(slide 1) Esther 1 Message October 9, 2022

(slide 2) The book of Esther recounts the story of the Jews under Persian rule being threatened with annihilation but in an unexpected turn of events the Jews themselves are able to wipe out their enemies. The Jewish people have held the feast of Purim ever since to celebrate this deliverance.

(slide 3)

Yet throughout history, interpreters have struggled with the Book of Esther which along with its sensuality and brutality does not mention God, Israel, the Covenant, the Law, or religious activity other than fasting, nor is it referenced in the New Testament. Though in the Christian biblical canon since the councils of Hippo and Carthage in 3rd century AD, early church Fathers were silent on Esther. For the first 7 centuries of the Christian church not one commentary was written on this book. John Calvin never preached from Esther nor did he include it in his commentaries. Martin Luther described himself as an enemy of the book of Esther wishing it “had not come to us at all” because it had “too many heathen unnaturalities”. A bit daunting, isn’t it?

(slide 4) Apostle Paul writes

*For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.* Romans 15:4

We can be assured that the book of Esther will teach us, help us endure, encourage us and give us hope. All Scripture is there because God wants it to be. It really doesn’t matter if we find it distasteful or inappropriate, no offense to Martin Luther. We must read any book of the Bible in the context of all Scripture. The ironic reversals, ambiguous ethics, uncertainties, flawed decisions, seemingly random coincidences in Esther are true to life and are found in other biblical stories.

(slide 5) here’s a list of references that I’ve used for this sermon.

(slide 6) Commentator Karen Jobes writes

“Without divine revelation, the human experience is inherently ambiguous and cannot be rightly understood.”

“God’s verbal, interpretive self-revelation is essential if we are to know him.”

“The book of Esther is canonical example of how ambiguous life and history would be if God had only acted but not also spoken.”

(slide 7) We will sing “*God Moves in a Mysterious Way*” after the message. *(click again if hymn lyrics aren’t already added)*

I encourage you to read about the life of William Cowper who wrote these lyrics, if you haven’t already. Despite faith in Christ, bible study and support of pastors and friends, he was tormented with voices and visions telling him he was damned, and suffered severe, suicidal and psychotic depression throughout his life. He was never completely free from the torment until reportedly on his death bed “his face lit up and he said “I am not shut out of heaven after all!”.

Surely this suffering saint was well qualified to write a hymn about God’s mysterious way and His frowning providence. Here, as we begin our study of book of Esther whose interpretation has challenged Jews and Christians much wiser and more learned than I, Cowper’s words apply:

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,*

*but trust him for his grace;*

*behind a frowning providence*

*he hides a smiling face.*

*Blind unbelief is sure to err,*

*And scan his work in vain;*

*God is his own interpreter,*

*And he will make it plain.*

Let’s pray - God, we thank You for the book of Esther, for your acting to save us and revealing yourself to us. We ask that You will be Your own interpreter for us today, Lord, through Your Word and by Your Holy Spirit, and make plain that which we need to hear from You today, in spite of my weakness and imperfect understanding. Please teach us and help us respond in obedience as we come to You humbly and in faith through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

(Slide 8)

 **Someone Else Better**

(Slide 9)

**Key vs. 19b *Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she.***

(Slide 10) Today, by way of introduction to the book of Esther, after some background, I’ll draw from Alister Bigg’s 2013 sermons looking at the big picture, the big question, the big idea and the big deal of the book of Esther, then at the big banquet of chapter 1 which points to the need for someone else better and sets the stage for this remarkable story.

(slide 11) **First, some Background – Who What Where When Why How?**

 Notice that the book of Esther begins not with Esther, Mordecai, God, nor even the Jews, but with the powerful pagan King Xerxes and his royal court and is set not in Palestine but in the Persian Empire in the city of Susa (modern day Iran). The unknown author was a Jew living outside of Palestine and familiar with the royal Persian court and Susa. He is clearly telling the story about actual historic events, but tells it in the form of a skillfully crafted narrative intended to entertain as well as teach.

(slide 12) This is an artist’s rendition of King Xerxes along with ancient Persian artefacts bearing the King’s image. Historian Herodotus, somewhat enamored with Xerxes, described him as the tallest, most handsome of the Persian Kings, an ambitious and ruthless ruler, a brilliant warrior and a jealous lover.

