2?

Who has been commanded by King Ahasuerus to honor Haman?

Why is Haman being honored?

Reflection

There are individuals that we must honor based solely on their position or rank. For instance, a mere command of the king required that Haman be honored. But how should we respond when we don't feel the person we should honor is deserving of honor? Do we normally respond in giving

honor even when we do not believe the person is worthy of such?

Write down the names of three people that you struggle to honor presently in your life. You could list a parent, government official, boss, co-worker, neighbor, etc. Beside their name, write down why you struggle to honor them.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Now, look up Matthew 5:43–48. After reading these verses of Scripture, pray those verses back to God, asking Him to soften your heart that you may love and honor those that he has commanded you, including the ones on your list.

Week Four | Day Two | Mordecai's Defiance

Esther 3:1–6

Vashti is not the only person in this story that defies the laws of the king. In this chapter we learn that Mordecai decides to disobey one of the king's commands.

What command does he choose to disobey?

Why do you think he chose to disobey this command?

What does Mordecai reveal about himself in verses 3–4?

Why do you think Mordecai told the royal officials he was a Jew, especially since he was adamant that Esther hide her ethnicity?

Why do the royal officials expose Mordecai's defiance and divulge his ethnicity to Haman?

Reflection

In certain situations, it can be very difficult to watch others break the rules when you are following them. What are some temptations/struggles that you may face when you feel like others are getting away with breaking the rules that you are following?

How do you think God wants you to respond in situations when you are doing what pleases Him through obedience, but others are not?

We read in Psalm 139:23–24, “ Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” Repent if you need to and ask God to help you be faithful, even when those around you are not. Take a moment to pray these verses of Scripture back to God.

Week Four | Day Three | The Wrath of Haman

Esther 3:5–7

In today's reading, the author describes Haman's reaction to Mordecai's defiance.

What do you think upset him the most?

Why do you think Mordecai's Jewish ethnicity angered Haman?

How does a person's anger get to such a place that would cause them to want to wipe out an entire race of people?

How was the annihilation date of the Jews determined according to verse 7?

Reflection

Casting lots during this time was not used as a form of gambling but for divination. Once again, we see individuals seeking answers from a higher power but missing the one and only true and living God in the process. It can be easy for us sometimes to do the same. List some ways that you may seek answers or direction that bypasses God?

As you look over your list, pause for a moment and think about the verse below that reminds us of the benefits of seeking God first.

Psalm 9:10 declares to us, “And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.”

Week Four | Day Four | The Power of Persuasion

Esther 3:8–15

We see once again in verses 8–11 how easily the king is persuaded into making yet another major decision.

What decision is the king persuaded to make this time?

What was said to persuade him to destroy an entire group of people?

What were the orders issued throughout the king's provinces?

Describe the contrast between the king and Haman and the city of Susa mentioned in verse 15?

Reflection

Throughout chapter three, Haman makes it very clear that he has issues with the Jews. In verse 8, what words or phrases does Haman use to describe the Jewish people to the king?

Take a moment to think about this passage. Have you ever found yourself angry, frustrated, or estranged from a group of people of a different ethnicity, background, or cultural customs than you? Romans 12:10 tells us to “love one another with brotherly affection” and to “outdo one another in showing honor.”

How can you allow God to help you love those who are different from you?

How can you allow God to enable you to love those for whom you have indifference or hostility?

Spend some time in prayer asking Him to give you His love for those different from you and those for whom you have anger or lack compassion. Ask God to help you to see all people as image bearers of the Most High God.

Week Four | Day Five | Seeing the Unseen

Esther 2:19–3:1–15

You may have noticed that the transition between Esther chapter two and Esther chapter three seems quite abrupt.

The second chapter ended with Mordecai uncovering a plot to kill the king. His discovery and declaration of the plot saved the king's life. But then chapter three picks up with Haman being honored instead of Mordecai. The reason for the king's decision is unknown. Haman was promoted by the king while Mordecai went unnoticed and unrewarded.

Between chapters two and three, five years have elapsed. Mordecai, who saved the king's life five years prior with no reward and no recognition, was expected now to kneel and honor Haman. We can only imagine how Mordecai must have felt.

As Mordecai refused to pay homage to Haman, some of the king's men questioned him as to why he would not bow. He revealed his ethnicity to these men as a reason he did not give honor to Haman. These men, in turn, shared with Haman how Mordecai disregarded the king's command in giving him honor because of Mordecai's Jewish ethnicity.

Mordecai's action rekindled the deep, generational hatred that existed between the Agagites and the Jewish people. (Read more about the history surrounding their hatred for each other in 1 Samuel 15 and Exodus 17:8—16). The

revelation of Mordecai's defiance was all Haman, an Agagite, needed to unleash his wrath upon all the Jewish people (v. 10), especially Mordecai.

Anger and vengeance are emotions that ordinary human beings experience and express in moments when they believe they have been wronged in some way. Much like Haman, these emotions can lead to making rash decisions and taking extreme actions.

But God allowed and purposed all of this! There was a king in place that was easily manipulated. Haman's extreme hatred caused him to persuade the king to set an irrevocable decree into motion; one aimed at not only destroying one life, but the lives of an entire ethnic group of people.

Although everything is pointing to a hopeless and tragic end, the stage is set for God, with whom all things are *possible*, to step in and do the *impossible*! To God alone be the Glory!

Reflection

Write down one seemingly impossible thing or situation in your life.

Begin today praying and asking God, that if it be His will, to turn it around and make it possible for you. Jesus said in Matthew 19:26, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Week Five | Day One | The Dawn of Mourning

Esther 4:1–3

Read Esther chapter four as you begin today.

The edict of the king has now gone out regarding the annihilation plot against the Jews. Mordecai is aware of Haman's plan to commit genocide.

What was Mordecai's response when he learned of the king's edict in verse 1?

Write down how Mordecai is said to have mourned.

According to verse 3, how did the other Jews throughout the province respond to the king's edict?

What do you think may have been the significance of such a public display of sorrow and grief by the Jewish people?

Reflection

How do you typically respond when facing a difficult situation or an uncertain outcome?

Philippians 4:6 urges us “not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

The Apostle Paul shared with the Corinthians about his prayers to God regarding his suffering, to which God responded, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

How do these words encourage you today? What other verses in the Bible provide you with comfort or instruction in how to respond when facing a difficult situation?

