



This Sunday we continued our series in the book of Esther.

Last week we left it on a cliffhanger. God's people are in exile in Persia and under threat from an edict calling for their annihilation, but Esther has been raised up to be Queen – perhaps, “for such a time as this”. Esther (along with her entourage and Jews in Susa) proceeds with a 3 day fast.

This week in chapters 5 & 6, we focused in on each of the 3 human characters

Esther's wisdom in playing the long game

The book of Esther more generally is a book dripping with irony and contrasts. As Esther approaches king Xerxes after the fast he is pleased to see her, but recognizes something is up for her to approach him unbidden. He immediately and rashly offers her up to half his kingdom (!) but rather than accepting she invites him and Haman to a banquet and then a second banquet. She is willing to wait and play the long-game and reel him in, rather than jumping to solving problems quickly.

We noted how in our short-term culture this is a key lesson for us, we also noted that this wisdom and strategy is not at the expense of God's sovereignty.

Haman's pride leading to his downfall

Haman is the arch-enemy of Mordecai who has issued the edict for the Jews annihilation. He (along with his enormous ego) is thrilled with the fact that Esther has invited him to the banquet but angered again that Mordecai will not bow to him. He is intoxicated by his arrogance and pride and has a fragile ego. When his ego is massaged and stroked he is happy, when it's not, he is not. In v13 he says that, despite all he has (having just listed them to his friends and family) he has no satisfaction because Mordecai lives (6v6 also shows he wants to be king). He plots to impale him on a pole.

We noted how pride is never content. He is an archetypal fickle man who lashes out when he does not get what he wants.

Mordecai's fortunes about to turn

As the Lord so often does in the bible, he lifts people up from the depths. It's clear he's in the plan as Xerxes just happens to be kept awake, and just happens to read his chronicles and spot he's not rewarded Mordecai for his earlier preservation of the king, and it just happens Haman (and his enormous ego) enters the king's court at the right time and

wrongly interprets Xerxes' question and finds himself making a crown for Mordecai's head and bestowing him in glory. Even Haman's friends see the Lord in this, and his imminent certain downfall.

Again we noted the way the Lord, to bring glory to himself, loves to raise up the downtrodden and parades them in glory – at times in the here and now, though definitely in eternity. We noted both Mark 10v29-31 as Jesus promises his followers reward for what they've given up to follow him, as well as Phil 2v6-12 noting how we follow in the footsteps of Jesus as we live this way. Jesus who humbled himself and was lifted up in glory.

Outline the story so far in Esther...

What do we make of Esther's plans in chapter 5? Is she wise? Is she manipulative? How might we contrast her with Xerxes?

What wisdom can we learn from her in our dealings with 'the kingdom'?

How do we see Haman's pride here? What does he want? Why?
Why do you think he reacts so strongly to Mordecai? What does this reveal about his heart?

How is he a warning to us? What makes you really angry in day-to-day life? Why do you react so strongly with certain things and not others? What 'gods' do you serve?

Why do you think the Lord deals so strongly with pride?

What evidence is there that Mordecai's fortunes are about to turn? How can we see the Lord at work in this?

Why does the Lord love to work when people are in the depths?
How is this a model for us?
How are we following in the footsteps of Jesus?

What do these passages teach us about God? Sin? Wisdom?
What practical things might you need to do as a result of these chapters?