(slide 13) These are ruins and a picture of the royal palace at Susa.

(slide 14) It was decorated with friezes of colored tiles in relief representing in life-size a parade of the King’s bodyguard of Bowmen, called the Immortals.

(slide 15) At its height the Persian Empire encompassed areas of modern-day Iran, Egypt, Turkey, and parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan. It stretched from the Balkan Peninsula in the west to the Indus River Valley in the east. It stretched south to Egypt and north to the Caspian Sea.

(slide 16) This map has more detail and shows us Palestine.

(slide 17) This map has provinces in the Persian Empire.

(slide 18) The most important points here are highlighted in yellow. King Xerxes inherited the Persian Empire from his father Darius the Great who had expanded the kingdom and ruled at the height of the Persian Empire, consolidated power by organizing the vast regions of multiple countries into satrapies and provinces with governors, established public works, roads, and a postal service for communication, finished the Palace at Susa, the administrative capital of the Empire. King Xerxes ruled from 486-465 B.C. While he did quell revolts in Egypt and Babylon, finished the palace at Persepolis to honor himself and a pagan god, history mostly remembers him as the king who unsuccessfully led a major invasion of Greece. In fact, the Persian Empire began to decline during Xerxes’ reign as he drained the treasury with his unsuccessful wars and irresponsible spending at home. The book of Esther was written sometime after 460 and likely before 330 BC but possibly even later. Looking at the turquoise highlights we can put Israel’s history and the events and writing of Esther more in context – Babylonian exile 586 BC, Cyrus the Great conquering Babylon in 539 and allowing Jews to return to homeland, and finally Alexander the Great conquering Persia in 330 BC.

(slide 19) Now we go to the Bigs – Big Picture, Big Question, Big Idea, and Big Deal

(slide 20)

**Big Picture** – The Big Picture is the Epic Story of God and His People. All Scripture is there because God wants it to be, and He tells His story through each book of the Bible in the way He wants it to be told. We can’t take any verses out of context, nor even any book out of the context of the entire Bible. We need the whole counsel of Scripture, and even then, we finite human beings still struggle to get it right. Christian cults take out or change the parts that don’t fit their heresy. Thomas Jefferson cut all the miracles out of his bible. Liberal theologians choose which to believe and which to demythologize and/or deconstruct. Christians of every kind including we evangelical Christians like to focus on the “best parts” and skip the difficult ones. So, thank you Pastor Paul for not avoiding this book and even asking a woman to teach today.

God’s story stretches from Genesis through Revelation and covers events from before God created the universe all the way into the future new heaven and earth where God dwells with His people forever. From our vantage point in this epic, looking back at the Cross and forward to Christ’s coming again, we know that God in Christ has already won, and Satan, death and sin were defeated on the Cross, but we are living between the already and the not yet until Jesus comes again to claim His Bride.

Keeping this larger context in mind, we read the Book of Esther as one of the most captivating scenes in God’s big picture. Over and over Israel’s enemies seek to destroy them, and God keeps saving his people.

The Jews were in Persia because Israel had failed to keep the covenant with God and were exiled as a consequence. God sovereignly moved Cyrus the Great to allow them to return to Palestine to rebuild the Temple and Jerusalem’s walls and reconfirm their covenant with God

But most Jews for whatever reasons remained in the countries of their exile, including Esther and Mordecai. Through the book of Esther, God tells these Jews that He will keep his covenant with them, too. We read allusions to Old Testament stories and foreshadowing to the fulfillment of God’s covenant promises in Jesus Christ. In Esther, Israel’s ancient enemy appears again and just as the Jews are about to be wiped out, they are saved through a series of human decisions and coincidences. In an ironic turn of events, the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem and Judah were saved by Jews who had not returned, since the decree to kill them went through the entire Persian empire.

It’s very easy to get lost in the details, like I’m doing now. But perhaps more so than any other book of the Bible, Esther is a dramatic, suspenseful, fast moving, even entertaining story, a skillful and complex literary work, and we must read and interpret it accordingly. Yes, it is also historical, but without getting into the weeds, there is much evidence that the unknown, inspired author of the Book of Esther told the story of real historical events and characters in such a way as to interpret them, using irony, satire, humor, artistic license, and other literary tools so that the reader would be drawn into the story with God.