Choose one of the Bible verses above or another one that tells you how to respond when facing trials or the unknown that you do not have memorized. Write your verse down here and on an index card with the goal of memorizing it by the end of the week.

Week Five | Day Two | The Message

Esther 4:4–8

People are abuzz in chatter about the king's edict and Mordecai's lament. Word of Mordecai's anguish reached Esther.

How does Mordecai's response to the edict affect Esther according to verse 4?

There are two ways in which Esther chose to respond to Mordecai's distress:

- What was the first way?

- What was the second way?

In verses 7–8, Mordecai gives Hathach a lot of information along with a request to take back to Esther. What does Mordecai tell him?

Reflection

Have you ever been in a situation in which you were asked to advocate for someone or a group of people? Perhaps you witnessed someone doing wrong or someone being mistreated? What are some of the risks involved when speaking out on the behalf of someone else? Make a list here of some risks.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Week Five | Day Three | Rational Fear?

Esther 4:6–11

After being briefed by Mordecai regarding the king's edict, Hathach relays this information to Esther.

How does she respond according to verse 11?

Esther's response was not an emphatic *yes* but somewhat of a *no*. Why did Esther have trepidation in approaching the king?

Was Esther's fear rational? Why or why not?

What can cause irrational fear? How can we prevent being troubled or ruled by irrational fear?

Can our categorization of rational or irrational fear dictate our assessment of what is a risk or not? How?

Reflection

Revisiting your list of five risks from yesterday, note beside each why you consider it to be a risk and whether you deem it to be a risk worth taking.

Week Five | Day Four | Don't Shoot the Messenger!

Esther 4:10–17

Mordecai received Esther's message listing all the reasons why she does not want to approach the king.

How does Mordecai respond to her in verses 12–14?

In Mordecai's stern response, what do you think stood out the most to Esther?

What do you think may have motivated her to lay it all on the line and approach the king?

How did she prepare before approaching the king according to verses 15–17?

Reflection

One more time, look back over your list of risks from the reflection section on day two.

Considering Mordecai's words to Esther in verse 15, what risks are you willing to take? Has God placed you in a perilous situation to be used by Him, for His glory, for such a time as this?

What are you willing to do? What is your next step of obedience today?

Week Five | Day Five | Seeing the Unseen

Esther 4:1–17

In chapter four, an edict that was meant to elicit fear, and most likely did, also invoked a response of humility, repentance, and seeking salvation from death. We observe this because the Jews chose to fast and mourn instead of retaliating.

As the news of Mordecai's mourning reached the queen, she became aware of the death sentence her people had received.

Do you wonder how Haman was oblivious to the relationship between Mordecai and Queen Esther when it appears so many others were not?

When considering the messages that passed between Hathach and the queen, there must have been a lot of trust. Hathach was an ordinary man that kept silent instead of outing the queen to Haman.

Only God could have placed people strategically around both Haman and Esther that could be trusted. God positioned people that would stand with them when the time came such as Esther's maids who fasted with her for three days and nights.

Only an extraordinary God could have given Esther the boldness needed in facing death to not look back. He had prepared her and all the people living in Susa for such a time as this.

Reflection

We see both the favor and power of God at work in Esther chapter four. What is something that is worth standing up for

that will require both the favor and power of God in order to see a change? Who is someone God would have you to stand up for, relying on His favor and power though it may come at great cost and consequence to you?

What is God asking you to do about it?

Accountability Check: On day one of this week, you were asked to write down and memorize a Bible verse to help you when facing trials or uncertainty.

Can you write down from memory your verse in the space below?

Week Six | Day One | Risky Business

Esther 5:1–4

Read Esther chapter five.

Let the feasting begin as Esther's action plan is set in motion.

What does verse 1 tell us she did on the third day?

What was the king's response to her?

How pleased was he with her? How do we know this?

If the king had not been pleased with Esther, what might have been the outcome for her?

Reflection

Describe a time in which you took a risk on behalf of someone else and it turned out well, though it could have ended poorly?

How did it make you feel? Looking back, are you able to see the evidence of God at work in that situation?

Week Six | Day Two | A Plan in Motion

Esther 5:1–8

Esther has constructed a multi-step plan as part of her effort to intervene on behalf of her people.

What is the first step Esther's plan as seen in verse 4?

What is the second step according to verses 7–8?

How many times in this chapter does the king offer to give her whatever she wants?

Why do you think Esther is taking her time and building up to her ask rather than asking for what she wants right away?

Do you agree or disagree with this strategy? Why or why not?

Reflection

Timing is everything, or is that just something we say?

Ecclesiastes 3:1 and verse 7b tells us, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.”

Whether in a normal day or in facing a dangerous situation, we need to know when to be silent and when to speak. Through reading the word of God and spending time in prayer, we can seek and receive direction from God. Take a few minutes now to connect with him in prayer. Ask for His guidance and direction that your daily decisions would be ones that bring you closer to Him, in obedience to Him, bringing glory to Him.

Week Six | Day Three | The Boastings of the Proud

Esther 5:4–13

Sharing a meal with others can be insightful, particularly so when you are trying to get to know someone better.

Haman has been invited to join the king and queen for a private banquet.

How does Haman feel heading home the day he receives the dinner invitation according to verse 9?

How did he feel after encountering Mordecai at the king's gate?

After Haman went home, he called together his friends and wife to do what according to verses 11-12?

What did Haman tell them?

Reflection

How do you think Haman's excessive bragging in verses 11–12 related to the disrespect shown to him by Mordecai?

Perhaps he felt he needed to build himself up. Maybe he believed his friends and family needed to be reminded that he was someone special in the eyes of the king.

This is the good news today: You really are special in the eyes of the eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God and King.

Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:10, declaring, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

What does this verse tell you about your significance? How does this change the way you see yourself?

Spend some time in prayer thanking God that he has created you special and for a purpose. Ask him to help you see yourself as such, that you may fulfill His will and purpose to which you have been called.

Week Six | Day Four | Never Satisfied

Esther 5:6–14

After all the boastings of a proud man, are you shocked by Haman's comments in verse 13? Why or why not?

