

Let's Worship God

30th July-4th Aug. 2018

Esther



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Monday - Esther 2:12-18 - The Winner Is...

Ionians, Parthians, Caspians, Phrygians. With so many languages and cultures, life must have been confusing in the harem in Susa. Libyans, Medians, Phoenecians, Cilicians. Yet Ahasuerus wanted the best and he had a whole empire to choose from. Arians, Arabians, Armenians, Assyrians. Young girls from 127 provinces, all compelled to vie for the King's affections. Who would he pick?

Nobody knew! There can't have been much to choose between the "contestants". They were all young. They had all been snatched from their homes. Most importantly, they were all beautiful; they wouldn't have been there if they weren't. An elegant Egyptian? A lovely Lydian? A pretty Pamphylian? With a judge this unpredictable it's probably better not to guess.

Yet, don't forget those six key words from v5. "There was a Jew in Susa". Don't forget that Esther was one of those who was taken. Sure, she was just one pretty face in a sea of pretty faces. But already she was standing out. Hegai was already impressed. Now it was the King's turn.

Let's not downplay what v15 involved. No doubt Esther was scared. No doubt she felt defiled. Perhaps her pillow was drenched with tears or perhaps she was too terrified to cry. But one thing is for certain: this young Jew was the winner of this tragically sleazy contest (v17).

Esther didn't know it yet, but there was a storm on the horizon. The very survival of God's people was on the line. They could certainly do with a friend in high places, and against all the odds, that's exactly what they got.

Why Esther? Why not one of the many other girls? Because God had a plan. Esther may have been Ahasuerus' choice, but more importantly she was God's choice. He's the one who's truly on the throne. "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will." (Proverbs 21:1)

Questions

1. How do you think Esther would have felt as she went through this year long routine?
2. If God could direct Ahasuerus' heart, he can (and does) do the same to every President or Prime Minister today. Do you believe that?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks for how no-one, even the most sinful unbeliever, is outside of God's sovereign rule.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

If it had not been the Lord who was on our side when people rose up against us, Psalm 124:2

Praise: Psalm 105:12-16 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Esther

Tuesday - Esther 2:19-23 - Watch Where the Camera Zooms

For those of you in the UK, have you ever seen Casualty on TV? If you haven't, you're not missing much. It's a drama set in a busy hospital as the medics deal with the injuries that come their way.

What I find interesting about Casualty is the sheer predictability of the storylines. Is that man climbing a ladder? You can be sure he's going to end up in the Emergency Department. Is that car's tyre looking a little frayed? You can be sure the car will crash before the credits roll.

You can foresee these disasters because there is a writer behind the scenes. Every detail is carefully designed in order to weave the story together. The writer has a plan and these small details bring that plan to fruition. If the camera zooms in on a balding tyre, you'd better believe that it's central to what the writer has in store.

Esther chapter 2 finishes with the camera zooming in. Not on a wonky ladder or a balding tyre, but on a rather dry looking history book (v23). Mordecai the Jew had become Mordecai the hero as he gallantly saved the King's life (v22). You would expect his life to be completely transformed as Ahasuerus lavished him with gifts. You would expect a prompt promotion and a princely pay rise. You would expect a bigger house and a better life. If the King wants to survive the next time, he'd better reward the one who saved his skin.

So what did Mordecai get? Nothing at all. No knighthood. No bonus. Not even a measly thank you card! Perhaps he spent months eagerly waiting for the recognition he deserved until eventually he gave up. His actions appeared to be in vain. But not so fast! The camera zooms in on this dull looking book. God, the master planner has got something up his sleeve. We'll have to trust him and wait patiently to see what he has in store. Isn't that always the way of faith?

Questions

1. Things didn't work out the way Mordecai would have liked, but eventually they worked out much better. Can you think of times that God has done that in your life?
2. It can be hard to wait and see what God is doing. What can help us to wait patiently?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that God would help you to believe that he is in control of the big things and the minor details.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

If it had not been the Lord who was on our side when people rose up against us,
Psalm 124:2

Praise: Psalm 37:22-26 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Esther

Wednesday - Esther 3:1-6 - Haman's Holocaust

"As soon as I have power, I shall have gallows after gallows erected. The Jews will be hanged one after another, and will stay hanging until they stink....their destruction will be my first and most important job."