So that’s the big picture.

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**Big Question**

*Where is God?* The Book of Esther answers with a resounding “God is here!”

Wait a minute – God’s not even mentioned in Esther.

The absence of God’s name and God’s covenant promises in the book of Esther actually serves to highlight God’s providence more effectively than would careful theological definitions. We see God working through the powerful pagan King as he is easily manipulated one way and then another, through decisions and actions that dramatically alter the course of events, great reversals of fortune, courageous risks and actions, all inexorably moving the story along to the deliverance of the Jews and punishment of their enemies.

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Karen Jobe writes “The book of Esther is the most true-to-life biblical example of God’s providence precisely because God seems absent. Even in the most pagan corner of the world, God is ruling all things to the benefit of his own people and to the glory of his name.”

Not mentioning God actually causes us to look harder to find Him throughout the story! God is here! The message for us is that God is always present – yes, even when we’re facing threats, tragedy, illness, trials, suffering, but especially in daily even routine life, seemingly insignificant decisions. God is here when we do not see or hear Him, which is actually the majority of the time. We rarely can see the hand of God in the middle of events, or understand the purpose or meaning of it all, but only on the other side of it we may. Oftentimes we never clearly know why during our lives, but we have the hope that though we see dimly now, then we will see clearly when we see God face to face.

Jobes writes “The great paradox of Esther is that God is omnipotently present even where God is most conspicuously absent.”

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**Big Idea**

The big idea is that throughout history God fulfills his covenant promises to His people through his providence. God sovereignly controls events of history and flawed human decisions to fulfill his promise to save for himself a people**.**  Beneath the surface of seemingly insignificant human decisions and events, an unseen and uncontrollable power is at work that can neither be explained nor stopped. Because this story is in the Jewish and Christian canon, it’s reasonable to construe that unseen power as God. If we did not have the testimony of other biblical books that teach us explicitly that God is the unseen power behind world history, then this would not be the case.

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Kent Hughes writes:

“The sweet doctrine of God’s providence is this: God sovereignly works in and through the everyday, non-miraculous events of life to effect His will. Such a God, of course, is great beyond our imaginings because He maintains all of life, involves Himself in all events, and directs all things to their appointed end while rarely interrupting the natural order of life.”

God’s providence is especially seen in reversals of destiny. God has used such irony throughout history in order to put his own wisdom and glory on display, using what is weak and foolish to accomplish his purposes. We find such redemptive irony throughout the book of Esther both as the historical events unfold and in the author’s use of irony in his storytelling that catches our attention and highlights the unseen hand of God.

This reversal of destiny and deliverance for the Jews is given as the reason to celebrate Purim which commemorates the reversal of destiny more so than any specific events in the story, but Purim is not the theme of the book of Esther.

The story of Esther illustrates that human action is essential to divine providence, yet God’s triumph in history ultimately doesn’t depend on what we do, but on what he does. It depends not on our character, but on his character. Like Esther and Mordecai we live in a completely pagan culture with flawed leaders and institutions. We face difficult ethical and religious questions in a highly political world, one that is hostile to our most fundamental Christian convictions. And we ourselves are morally ambiguous people at our best with mixed motives, hearts that stray from loving God and others fully. We live in the exile of history, in a world where God is unseen. We should expect nothing but death from this world, but in the greatest reversal of destinies, as Satan deals his death blow to the Son of God in apparent victory, the tables are turned. The death of the Son of God is the death blow to Satan, conquering sin and death itself as Christ bore the sins of all mankind and rose in victory over the grave.

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**Big Deal**

We saw the map of the Persian Empire and pictures of the royal Palace at Susa - the Kings of the Persian Empire were a very big deal. King Xerxes may have been the most powerful man in the world at that time. This is the power that Esther and Mordecai and all the Jews in Persia faced. But even this great king and kingdom could never frustrate the plan and promise of God who

***22*** *He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,
    and its people are like grasshoppers.
He stretches out the heavens like a canopy,
    and spreads them out like a tent to live in.****23****He brings princes to naught
    and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.*

Isaiah 40:22-23

The author and the original readers of Esther, likely a generation or two later, would have known that soon after these displays of majesty and power, the king would return to Susa after a huge defeat in Greece, and that he would be assassinated by one of his closest advisors in his bedroom. Readers after 330 BC would have known that the mighty Persian Empire would fall to Alexander the Great. In the grand scheme of things, King Xerxes and his Empire, as impressive and threatening as they appear, are not such a big deal. They could never frustrate the plan and promise of God. Through unseen and humanly incomprehensible means, God continues to move all of history to fulfill his covenant in Jesus Christ, the only true King of kings. Opposing Christ the King is opposing God, and the book of Esther warns such people that whatever wealth, power, or position they might enjoy, ultimately there will be a reversal of fortune that will end in death and destruction. For those who follow and trust King Jesus, His sovereign power is of great comfort.