Looking back at chapter 3:5–6, we learn that it was not enough for Haman to only kill Mordecai, but he wanted to do what else?

Now, it does not seem to be enough that an edict is in place to annihilate an entire race of people. Why do you suspect that it is still not enough?

What is proposed to Haman in verse 14 as a solution for his unhappiness?

What is Haman's reaction to this proposal?

Reflection

Let's pretend for a moment that everything works out according to Haman's plan. If so, Mordecai would be hanged on the gallows the next day, and, afterwards, Haman would go and dine with the king and queen. Then, later when the time came, all of the Jews would be annihilated.

Do you think Haman would truly be happy then? Why, or why not?

Can our happiness ever be found and sustained in material things, status, or even in someone else's downfall? Happiness is fleeting because it's tied to temporary things, but joy is everlasting and completely satisfying because it's found only in the eternal, Jesus Christ.

Take a moment and ask God to search your heart for any anger, hate or unforgiveness. Anything that may be keeping you from choosing contentment with the gift of this day that He has given you and the joy found only through salvation.

Week Six | Day Five | Seeing the Unseen

Esther 5:1–14

God lavished his favor upon Esther in extraordinary fashion. Any other person approaching the king unsolicited would have been executed. It was the law! From the beginning, however, we have seen repeatedly how God gave Esther favor in the eyes of others, and especially King Ahasuerus. For this ordinary girl to be esteemed so highly could only come from God.

Remember how this king had displayed such rigid and irrational behavior. Yet here, the king is not only pleased to see her, but gladly offered her anything she wanted up to half of his kingdom. There is no explanation to why this king acted so kindly and graciously towards Esther, except that the unseen God at work had a much bigger plan.

As Haman stewed in his loathing of the Jews and delighted in their coming destruction, one of the “certain people” he referenced back in Esther 3:4 is rising in power and endearment to the king.

In contrast to Haman who was distracted with building himself up to look good in front of his friends and family, Esther counted the cost, took up her cross, and prepared herself to lay down her life for her people by going to the king without being summoned.

Reflection

All of Scripture points to Jesus. The Old Testament promises, prophesizes, and pictures the coming of Jesus to save His people from their sin (Matthew 1:21). The New Testament tells us of One who was both God and man; One who counted the cost, took up His cross, and laid down His life for ALL people.

In following Jesus' example, what cost are you willing to count? What cross are you willing to take up? Who or what people are you willing to lay down your life for?

The Apostle John wrote, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers" (1 John 3:16).

Week Seven | Day One | Sleepless in Susa

Esther 6:1–3

Begin this week's study by reading Esther chapter six. As the chapter opens, we learn the king was dealing with an issue that is common to many people.

What is the king's struggle according to verses 1–2?

What did he do about it?

What was discovered during this late-night reading, and in what chapter did that event occur?

Reflection

At the end of chapter two, we read about a conspiracy to assassinate the king that both Mordecai and Esther helped thwart to save the king's life. The story moves on, but there

is no mention of Mordecai receiving any recognition for his heroic effort until now.

To his credit, Mordecai did not allow the lack of recognition stop him from showing up at the king's gate to fulfill his daily business and responsibilities. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are expected to work hard, in excellence, doing what is right as a way to honor God, rather than to be recognized by men.

The Apostle Paul exhorted, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men. Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:23-24).

Spend a moment asking God to search your heart for any anger, frustration, or resentment. Ask Him to pinpoint any feelings of bitterness or hurt you may have because you believe your effort or hard work has been overlooked by your employer, coworker, family member, or friend.

Will you choose to leave it at the feet of Jesus? Will you trust in the fact that He knows and sees you, even when others may overlook or ignore you and your work? Will you celebrate the fact that you have already received the greatest gift and reward, greater than anything this world has to offer; that is, salvation and redemption as the gift of God's grace through faith in the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ?

Week Seven | Day Two | Asking the right Questions

Esther 6:1–10

Obtaining the right answer requires crafting the right questions. If we are seeking wisdom and understanding, we must ask the important questions. In Esther 6:3–6, the king begins asking a series of questions.

What was the first question the king asked?

What was the second question the king asked?

Who had arrived and was standing in the outer court?

What was the reason for Haman being in the court?

What was the king's third and final question?

After asking a series of questions, the king acted. How did he apply the knowledge he had gained?

Reflection

Although King Ahasuerus was asking questions to gain knowledge for himself, there are times when asking questions is to help the one being asked or answering to gain knowledge or understanding.

Jesus was the master at leading others to a place of self-discovery by asking the right questions. Every time he asked a question it was never for His own knowledge (since He has complete knowledge of all things), but Jesus asked questions to help the person or group to whom He spoke gain an understanding of their beliefs, practices, or relationship to God.

In Matthew 16:15, Jesus asks His disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Take a moment and think about this question. Write down your answer(s) to that question here. Who is Jesus to you? Do a quick “fact check,” listing at least five Bible verses that support what you have written down.

Week Seven | Day Three | To be honored by the King

Esther 6:6–11

Haman could hardly contain his excitement as he believed the king wanted to honor him. The king asked, “How should the man he delights in be honored?”

How does Haman answer in verses 8–9?

What was the king’s response to Haman’s suggestions?

How do you think Haman may have felt when he learned that he was not the person the king intended to honor?

What did Haman do according to the king’s orders?

Reflection

Can you imagine how Haman must have felt? The person he hated most, the person who refused to honor him, was now receiving honor by the king’s command.

Proverbs 18:12 says, “Before destruction a man’s heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor.”

From what you have read in Esther to this point, between Mordecai and Haman, who would you classify as being haughty and who would you classify as being humble? Why? Are there any instances in which both demonstrated pride?

As you reflect on this chapter, think about this verse from the Apostle Paul: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:5–8).

Spend some time in prayer asking God to help you to have the same heart and mind as Christ; a mind and heart of humility and service, not haughtiness and self-centeredness.

Week Seven | Day Four | What's Next?

Esther 6:6–14

A reversal of status has taken place for Mordecai and Haman. Mordecai was honored, while Haman felt humiliated.

What happens next according to verse 12?

Do you think it is significant that Mordecai returns to the king's gate and Haman returns home? What does that tell us about these two men, if anything?

What did Haman's wife, Zeresh, tell him in verse 13?