I hardly need to tell you who bellowed those spite filled words. If you were to ask 100 people to name the most wicked man in history, all 100 would say Adolf Hitler. He is considered the very embodiment of evil. Yet, in today's passage we meet a man who could rival Hitler for all consuming hatred. A man who concocted his very own Holocaust more than two thousand years before. Today, we stare evil in the face. Haman the Agagite was an incredibly ambitious man who would trample over anyone who got in his way. He was used to getting what he wanted and livid when he was defied. Did you feel a shiver in your spine when Mordecai refused to bow before him (v2)? There's going to be trouble ahead!

Perhaps if it was someone else, Haman could have brushed it off. But not this time. Haman, like Hitler despised the Jews and would not rest until he had crushed them underfoot. It wasn't Mordecai he hated. It was Mordecai the Jew (v6). What lay behind this hatred? There's a massive clue in v1. Haman was an Agagite; a descendant of King Agag of the Amalekites. The Amalekites had ruthlessly attacked Israel in Exodus 17 and had brought God's judgment upon themselves. King Saul had been commanded to strike them down in 1 Samuel 15, but he failed to follow God's instructions. Hatred of the Jews was in Haman's blood.

Haman's hatred teaches us a simple lesson: sometimes God's people will be despised simply because of who they are. So it was in Susa; so it is today. But don't panic just yet: our saviour has told us it would be so (John 15:19). With his warning comes his promise: our sorrow will turn to joy (John 16:20).

Questions

1. Sometimes we will be mistreated because of Jesus Christ. Why is it encouraging that Jesus has told us this will happen?
2. Often we forget to pray for Christians who are facing serious persecution. How can we be better at this?

Prayer Points

1. Pray for Christians around the world who are persecuted simply because of who they are.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

If it had not been the Lord who was on our side when people rose up against us, Psalm 124:2

Praise: Psalm 129 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Esther

Thursday - Esther 3:7 - The Die is Cast

With brisk airport connections and unyielding ferry timetables, sometimes a holiday disaster is just around the corner. Take American couple Henry and Adelaide Frick for example. They were enjoying themselves in sunny Italy when disaster struck; poor Adelaide slipped and injured her ankle in a fall. The Fricks had their return journey booked, but that didn't matter: both ankle and itinerary had to be put on ice. Or spare a thought for poor Barry and Izzy Sim. On arriving at the airport they got the news that so many flyers dread: their flight was overbooked and their seats were gone. Not ideal when you have somewhere to be and have a screaming baby in tow.

Holidays ruined? Perhaps, but that's not the full story. Had the Fricks made their Atlantic crossing, their journey home would have been rather eventful. The name of their ship? RMS Titanic. As for the Sims, their plane met with similar disaster as it was struck by a surface-to-air missile over Eastern Ukraine. Perhaps a missed flight isn't such a disaster after all.

It goes to show: safety and disaster can rest on razor thin margins. So it was with God's people in the Persian Empire. The Hitler-esque Haman had settled on his very own Final Solution (v6); all that was needed now was a day and a date.

Luckily Haman was a superstitious individual. Luckily, he didn't want a date; he wanted THE date. He wanted to be sure that fortune would smile on this extermination he had planned. That's why he cast lots until he found the perfect moment for a holocaust (v7), almost a year away.

11 months gave Haman plenty of time to put arrangements in place. Luckily it also gave time for the rescue plan to be crafted. Sorry, did I say luckily? God's people are never hostages to blind chance. "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD." (Proverbs 16:33)

Questions

1. Can you think of any other times in the Bible when God's people were saved through what appeared to be luck?
2. Haman hoped that his pagan gods would make his attack successful. What really happened behind the scenes?