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Proverbs 16:18 *Pride goes before destruction,
    a haughty spirit before a fall.*

Finally, with the big picture, big question, big idea, and no big deal King Xerxes in mind, let’s zoom in to the 3rd year of King Xerxes’ reign, in the administrative capital and largest royal palace in Susa to see what’s happening with…

(slide 27)

**The Big Banquet** Esther ch 1

(slide 28)

***1****This is what happened during the time of Xerxes,[**a**] the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush[**b**]:****2****At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa,*

Vs 1 The phrase “*This is what happened*” indicates that the author wants us to view story as a real. It is a common Hebrew formula to begin historical books in the Bible. The author also wants his readers to know which King was ruling and may be mocking him already.

(slide 29) This slide is of King Xerxes as portrayed in the movie “300” reigning from his royal throne.

NIV uses the Greek Xerxes while other translations the Hebrew transliteration of the Persian name, Ahasuerus (pronounced Ahashwerosh). While the name has no meaning in Hebrew, when pronounced aloud it sounds something like “King Headache”. In describing the provinces larger number 127 (probably even higher than the actual number) of provinces rather than the 20 larger satrapies seems a purposeful exaggeration.

Vs 2 The king reigned from his royal throne (perhaps as opposed to being out conquering) in the citadel of Susa – the fortified part of the city enclosing the palace and its surrounds with those serving in the palace. The picture here is of the king reigning happily in physical comfort and security.

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***3****and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present.*

***4****For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty.*

The king decides to throw a huge banquet seemingly to display vast wealth, splendor and glory of his majesty (these phrases seem repetitious, using different words that mean the same – again, over the top). This party was for the great and mighty men of the Empire, to impress them with his power and wealth, garnering their support, quell any opposition, gain their confidence and loyalty before the next war campaign. The description of the banquet is grandiose in terms of guests and duration. It lasted for 6 months! It seems unlikely that all these leaders could have taken 6 months off and so may be hyperbole. Or there may have been a rotating guest attendance. Either way it’s quite over the top.

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***5****When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, in the enclosed garden of the king’s palace, for all the people from the least to the greatest who were in the citadel of Susa*

*.****6****The garden had hangings of white and blue linen, fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings on marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and other costly stones.****7****Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other, and the royal wine was abundant, in keeping with the king’s liberality.****8****By the king’s command each guest was allowed to drink with no restrictions, for the king instructed all the wine stewards to serve each man what he wished.*

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Vs 5-8 The next banquet of 7 days is for all the people in the citadel, most likely those in the service of the palace. It was in the enclosed palace gardens, described in detail as exceedingly luxurious, lavish, and exotic, and may not actually be exaggerated based on evidence that the palace of Susa was decorated more ornately than any other Persian palace. The king’s liberality is emphasized from the individually designed gold goblets to the free-flowing wine, demonstrating not only indulgence but also calls to mind that King Xerxes drained the empire’s treasury with such excesses.

(slide 33) this shows the Persian gardens and floor plan for the Palace

(slide 34) her are gold cups and other items from the Persian Empire

(slide 35-text)

***9****Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes.*

1:9 The third banquet is barely mentioned and serves to introduce Queen Vashti in the story. The women’s party was indoors in the royal palace of King Xerxes making clear that they were in his palace, under his authority.

This introduction to King Xerxes and his palace at Susa exaggerates the grandeur and wealth of a palace that has no need of exaggeration as he makes an ostentatious display setting the scene for the first real action and dialogue in the story.