Zeresh, in making what could be seen as a prophetic statement, cites Mordecai's ethnicity as being the reason for Haman's downfall. What do you think would make her believe that?

Describe the emotions you think Haman felt heading into the second banquet with the king and queen? What makes you think he felt this way?

Reflection

Haman returned home in search of moral support from his loved ones. Instead, he found quite the opposite.

Have you ever confided in someone expecting to be told how right you are, only to be told how wrong you are? How have you responded in those instances in the past?

The writer to the Hebrews says, “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (12:11). What does this passage say about discipline/correction?

We read in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” God tells us we have a great measuring tool when it comes to receiving correction. Be sure when either giving or receiving correction that it aligns with the word of God!

Week Seven | Day Five | Seeing the Unseen

Esther 6:1–14

Throughout chapter six, we witness once again the many instances that could be seen as random. Hopefully by now we can see them more clearly as the divine providence of God. The chapter starts with the king being unable to sleep. To remedy his insomnia, he had someone read to him from the book of the chronicles of the king. Of all the books chronicling the time of his rule, on this night, the selection from which he read recounted the details of the conspiracy to kill him. In those details it is conveyed how the plot was uncovered by a Jew named Mordecai. Rather than the king just listening and falling asleep, he sought to find out if Mordecai had been rewarded or not. His discovery ultimately led to Mordecai receiving royal recognition and honor from the king.

It was no accident that at the same time Haman was coming to petition the king to kill Mordecai, the king was seeking to commend Mordecai. It was also not an accident that Haman, Mordecai's arch enemy and the one planning Mordecai's destruction, was the one who would now have the duty of carrying out the king's orders to celebrate Mordecai.

Talk about turning the tables! Haman was just on top, honored and celebrated. Now, he finds himself unsure of his outcome heading into a special banquet with the king and queen.

Only God can take a situation that appears to be completely hopeless and turn it around. Only God can allow circumstances to cause a person to pause and reflect on the past and make the things right that they may have overlooked previously. And only an extraordinary God can bring salvation, whether it's spiritual, physical, or emotional, even when darkness seems to engulf us and hope appears gone. God can and will, if only we seek Him first.

Reflection

Jesus directed us as to what is the highest priority of our lives, when He said: "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

How can you today, put aside your plans and seek Him first and His righteousness?

Week Eight | Day One | The Promise of a King

Esther 7:1–2

Begin this week's study by reading Esther chapter seven.

A second banquet sets the stage as we open this chapter. After all that took place the day before, what do you think Haman's state of mind was going into this banquet?

What is the question the king continues to ask Esther in verse 2?

What is the offer that he lays before her again?

Why do you think he continues to ask her the same question rather than changing the subject?

Reflection

King Ahasuerus promised to give Esther anything she wanted, even up to half of his kingdom. How amazing is that? What would you do if you were made a promise like that by someone with the power and means to fulfill the offer?

What if I told you that you have been made a promise better than that? The King of kings and Lord of lords has promised you eternal life, in an eternal kingdom.

Jesus taught, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one” (John 10:27–30).

Spend some time thinking about these words from Jesus. What does His promise mean to you? Do you consider yourself to be one of his sheep?

Week Eight | Day Two | I Surrender

Esther 7:1–4

Esther did not broach any official business during the first feast. She then invited the king and Haman to a second feast she planned for the following day. At this feast, Esther makes her request of the king.

Why do you think she waited until the second banquet to make her request?

What were the two things Esther asked in verse 2?

Do you think there was any significance to Esther prefacing her request, saying, “If I have found favor with you”, and “if it pleases your majesty”? Why, or why not?

How does she describe her situation, according to verses 3–4, and what does she compare it to?

Reflection

Esther addressed the king, confessing, “If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king.” Notice how the first part of this statement made by Esther reminds the king of the relationship between the two of them (“if I have found favor in your sight”). She knew the king cared for her. She was his wife and queen.

The second part of her statement comes from a posture of humility and submission (“if it please the king”). He was the head over her; he was her king. How are Esther’s words to the king similar to how Jesus addressed His Father as He prayed in Matthew 26:39, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this **cup pass from me**; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will”?

What are the similarities?

There are also some striking similarities in the model prayer Jesus gave to His disciples in Matthew 6:5–15. As you spend time in prayer, try using this model of first acknowledging God and who He is in relation to you, and then take on a posture of humility and submission by inviting him to accomplish His will and His purpose within your situation.

Week Eight | Day Three | The Revelation

Esther 7:2–8

After much anticipation by the king, Esther has now revealed her request. In doing so, she identifies herself as one of the Jews facing death by the king's command.

Describe the king's response to Esther's petition in verses 5–7?

How did Haman respond when he was identified as the culprit? Do you think Haman was surprised when Esther fingered him for the sinister plot?

Why do you think the king went into the garden?

Why did Haman not follow the king into the garden according to verse 7?

Reflection

Esther exposed Haman. Although he had no idea that his evil plot and intentions would directly impact his queen, Haman had to face the consequences for his actions. Haman's decisions and actions were born out of his hatred of Mordecai and the Jewish people.

When was there a time in your life in which you did something with secret motives or a hidden agenda?

Were you afraid that someday others would find out what you did? Was your deed ever discovered? If so, what happened?

The word of God reminds us that "nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light" (Luke 8:17). If there is something in your heart or life that you need to set right, go to God in prayer. Confess your sin, turn from doing that sin, and ask God to show you what to do next.

David's words to God reminds us that God is gracious and full of mercy. He proclaimed, "Let us fall into the hand of

the LORD, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man” (2 Samuel 24:14).

Week Eight | Day Four | A Sticky Situation

Esther 7:7–10

Poor Haman! Things seem to be going from bad to worse for him. When king Ahasuerus returns from the garden, what does he find Haman doing in verse 8?

How did the king respond? Was the king justified in his response?

What was decided to be Haman's fate?

Do you think the king felt betrayed by Haman at all? Why, or why not?

How do you think Harbona knew about Haman's plans?

Reflection

Haman allowed his hatred for one man to seal his own fate. In his quest to “payback” Mordecai for disrespecting him, he ended up destroying his own life. Stepping into God’s place to act as judge and jury over someone else’s life or to seek vengeance for what someone has done to you is not what God has entrusted for us to do.