Prayer Points

1. Thank God for how he is in control of every tiny detail of your life. Thank him for "strokes of luck" that have kept you safe.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

If it had not been the Lord who was on our side when people rose up against us, Psalm 124:2

Praise: Psalm 115:1-6 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Esther

Friday - Esther 3:8-11 - Satan Makes His Move

Magnus Carlsen has the best eyesight in the world. He sees things that no-one else can see, not just in the present but in the future as well. The world marvels at his powers of perception; too bad they're mostly limited to the chess board.

Carlsen became a chess grandmaster at the age of 13 and has gone on to become one of the greatest players of all time. He has an incredible ability to "see" the board: to spot opportunities and threats before they ever arise, to predict his opponent's moves, to envisage exactly how the game will unfold. When pressed by a journalist, Carlsen once confirmed that he sometimes sees up to 20 moves ahead.

Playing against the Norwegian prodigy must be a humbling experience. You might have a well thought out plan, you might get your hopes up as you navigate your pieces around the board, until suddenly...CHECKMATE! While you were busy focusing on one or two pieces, Carlsen was surveying the whole board. You made your moves, but the grandmaster was quietly making his own.

This would be a good opportunity to take a step back from the drama of Esther and observe the whole board. Haman is a monster, Ahasuerus too; but they're just pawns in a bigger fight. Susa is part of a cosmic chess board with Satan on one side and God himself on the other.

In today's passage we see Satan making his move. It's a devastating manoeuvre as King Ahasuerus gives his assent to the annihilation of God's people. Checkmate? It certainly seems that way. But wait! Magnus Carlsen doesn't have the best eyesight in the world; God does. Think of all that has happened so far: 1) Ahasuerus has foolishly driven Vashti away. 2) Of all the beautiful women in the empire, a young Jew has taken pride of place. 3) Somewhere in the royal archives, Mordecai's name is written in a book.

Today, Satan makes his move. God has already made three.

Questions

1. What are some of the ways Satan makes his move today?
2. What happens when we forget that we are on the winning side?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks for how the fight between God and Satan does not lie in the balance because God has already triumphed through Jesus Christ.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

If it had not been the Lord who was on our side when people rose up against us, Psalm 124:2

Praise: Psalm 33:7-12 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Esther

Saturday - Esther 3:12-15 - Don't Just Wait There, Wait for the Lord!

As I write this, the 2018 FIFA World Cup is in full swing. There have been plenty of absorbing, unforgettable matches. I've watched some of them with goosebumped arms and a thumping heart. I've watched others with a mood of tranquil calm. What's made the difference? It's quite simple: I've watched some of the matches as they've happened; I've watched highlights of others the next day.

Watching sport when you already know the score is a very relaxing experience. You have no anxieties, no worries, and no doubts about what comes next. For anyone with a heart condition, it's maybe the way to go!

Of course, real life isn't like that. Real life is lived in real time. We don't know what's around the corner and we don't know what's coming next. What will the consultant say? Will I get the grades I need? Can the company stay afloat?

When we read stories from the Bible, it's easy to forget that we're just watching the highlights. The characters themselves lived in real time. Take the story of Esther for example: the Jews had no idea what rescue God had in store. All they knew was that the holocaust was coming.

Try to put yourself in their shoes. Imagine having your death warrant arrive in the mail (v13). Imagine circling a date on your calendar: "This is the day I'm going to die." Imagine celebrating your child's birthday while being convinced that this will be her last.

Everything seemed hopeless. There was nowhere to run and nowhere to hide. All the Jews could do was wait for the knock on the door. Not to downplay their experience, but isn't that sometimes what we're called to as well? So, what can you do when you can't do much at all? Remember that God is still God (Psalm 46:10). Remember that we DO know the final score (John 16:33). Be strong and take courage (Psalm 27:14). Don't just wait there; wait for the Lord!

Questions

1. Can you think of difficult times that God has brought you through in the past?
2. How do you feel when you look back on them now?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that God would give you the faith to wait for him as you face the trials of life.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

If it had not been the Lord who was on our side when people rose up against us, Psalm 124:2

Praise: Psalm 27:13-16 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

The goal of Let's Worship God is to encourage and help you in your worship of God each day.

**God tells us that
Ezra read from
the book of the Law
day after day
and that
the people of God
were filled with joy!**

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