(slide 36-picture)

Vs 10-11 **10***On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him—Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Karkas—****11****to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at.* ***12****But when the attendants delivered the king’s command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger.*

He is in “high spirits from wine”, perhaps cheerful but also likely drunk. The phrase literally is that his heart was “good with wine”. He sends seven eunuchs to fetch the Queen. Why so many? It’s pompous. Listing the names is unnecessarily detailed, but the names themselves are twisted forms of Persian names, suggesting that this episode is intended to be farcical and not strictly accurate historically. Some suggest that “wearing her royal crown” meant being naked otherwise. Not surprisingly, the beautiful Queen Vashti refuses to come. Again, no reason given but the reader can certainly imagine several reasons. This seems to draw us into the story more as we imagine what the Queen is feeling and thinking. This is an early reversal already in the story – the King displaying his splendor and glory to for all to see, then his Queen refusing him, also for all to see.

We are told how the King felt, which is no surprise – he became furious and burned with rage. Tension builds as we anticipate this intoxicated, pompous, powerful King to react impulsively and perhaps violently, or at least loud and aggressively, full of bluster to impress his drunken guests, as he had just tried to do by exhibiting his beautiful wife.

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***13****Since it was customary for the king to consult experts in matters of law and justice, he spoke with the wise men who understood the times****14****and were closest to the king—Karshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memukan, the seven nobles of Persia and Media who had special access to the king and were highest in the kingdom.****15****“According to law, what must be done to Queen Vashti?” he asked. “She has not obeyed the command of King Xerxes that the eunuchs* have *taken to her.”*

 But no - we experience a sudden shift from drunken rage to cool-headed, dispassionate almost stilted discourse with his closest advisors as the king asks “*According to law, what must be done to Queen Vashti?”*

 This dialogue is formal, official, and procedural, seems ridiculous in this setting. Is it really “customary” to disrupt a banquet to hold such a meeting? The King, the most powerful man in the Empire, really needs to consult 7 men in this matter with his Queen? This may appear to demonstrate self-restraint, but we soon discover that this King is in reality indecisive, malleable and easily manipulated. In contrast to his lavish banquets and attempt to display his glory and majesty, he demonstrates weak leadership and lack of authority before the party is over. Is there really any law to address such a specific situation? Could it not be better handled privately, even sparing further dishonoring of the King? He consults seven advisors described as “experts” “wise”, “understand the times” “closest to the king” “nobles” “had special access to the king” “highest in the kingdom”. The names are similarly twisted and farcical like the 7 eunuchs, the number of 7 is excessive – does the King really need 7 advisors in order to make a decision? - as is the author’s 7-fold description of their expertise and high standing, clearly mocking their esteemed qualifications. The humor in this becomes more and more apparent as their convoluted recommendations spiral absurdly into an empire wide crisis.

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***16****Then Memukan replied in the presence of the king and the nobles, “Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king but also against all the nobles and the peoples of all the provinces of King Xerxes.****17****For the queen’s conduct will become known to all the women, and so they will despise their husbands and say, ‘King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.’****18****This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen’s conduct will respond to all the king’s nobles in the same way. There will be no end of disrespect and discord.*

Certainly, disobeying the King’s command is a serious matter and warrants some response by the King, although this could have easily been handled more discretely and avoided further embarrassment and dishonor. Memukan’s recommendations are wildly out of proportion. The officials seem more concerned about their own honor and wives disrespecting them than with the Queen and King. He overgeneralizes the problem to the entire Empire and catastrophizes a total breakdown in order in the kingdom from this one incident in the royal court. The author is certainly mocking the King and his advisors. But it could also be Memukan’s clever manipulating of the King, purposefully perhaps to undermine his authority. Historians report that King Xerxes was assassinated in his bedroom by one of his closest advisors. These men were just described as “closest to the king” by the author. The original readers would have known that the King had been assassinated and maybe who it was. Regardless, the author is poking fun at the way the Persian royal court was run.

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***19****“Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she.****20****Then when the king’s edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm, all the women will respect their husbands, from the least to the greatest.”*

The official royal decree that Vashti is banned from his presence will be written in the Empire’s laws. Really?Is the King so impotent that he can’t command who does and does not enter his presence? Apparently so. Imagine discovering a law in Persian chronicles of such a personal, specific matter. Also, there is no historical support that Persian laws could not be repealed, and in fact we’ll see later in the narrative that the King is quite able to change laws at his whim. The irony and satire is dripping throughout this passage.

