



This Sunday we started our new series in the book of Esther.

We began the series by thinking that as the people of God away from home, there are always the twin temptations of anguish (is God really there, is he really in control?) or assimilation (we just become like the surrounding culture because it's too hard to be different).

The context of the book of Esther is that the people of God are indeed away from home, in exile in Persia. In fact they have been in exile for a number of generations. On Sunday we did a speedy bible overview, helping people to see the story so far and how we've arrived in Persia (in a nutshell, God's people arrived in the land he promised, then the nation split under Solomon, the North (10 tribes) were removed into exile by Assyria and never came back, the south removed later by Babylonia and then some returned to the land as the Persians rose to prominence – Esther though stayed in Persia)

1v1-8: Power and Opulence

The book begins with a description of the power of King Xerxes, ruling over 127 provinces in a vast geographical area. He celebrates his power peacock style, with a 6 month party opulently displaying his supremacy – beautiful houses, gardens, food, people etc... We noted that it shows something of his power, and yet ironically saw his weakness (v8) as all he can do is create laws... It sounds like petty bureaucracy! It goes sour when he wants to display his wife...

1v9-21: Power and Obedience

In this section we see something of the weakness of Xerxes as Vashti says she will not attend his party to be displayed like a possession. She is banished and then the king tries to work out a plan of action to deal with the mess! His wise (!) advisors suggest another edict to the whole of the kingdom that seeks to prevent marital disrespect within the households of Persia as (apparently) the wives everywhere will want to disrespect their husbands, just as Vashti did. In reality it just announced to everyone that the king was not respected in his own household.

Application

We noted three main areas of application

- 1) do not be assimilated – the book of Esther contains humour and satire as it seeks to show the weakness of this totalitarian state. The use of repetition, the stupidity of Xerxes, etc are meant to show the hollowness of dreaming of the kind of power and wealth that Xerxes enjoyed – and yet aren't these the kind of dreams we are meant to pursue in our country>?
- 2) do not be in anguish – the reminder that, big picture, God is at work – quietly behind the scenes, working out his plans and his purposes. Not in big Exodus-type ways, but in the small decisions and through little people
- 3) See God in the contrast. We noted that Xerxes is, in many ways, the opposite to God. He uses people for his purposes, he does not treat his bride well, he is entirely selfish and self-motivated. Jesus on the other hand works by wooing his people, he loves his bride and serves her – pouring himself out for her (contrast this with Xerxes wanting to have his drunken mates look at her).

V1-8: in what ways do we see the glory of Xerxes in these verses? What picture do we get of him and his kingdom? In what ways do you see his power? What's the glimpse here of his weakness?

V9-21: do you think Vashti was wise in disobeying her husband? Why? How does Xerxes respond? Is he wise? How does the writer show us a lack of wisdom?

What picture do you get in ch1 of Xerxes' strengths and weaknesses?

Application

- 1) assimilation.

In what ways is Persia in ch 1, painted like our culture? What dreams do people have? How might we be assimilated into this kind of thinking?

- 2) anguish.

From Esther as a whole, what would you say to someone who was thinking it was too hard to be a Christian because of the negative culture around?

- 3) Contrast.

Compare and contrast king Xerxes with king Jesus.