What are God’s instructions to us in Romans 12:18–20? We read, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ To the contrary, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head’”.

Instead of allowing your hurt to turn to anger and your anger into hatred, how can you apply these verses toward those you feel have wronged you?

Prayer is always a good place to start. Take a moment to pray for any who you feel have wronged you in some way. Ask God to help you to forgive them. Request that God would show you how to extend to them grace as he has

given to you. Seek God's help for you to trust Him and His sovereignty and wisdom. And that above all else, pray that God would bless the individual, draw him or her who hurt or wronged you to be closer to him, and that the individual would walk in a manner that will bring glory to God alone.

Week Eight | Day Five | Seeing the Unseen

Esther 7:1–10

Chapter seven begins with one of the most ordinary things that we as humans do—eat! How, though, does a dinner party end in a hanging? Especially in the hanging of your honored guest?

Esther had the king’s attention, affection, and resources at her disposal. Given that this king was manipulated easily, there was a high probability that he would react strongly and hastily in coming to her rescue once he heard that her life was threatened.

Once again, we see the king’s kindness towards Esther produce a favorable outcome for her. She used her positions and influence as both queen and wife to her advantage. In the blink of an eye, Haman went from being the king’s most honored noble to being executed. Hung on the very same gallows that he had built for Mordecai. The only explanation for such a reversal—God!

Only God could allow Esther to have both the king’s heart and ear in such a way that he would have given her anything in an effort to please her. The king trusted her word. He came to her rescue.

Only God can reveal and expose a heart like Haman’s. Haman thought he was going to get away with the annihilation of an entire race of people. He was so fixated

on ruining the life of one man, Mordecai, he did not realize he was destroying his own life in the end.

Our extraordinary God knew the story before it began. He knew that He would not allow anything to harm His people nor to stop His plan of redemption both for His people and the entire human race.

Reflection

Rest in knowing that our God is the same God who was at work in Esther. He is the “same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). No matter where you may find yourself, on the mountain top, in the valley or somewhere in between, He has a plan for your life! As you meet with him in prayer, surrender to Him and seek His will in the plan He has for you. Pray as Jesus taught us, asking that His “kingdom come” and His “will be done” (Matthew 6:10) in your life this very day.

Week Nine | Day One | A Return on an Investment

Esther 8:1–2

Begin this week by reading chapter 8 in its entirety.

In this chapter you've read how power and wealth shifted in the wake of Haman's death.

What did the king give Esther according to verse 1?

What secret did Esther finally reveal to the king?

Mordecai received two gifts. One from the king and one from the queen. In verse 2, what gifts were given to Mordecai? What is significant about these two gifts?

Why do you think Esther put Mordecai in charge of Haman's estate?

Reflection

Although married to the King of Persia and holding the position of Queen of Persia, Esther did not leave her family behind. She invited Mordecai to be a partaker of the favor, power, and wealth that she had. She did not separate herself from him but ensured that he had a seat at the table with her. Mordecai did not leave Esther behind as an orphan, nor did Esther leave him behind during her rise in power.

Is there someone who comes to your mind that made sacrifices to give you a better life or opportunity or was a special blessing in your life? Who shared the good news of Jesus Christ with you so that you would not miss out on the favor and goodness of God through the redemption that comes by faith in Jesus Christ?

Will you take some time to pray for them right now? Would you take the time to write a note, send a text or email, or make a call, if possible, letting them know how much you appreciate their effort that has enriched your life? Finally, will you let them be an example to you? In what way(s) can you be investing in the lives of others? Knowing that any investment in another person is always worth the time and effort.

Week Nine | Day Two | Ask and it Shall be Given

Esther 8:1–8

Esther once again pleads with the king. On whose behalf does she now petition the king in verses 3–6?

What does the text say the king extended to Esther yet again?

As she makes her petition, what method does she use in appealing to the king? Have we heard or seen Esther previously utilize this approach?

What is Esther's request? How big of an 'ask' is this?

Reflection

It is not enough for Esther and Mordecai alone to be safe and protected. Esther desired assurance that her people would be saved too.

Yesterday's study ended talking about how Esther did not leave behind her uncle. She looked out for him using the power and influence of the position God had entrusted to her. Today, we observe her concern for a great number of other people.

Do you want to see people who are extremely wealthy, powerful, or influential leverage their lives, position, or resources to look out for others? Provide a few examples of how you would anticipate them doing this.

We desire and expect those who can give back to their community in some way to do just that. We expect them to speak up for those who are marginalized, vulnerable, or without a voice. We anticipate those who are able and can to create positive change in this world.

Do you know that God expects us as disciples of Jesus to be agents of change in this world, living for His glory and the good of others? As Jesus said, the greatest two commandments are to **love God** and to **love others**.

Jesus declared this expectation of His disciples, saying, "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under

people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:13–15).

How does Jesus describe us in Matthew 5:13–15?

What does He tell us we are to do? What is to be the ultimate goal and outcome of doing this?

What is the importance of our being salt and light? What purpose do salt and light serve? How are disciples to be both salt and light in this world?

As you pray to God, ask Him to help you not to lose your saltiness or to hide your light. Ask for His power to daily remember who He has set you apart to be so that this world may see and glorify Him. Petition Him for the boldness and wisdom to live for His mission every day.

Week Nine | Day Three | What's in a Name?

Esther 8:7–12

Esther had made another appeal to the king. As the king responded to her appeal in verses 7–8, who does he address?

What statement does he make about Haman?

How does the king respond to Esther's request?

What happened on the twenty-third day of the month of Sivan according to Esther 8:9–10? Why is this so important?

Reflection

We read in Esther 8:10, “Mordecai wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, sealed the dispatches with the king’s signet ring.” Mordecai may have chosen the words to write, but it was the name of the king and the seal of the king’s ring that held the power.

Mordecai had access to great power. Yet what he had pales in comparison to the power to which we have access. We have God’s written word, which is powerful (Hebrews 4:12); and the gospel, which is the power of God to salvation (Romans 1:16).

In Ephesians 1, the Apostle Paul says that God, the eternal King, has sealed every one of His followers. With what has He sealed us, and how is that seal one of power?

Even more, we have access to the mighty, powerful name of Jesus (John 14:13, Philippians 2:9–11).

