

"A Queen Deposed"

Introduction: Last week in our study of the book of Esther we look at an introduction and we started into the feasts that are mentioned in chapter 1. This book is unique for several the reasons. Notice the words of Curtis:

"You cannot read Esther without asking questions. Why is there no reference to God or religious activities? Why does Esther hide her Jewish identity? Why is there no reference to the Feast of Passover even though the date for that feast may be inferred? Why did Vashti not appear before the king? Why did Mordecai refuse to bow to Haman, and why does Haman react so out of proportion? Did Ahasuerus ever have an original thought? Did anyone ever eat at the banquets or only drink? Why did Esther not just come out and accuse Haman instead of doing the two banquets?"

You can see that Esther is a deeper book than meets the eye, but what purpose do these literary devices serve? The answer is that they underpin the central message in this book, which is the providential care of God for His people. Both Mordecai and Esther are non-practicing Jews. Even more so, Mordecai's behavior places all Jews in Persia under a death sentence. In the telling of the history, the central characters do not appeal to their God; they do not make the connection between Passover and the crisis crashing on them. Mordecai and Esther seek a human solution with a foreign king. By highlighting the paired events, ironic reversals, and puzzles, the author of Esther begs us to see God behind the scenes. We see that God rescued His people because He cares for them. We are also challenged to see the hand of God in the events surrounding our lives..."

Tonight, we are going to get right back to the verses and the feasts.

I. The King's Feast

Notice Esther 1:1-4

Here is the first feast and as we considered last week this was a "Feast of Boasting". This feast lasted 180 days or 6 months. This feast was held so that the king could parade his wealth before all who attended the celebration.

Notice the words of Swindoll.

"Archaeologists excavating at Susa have unearthed inscriptions in which this king refers to himself as, "The great king. The king of kings. The king of the lands occupied by many races. The king of this great earth." Old Ahasuerus didn't struggle with an inferiority complex!"

Notice Esther 1:5

Here we see the second feast that lasted 7 days. This was a drinking feast.

Notice Esther 1:6-7

Whoever the writer of the book is, we can be certain in these verses that it was their goal to draw attention to the wealth of the king and his kingdom. We read of the expensive decorations, the golden vessels for drinking, and they were drinking royal wine, not just cheap wine.

Now there is something in the midst of all of this that we need to understand. At these feasts, the king would only surround himself with people who were impressed with his wealth. There was no place at these feasts or anywhere in the king's life for people who were sad and discouraged. We see this in chapter 4.

Esther 4:1-2

When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry;

² And came even before the king's gate: for none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth.

We see the very same thing in Nehemiah.

Nehemiah 2:1-2

And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence.

² Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid.

Application:

I know that as we go through life there are times when we do not desire to hear anymore "negative news", but in this world we will. To ignore the bad news can result in many problems. While this king distanced himself from bad news let us remember that because he did this it almost resulted in the destruction of all the Jews in his kingdom. This is one reason why Esther was so cautious about entering into his presence and presenting the bad news. Xerxes ruled his kingdom by sheltering himself from negative news.

Praise the Lord that our Savior welcomes people who are burdened and sorrowful into His Kingdom.

Mathew 11:28-30

²⁸ Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

1 Peter 5:6-7

⁶ Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

⁷ Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

Notice Esther 1:8

Here we find the rules for the drinking party. There were no rules. No one was forced to drink, and all were permitted to drink as much as they would desire. We can only imagine in this pagan empire; how much immorality was practiced at this event.

Notice Esther 1:9

Here we see another feast that was held by Vasti the Queen. We do not know the purpose of this feast, but we do understand that at this time the women were holding a separate feast.

Notice Esther 1:10-11

It was on the last day of the king's feast that he summoned Queen Vasti to come before the people at the drinking party. Xerxes desired to parade her beauty before all the people. It is important to notice that this request was made on the last day of the seven-day drinking feast, when the king's heart was merry with wine. There is no doubt that at this time the king was intoxicated. There had been seven days of drinking. Herodotus tells us that the Persians actually believed that intoxication took them closer to the spiritual world!

Now, let us stop here for a moment and consider what is happening. The king is under the control of strong drink and it causes him to make an unwise request that will forever change his kingdom. This brings to mind the words of Paul from Ephesians.

Ephesians 5:18-19

¹⁸ And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

¹⁹ Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;

We are to be controlled by the Spirit as the king was by the wine. One of the most accurate ways to determine if a man is being controlled by strong drink is by listening to his speech. In the same way, one of the best ways to determine if a person is controlled by the Spirit is to listen to their speech.

In Ephesians 5:18-19 Paul indicates that the tongue is the first member of the body controlled by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit has the power to control the tongue in each believer. Many have not been controlled by the Spirit and they have caused many problems with an uncontrolled tongue just as Xerxes.

James 3:5-8

⁵ Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

⁶ And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

⁷ For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:

⁸ But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

The tongue is uncontrollable without the power of the Holy Spirit so let us be sure to submit to Him each and every day. The kingdom of Xerxes would be forever changed because of this one request. Let us understand that when the tongue is not under the control of the Holy Spirit but is instead controlled by the flesh, the words that are spoken can bring consequences that will stay with you the rest of your life.

Notice Esther 1:11 again.

Xerxes desired to put the Queen on display to show off her beauty. This tells me there was little or no love between the two. A man who loves his wife would never do something like this.

1 Corinthians 13:7

⁷ Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Here we read that love "beareth" all things. The word "beareth" means "to cover" or "to conceal". The meaning here in 1 Corinthians is that love does not expose the faults of others. There is also an application with what Xerxes did. He wanted to expose the beauty of the Queen in that he would have made her an object of lust. If he truly loved her, he would never have considered putting her on display before all the other men.

Notice Esther 1:12

This verse is the pivot point that sets the stage for Esther. A disobedient queen stands up against a hot-headed King. When Vashti refused to come before the king, he was filled with anger. Let us remember that he is controlled by his pride as he has been showing off his kingdom for more than 6 months. Then at the end of this great demonstration in which he has placed himself on his high horse, the queen with one answer knocks him out of the saddle. How humiliating this must have been for him in the presence of all who were at the feast.

Application:

This is the encounter that God will use to open the door for Esther to be put in the place to be used to deliver the Jews from certain death. God is allowing the sinful king and queen to exercise their own free wills and He will use their actions to make a way for deliverance before the problem ever arises.

There is so much encouragement in these thoughts for us. Before our trials and tests even arise, God knows about them. We do know of them, but He does and because He knows, He is working His plan to meet our needs before we ever get there. There is not one thing that happens in our lives that God does not know of it before it happens.

Man's sin is one example.

Revelation 13:8

⁸ *And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*

We looked at this on Sunday evening. Jesus was foreordained to go to the cross before the world was ever created. God knew that man would sin and need a Savior before man was ever created. In a practical way, God knows every event that will come into our lives and He knows what our needs will be, therefore we can rest in Him with whatever comes.

Matthew 6:31-34

³¹ *Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?*

³² *(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) **for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.***

³³ *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

³⁴ *Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*

Conclusion:

As we look around in our world it often appears as though people are out of control. In a sense they are but behind it all God is allowing sinful man to exercise His free will and He is working all things together to accomplish His plan.