The predicted scenario is highly improbable in that culture where men held all the power. And the notion is ludicrous that even if it were to happen that a mere decree for all women to respect their husbands would suddenly change their hearts or the resulting anarchy. We can easily imagine the impact such a decree would have on our own society. The other irony hinted at and known from history is that King Xerxes himself, not the Queen nor all the women, with his excesses and poor leadership will cause the decline of the Empire.

We find the title and key verse in the middle of Memukan’s long speech, “let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she”, presumably who is more obedient and respectful to the king.. Someone better obviously refers primarily to Esther. This sets the stage for the story of Esther to be told. “But after this introduction of King Xerxes and the Persian court, it is even more apparent that they needed someone better to lead them. We have noted allusions and foreshadowing throughout this book to other biblical men and women in God’s big story, none of whom were completely without human weaknesses. “Someone else better” is ultimately Jesus Christ, who in stark contrast to King Xerxes is humble, gentle, without sin, wise, loving, respectful of women, having all authority in heaven and on earth, demonstrated power to conquer all our enemies.

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***21****The king and his nobles were pleased with this advice, so the king did as Memukan proposed.****22****He sent dispatches to all parts of the kingdom, to each province in its own script and to each people in their own language, proclaiming that every man should be ruler over his own household, using his native tongue.*

The King needs the approval of his nobles as well as the advisors to make a decision. He contributes nothing. His indecision and being easily persuaded will be key to the plot against the Jews as well as Mordecai and Esther’s rise. Sending out multilingual dispatches to every corner of the Kingdom requires huge resources. But the dispatch itself is comical – all of these resources to deliver a useless proclamation. It cannot be monitored nor enforced. And all this bravado being trumpeted throughout the kingdom merely spreads the news of the King’s inability to command the respect of his Queen. Reversals of destiny are already appearing in anticipation of more to come in the story – the boastful proud King is humiliated by his Queen, Queen Vashti is deposed so someone else will rise, the King is being undermined by advisors, eventually assassinated by one of them. He inherited the Persian Empire from his father and now is in the process of squandering its wealth and glory and leading his kingdom into decline and eventually will fall to Greece. Though displaying the pinnacle of wealth and power at the beginning of this chapter, he’s already showing signs of weakness and ineptitude.

Takeaways

Big Story slide 41

1. We are in God’s epic story and need to not only study each book of the Bible as part of this story but also keep coming back to this truth as our lives unfold. God keeps his promises and He is working His purpose out in our daily lives and in all of human history. Let’s tell our stories of God’s saving work through Jesus Christ and His presence in our lives so we can bring others into the Greatest Story.

Big Question slide 42

1. The answer to the question “Where is God?” in Esther is that God is omnipotently present even where God is most conspicuously absent. Remember this when you don’t sense God’s presence because that will be the majority of the time.

Big Idea slide 43

1. God’s providence is this: God sovereignly works in and through the everyday, non-miraculous events of life to effect His will. May this truth be so sure in our hearts and minds that we experience increasing peace that passes understanding in the scary and confusing times of our lives, meaning in the seemingly pointless times, hope in desperate situations and thankfulness at all times.

Big Deal slide 44

1. Don’t take ourselves too seriously and don’t think that we’re a big deal or be intimidated by people who appear to be big deals now. Remember that the King of kings is the real big deal. Memorize Proverbs 16:18 and remind yourself anytime you’re feeling too good about yourself as a gentle reminder to not get too carried away.

Big Banquet slide 45

1. Let’s build God’s kingdom like Darius the Great rather than squander it like King Xerxes and store up our treasures in heaven.

Big Laugh slide 46

1. Enjoy the story of Esther – look for reversals and irony

God laughs at rulers who try to oppose him.

Rejoice in the Lord always, and again, I say rejoice!

Slide 47

As I was wrapping this up, I realized that I had begun on a rather melancholic note, the frowning face of Providence in William Cowper’s life, and before we sing his hymn, this reminds me of the Greek Drama masks of comedy and tragedy.

God’s epic story is in the end a comedy. God laughs. We find eternal pleasures at His right hand.

But we’ve mentioned the other choice – for those who oppose God and reject Christ there is a different end to the story. It is a tragedy.

Which story will you choose for your life?