In 2 Corinthians 10:4, we are reminded that our weapons of warfare are not of the flesh. God has given us divine power by His Spirit, through His Word, and in the name of Jesus Christ to destroy strongholds. How will you live in the power of His Spirit, using the word of God, and praying in the name of Jesus to see any and all strongholds destroyed in your life?

Week Nine | Day Four | Redemption Song

Esther 8:9–17

In honoring Esther's request, the king effectively set a new edict in place. The king's new order granted the Jews the right to do what *three* things outlined in verse 11?

What was the day appointed for the Jews to defend themselves?

What was Mordecai wearing when he left the king's presence?

How did the Jews respond to the king's new edict?

Reflection

Here, in chapter eight, we see that things have drastically changed for the Jews.

Psalm 30:11 says, “You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness.” How does this Psalm apply to their story?

Can you relate to how the Jewish people must have felt? Write down one way that God has turned your mourning into dancing. Then, take time through prayer to thank him and ask him to lead you to someone this week with whom you can share your story. Write down the name of any person God brings to your mind and seek an opportunity to share with them this week.

Week Nine | Day Five | Seeing the Unseen

Esther 8:1–17

Everything has changed! Those who once faced death now have a new edict of life. Those whom the former law targeted now have a new law on their side. Out of seeming ashes, hope arises. A people, a nation, stand ready to fight for their lives.

How did such a shift and change in power and position come about for Mordecai, Esther, and the Jewish people?

Mordecai held the power of the kingdom in his hands. Ahasuerus gave him the signet ring to seal and set irrevocable laws into place. This man, a despised Jew formerly positioned outside of the king's gate now wields and invokes the full power of the king.

Things like this don't just happen by accident. The same favor of God bestowed on Esther is being lavished on Mordecai. A virtual nobody rising out of nowhere gained the full trust of the king.

And the king...well, we cannot overlook how easily this king gave up his power. He needed others to tell him how to run his kingdom. Such a character flaw for someone holding a position of great power with the ability to significantly impact others' lives was not unknown to God. God worked through the king's less-than-ideal character and personality

to accomplish His will for His people. While Ahasuerus may not have been the kind of king we would have chosen, God chose him. God could have chosen any other person to have been king through whom He would have worked. But God knew all along how He was going to providentially work through this king and his shortcomings. God gave us this story to reveal His power and ability to accomplish His work through flawed people.

Lastly, the fact that there was a solution or work around to an “irrevocable law” is also only by the hands of an extraordinary God. Laws are “irrevocable” for a reason. Nevertheless, God placed the right people in the right position at the right time. He gave them wisdom to act in alignment with His plan of salvation for His chosen people. In doing so, God protected the people through whom He chose to bring blessing and redemption to all families of the earth (Genesis 12:3).

Reflection

Ask God to give you His wisdom. Seek Him for guidance that you might be wise in your encounters with others; that you might make choices and decisions that align with God’s plan. We do not always know how a wise decision we make today will impact others to live out God’s plan.

“For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:6).

Week Ten | Day One | The Tables are Turned

Esther 9:1–2

Begin this week's study by reading Esther 9:1–19.

As a power shift takes place in Susa and all the provinces of Persia those that were once weak are now made strong.

What was going to take place on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month of Adar?

Who were the two groups of people getting ready to go to war with each other?

What had changed between these two groups according to verses 1–2?

Why do all the other nationalities fear the Jews? How is the fear of the Jews here in these verses like the fear of the Jews described in Joshua 2:8–9?

Reflection

The tables have been turned. An edict went out informing all people that those once targets of violence were now empowered and granted with the right to defend themselves.

Like the Jews here in this story, throughout history God's people have been targeted by enemies for persecution or annihilation. At this point in history, Haman targeted God's people. Why was Haman filled with such murderous rage?

The Jews were aware that the Amalekites were their enemy who had been seeking their destruction for years. See Exodus 17 and Deuteronomy 25:17–19.

We as Christians have an enemy as bloodthirsty for us as Haman was for the Jews?

God's desire is not that we be victims for our enemy to prey upon. He calls us to be prepared and ready to defend ourselves against our enemy.

Do you know who your enemy is?

Since the day when sin entered the world in Genesis 3, Satan became the great enemy of humanity. In both the Old and New Testament, and all of history, we see that he is not only our enemy but God's arch enemy.

What do the two verses below tell us about our enemy?
How are we to prepare to defend ourselves against him?

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

Week Ten | Day Two | The Fear of Man

Esther 9:1–10

The Jews are preparing to defend themselves against the people the enemy is using to try and harm them. The enemy of the Jews who were once identified as the Amalekites are now in this moment the Persians due to the influence of Haman's edict.

How were the Jews preparing to defend themselves?

According to verse 3, why are the Jewish people being helped?

Why did so many people fear Mordecai?

Describe what took place in verse 5?

Reflection

The Persians aimed for the destruction of God’s people. Likewise, Satan targets people for destruction. Jesus said Satan is a thief who comes to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). The Jewish people were fighting to defend themselves from a very real threat. In similar manner, we must prepare daily to defend ourselves against our very real and present enemy. We must be wise to recognize how our true enemy uses people to carry out his schemes in opposition to Christ and His followers.

Ephesians 6:12 reminds us of what kind of battle we face. “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”.

In knowing the kind of battle we face, how will we need to fight?

Begin fighting now. Spend some time in prayer asking God to help you see your enemy for who he truly is. Your enemy is not necessarily your neighbor, spouse, friend, or government official. He is the evil one—Satan. He is the god of this world. Ask God to give you discernment to see your enemy clearly and know how to prevail against him.

Week Ten | Day Three | The End of a Bloodline

Esther 9:6–19

In this chapter, blood was shed, lives were lost, and a bloodline came to an end.

As the battle ensued, what family was targeted and killed according to verse 7?

How were the ten sons of Haman killed?

The king continues to ask Esther what she wants. She continues to make clear requests known to him. On behalf of the Jews in Susa, what does Esther ask for?

How does the king grant her request?

Reflection

Mercy is not a word that readily comes to mind when hearing Esther's requests. She sought orders from the king to have Haman's ten, dead sons publicly displayed.

Additionally, she requested a second day so the Jews in Susa could defend themselves against their enemy.

God does not instruct us in His word to go easy on our enemy. We are commanded to resist the Devil in James 4:7. We are to clothe ourselves in the armor of God.

“Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication” (Ephesians 6:13–18).

What are the six pieces of armor mentioned? In what way is each piece important for the soldier to fight and win the battle?

Are there particular pieces of armor you need right now for the spiritual battle? How can you use each piece today in doing battle against the enemy? Write down your battle plan.

Spend some time thanking God for how he has given you access to all that you need to be victorious against your enemy. Ask him to give you wisdom, guidance, endurance, and perseverance as you go to battle in His name.

Week Ten | Day Four | Kill or be Killed

Esther 9:1–19

We find three significant days of events taking place within this chapter.

Occurring in the twelfth month of Adar, describe what takes place on the 13th, 14th, and 15th days? What is significant about these days?

How many in total were killed?

Although many lives were taken within these two days, what didn't the Jewish people take or do? Why did they make this choice?

Reflection

As the Jewish people were threatened by violence according to the king's original decree, their interest was simply to protect themselves. Although they could have plundered the provinces, they chose not to do that. They saw this battle as a "holy war." As such, they chose to honor the rule of holy war, which meant no plunder is to be

taken. This practice was set in place by Abram in Genesis 14.

In 1 Samuel 15, when King Saul had the opportunity, as well as the command, to wipe out the Amalekites, he refused to act to obey God's demand. His disobedience to God allowed the bloodline of the Amalekites to continue. Haman was a direct descendant of the Amalekites. The Jewish people remembered how Saul had failed God and them. In their moment of decision, they did not want to do the same.

“And Samuel said, ‘Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king’” (1 Samuel 15:22–23).

What truths can we glean from 1 Samuel 15:22–23?

How can you apply those truths to your life?

Spend some time in prayer asking God to help you seek obedience over rebellion. That you may please Him and show love towards Him through your obedience.

Week Ten | Day Five | Seeing the Unseen

Esther 9:1–19

Can you think of a situation in which those oppressed and mistreated became the ones that others feared?

Who would have thought that this story would end in such victory for the exiled Jewish people?

We have witnessed a complete reversal of destiny for the Jewish people. We see all the other nationalities afraid of all Jews. High ranking officials and powerful men fear Mordecai specifically.

Why do you think that was? It doesn't seem to make sense that suddenly everyone would fear Mordecai and the Jewish people.

Although, Mordecai and the Jewish people may be ordinary, our God is not. Only an extraordinary God can cause unbelieving, sinful people to recognize His presence and protection upon the lives of those that belong to him. Only He can humble the proud and powerful and cause them to fear those believed to be weak and powerless. Even when His name is not mentioned His work occurs through ordinary people and the events of their lives.

The Jewish people killed those who rose up against them and ended the lineage of Haman by killing all ten of his sons.

How were they able to accomplish this?

They may have received the favor and blessing of the king to extend their days and territory for battle, but it was God who gave them the power and strength to be victorious. God gave them exactly what they needed at the exact time they needed it.

Reflection

This week you have read and walked through Esther 9:1–9. What are three takeaways that you have from this week's reading?

How can they be applied and direct you in your next steps of obedience to God in the week ahead?

Week Eleven | Day One | A Day to Remember

Esther 9:20–22

Congratulations! This is your final week of study in the Book of Esther.

Begin this week by reading Esther 9:20–10:3. You have now completed your reading of Esther.

Continuing with verse 20, who do we learn records the events and writes to the Jews throughout the provinces?

What is Mordecai asking them to do in verse 21?

According to Mordecai in verse 21, what were the days in which the annual celebration should take place?

We read in verse 22 that the Jews were to do four things as they observed these days. What were the four things?

Reflection

Mordecai instructed the Jewish people to observe Purim by feasting, being joyful, giving food to others, and sharing gifts with the poor.

Does this sound like a holiday that we celebrate here in the United States? List some ways in which the meaning of Purim and Christmas are similar.

It's interesting how both Christmas and Purim are based on the story of how a loving God came to the rescue of people He created in His image for a relationship with Himself. He is a God who keeps his promises, and He is not done yet.

“Even to your old age and gray hairs, I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you” (Isaiah 46:4, NIV).

Spend some time in prayer thanking God for His constant care and concern for you. If there is a situation, you're facing that you have not entrusted to him, do so now. He wants to sustain you in it, carry you through it, or rescue you from it. He's the only one who can, so let him!

Week Eleven | Day Two | A Roll of the Dice

Esther 9:23–28

We are reminded in verse 24 how Haman determined the annihilation date for the Jewish people.

How had that date been determined?

What does the word “pur” mean?

How does Mordecai tell the story of Haman and the Jews according to verses 24–25?

Why did the Jews decide to agree to the celebration of “Purim” according to verses 26–27?

Reflection

One of the most interesting things about Purim is that this was not an observance/celebration established by a religious leader or through a commandment from God. Essentially, it was a response of the Jewish people for their

deliverance by an act that only God could have ordained and accomplished but he is not even mentioned at the time.

Mordecai and Esther could be equated to “lay leaders” in today’s terminology. Mordecai wrote letters encouraging the Jewish people to celebrate and not forget how they were rescued when facing death.¹

As a disciple of Jesus, one of the things we should celebrate is the gift of God’s grace that has brought salvation to us. The Gospel message and our testimony of faith in Jesus Christ are a perfect pairing since we cannot obtain salvation without acceptance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith...” (Romans 1:16–17a).

Why is it important to share the Gospel according to Romans 1:16–17?

Spend some time in prayer asking God to give you a greater desire to share the Gospel. And to share your story of what happened when the life of an ordinary person (you) intersected with an extraordinary God.

Week Eleven | Day Three | Pass It On

Esther 9:22–32

Purim was not to be celebrated only once. It became a Jewish tradition and observance to be passed down from generation to generation.

To establish a new tradition among the Jewish people, who was commanded to remember and observe the days of Purim in verse 28?

There was a second letter written regarding Purim. Who wrote the second letter?

How many provinces received Mordecai's letters?

Why did he send those letters?

Reflection

Mordecai, in asking the Jewish people to set aside these days, was intentional about communicating the “how” and “why” for observing Purim. It’s important to understand why we celebrate or observe certain days or hold to certain traditions.

The Lord’s Supper remains an ordinance we celebrate as disciples of Jesus. In Luke 22, Jesus and the disciples sit down to eat the Passover meal together on the night that He was betrayed. As they ate, Jesus gave the Passover meal all new meaning. Jesus told His disciples that the Passover, although a meal celebrating a historical event of salvation for Israel, was always pointing to a greater work of salvation that had now come. The Passover meal represented His death as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

Considering this, Jesus instituted the Passover meal as a way for His disciples to remember, celebrate, and declare His work on the cross for the redemption of humanity. Jesus’ disciples are meant to observe the Lord’s supper regularly. Paul rebukes and instructs the early church in how to properly observe and celebrate the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11.

In what ways are Purim and the Lord’s Supper similar?

What is the significance of celebrating the Lord's Supper as believers in Jesus Christ?

Spend some time in prayer thanking God for his commitment to us as expressed in John 3:16–18. Thank Him for the sacrifice Christ made on our behalf to restore us into right relationship with him and the promise of eternal life with the father. Ask him to help you pass on this glorious, good news (the Gospel) of Jesus Christ.

Week Eleven | Day Four | Legacy

Esther 9:29–10:3

We see more of Esther’s authority demonstrated in Esther chapters nine and ten.

What do we learn in verse 32 about the decree she made?

Describe the contrast between how Esther is referred to in chapter 2:15 with that of chapter 9:29.

Much has changed for Mordecai as well. What do we learn about his status in verse 3?

Reflection

In studying the book of Esther, we’ve had a front row seat in examining the lives of both Esther and Mordecai. When specifically examining their story one of the words that comes to mind is transformation. Both of their lives changed significantly over the course of the story. God raised them up and placed them in positions of influence that resulted in a nation being saved from destruction.

Most of us don't have the pleasure or displeasure of having our stories preserved or published somewhere to be read by many. However, our lives are still seen, and live on in the memory of others. We still influence those that are in our lives and leave impressions on the ones we cross paths with. There is a story of our lives that will be told. Will it be a story that will encourage and inspire others to put their hope in God and keep his commandments as mentioned in Psalm 78:7?

If you were to die today, what would be the story others would tell about you? Think of three different people in your life. What story would each of them tell and would they be similar or different if compared to each other?

Week Eleven | Day Five | Seeing the Unseen

Esther 9:1–10:3

As we conclude our study, we observe in Esther chapters nine and ten how Esther and Mordecai used their power and authority to establish a holiday to be celebrated and observed among Jewish people for generations. It is still today a reminder of God’s power, protection, and promise to His people.

Yet the Book of Esther bore no mention of God, His covenant with His people, or prayer to God. Nevertheless, we see Him so clearly.

The fact that this story is even in the Bible is evidence of God’s work. As the Jewish people celebrate Purim today, they do so because of the story of God’s salvation. God’s hand and promise remains upon His chosen people. Only God can write a story in which He is never mentioned, yet He receives the glory for the significant events that take place.

The authority that Esther possessed is another example of something that only God could do.

Karen Jobes writes, “No other woman among God’s people wrote with authority to confirm and establish a religious practice that still stands today.”²

God took Esther from being an ordinary girl, an orphan in fact, and made her Queen of Persia for His will and purpose. He gave her a leading role in a salvation story of the Jewish people. He specializes in taking the ordinary, the nobody's of this world, and making them into somebody's for the advancement of His kingdom for His glory.

The good news is that God is not done.

God's redemption makes possible for us to find our place in His story.

The Book of Esther paints the picture of a beautiful redemption story; one that should remind us of God's ultimate salvation. All humanity was destined for death and destruction because of sin and the work of the evil one. We were all without hope and in desperate need of salvation. Because of the great love of our Creator and Heavenly Father, salvation came to us in the form of a man. He stood up for us by doing what we couldn't. He lived a sinless life so he could take upon himself our sin as He was nailed to a cross meant for us. He did so in order that we could be forgiven and found sinless in the eyes of God.

He suffered the consequences of our sin, which is death. He died in our place on the cross. But because He was not only man but also God, He was raised from the dead on the third day, conquering death, evil, and sin. He alone offers us new, eternal life through faith and trust in Him. This God-man, of course, is Jesus Christ!

Do you know His story?

Do you believe it?

Have you received His salvation through faith in Him?

If you are unsure of your salvation and the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ, stop now and take a moment to pray in faith to receive His gift of new life and relationship.

Let him know that you recognize your need for a Savior. Confess that you are a sinner and understand that your sin separates you from Him. Admit that you know there is nothing that you can do to save or cleanse yourself from sin. Declare to God that you no longer desire to live a life apart from Him. Let him know that in this moment, you trust the sacrifice that Jesus made on your behalf. Tell God that right now you are putting your faith and trust in Him to bring you into a right relationship with Him.

If you trusted in Jesus Christ for the first time, we want to celebrate with you and help you as you begin this journey as a disciple of Jesus. Go to **fbcmatthews.org/followjesus** to let us know about your decision so we can follow up with you to discuss your next steps as a disciple of Jesus.

Gather

ORDINARY PEOPLE, EXTRAORDINARY GOD

Sermon & Small Group Notes

Endnotes

Introduction

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² David Firth, *The Message of Esther* (J. A. Motyer, ed.; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 19.

³ Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament Wisdom, Poetry & Writings* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 180.

⁴ Karen Jobes, *Esther* (Terry Muck, ed.; The New Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 21.

⁵ Karen Jobes, *Esther* (Terry Muck, ed.; The New Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 21–22.

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⁸ Iain Duguid, *Esther & Ruth* (Reformed Expository Commentary; Phillipsbrug, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005), 15.

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² “Providence Defined,” *Ligonier*, April 6, 2015, n.p., accessed online July 17, 2022: <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/providence-defined>.

³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 315.

⁴ R. C. Sproul, "What Is Providence?" *Ligonier*, May 5, 2021, n.p., accessed online July 25, 2022:

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⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 321.

⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 327.

⁹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 321.

Week Two

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² Karen Jobes, *Esther* (Terry Muck, ed.; *The New Application Commentary*; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 65.

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² Karen Jobes, *Esther* (Terry Muck, ed.; *The New Application Commentary*; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 224.