

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

AUGUST 27TH - 28TH, 2022 // BOOK OF ESTHER

THE KING'S FEAST (ESTHER 1:1-9)

The **book of Esther** begins by setting the scene—its events took place in Susa during the reign of King Ahasuerus (**vs. 1-2**), whose **empire extended from India to Cush (Ethiopia/South Sudan)**.

- This King is more **commonly known in history by his Greek name, "Xerxes,"** and he inherited the vast Persian Empire from his father, Darius I.
- In the first 2 years of his reign, **he had consolidated his empire into 127 provinces.**

And now, in his **3rd year**, King Ahasuerus gathers his military, his officials, nobles, and leaders and throws them an **elaborate feast to display and showcase** the "glorious wealth of his kingdom" (**vs. 3-4**).

- It takes this king **6 months to parade all of his wealth, power, and affluence before these people!** And as if that wasn't enough, the king then throws a 2nd feast and **invites the whole city (vs. 5)**.

Verse 6 gives us an **elaborate description of the décor of the fortress of Susa** where this great banquet was taking place.

- The only other time in the **Old Testament this much detail is given on interior design** is in the descriptions of the **temple and tabernacle**.
- But at the time of this story, both are long gone, and **the God of Israel is seemingly nowhere to be found.**

From the outside, it looks like **this pagan king is the one with all the wealth** and the glory.

- This party was one of great opulence and wealth, but **we can also be sure it was one of great debauchery (vs. 7-8)**.
- There were "**no restrictions**" on how much wine a **guest could drink and whatever a person wanted** they could have.
- These **kinds of environments** always lead to sin.

This king not only loved **wealth, pleasure, wine, and admiration**, he also loved power—everything that took place at this party was under his control (**even the rules for drinking**).

- But as Ahasuerus' extravagant party is underway, his wife, **Queen Vashti, is also giving a party for the women (vs. 9)**.
- This is a picture of a man who has attained all that the world has to offer, and **yet something is about to go terribly wrong** to topple it all over.

DOMESTIC DISCORD (ESTHER 1:10-12)

After 7 days of **feasting, partying, and drinking, this thoroughly intoxicated king calls** for his queen to parade her beauty before the people and officials (**vs. 10-11**).

- This is the king of the largest empire the world had ever seen: it covered **Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel; and also parts of modern-day Egypt, Ethiopia/Sudan, Libya, and Arabia.**

This party he was throwing was certainly for **his enjoyment**, but more than that, Ahasuerus was planning for a **doomed invasion of Greece**.

- Many historians speculate that this showcase was a political ploy to **convince his military, nobles, and officials of his power and leadership and to persuade them to go to war** with him against Greece to further expand the Persian Empire.

According to Jewish tradition, **the king's request came from an argument among the men at the feast** as to which country had the most beautiful women.

- Ahasuerus decided to settle the issue by **putting his wife, the queen, on public display**.
- It's not specifically said, but the implication is that **Queen Vashti was expected to display herself** in an immodest way.

This man has spent **187 days trying to impress people by showing them how rich and powerful he is;** but in the end, he's not all that powerful (**vs. 12**) because his own wife refuses to come at his command.

- The most powerful man in the entire world is humiliated by **a woman who sees beneath the surface** and isn't impressed or fooled one bit.
- This man who **rules 127 provinces** can't even control his own wife!

"The king became furious and his anger burned within him..." (**vs. 12b**)

- It's been said that **anger is often a symptom of a loss of control** or a feeling of helplessness.
- When you **can't control a person, situation, or circumstance, anger** puts us in the driver's seat.
- What Queen Vashti seemed to see is what King Ahasuerus hoped nobody would notice—even if he **had everything on earth**, it was all so empty and insecure that the slightest thing could topple it over.

THE KING'S DECREE (ESTHER 1:13-22)

It seems like a bit of an overreaction for the king to take an **embarrassing situation** at a drunken party and turn it into an issue of national security.

- Keep in mind that **the king was flexing his power through this extended banquet in the hopes** that his entire empire and military would obey his command to go to war against Greece—but in **his own palace, he couldn't even get his wife to obey!**

So **the king summons his seven top advisors** to help him figure out what to do next (**vs. 13-15**).

- Their solution is a bit comical for a few reasons...
- Their fear is that **everyone is going to hear about the situation**, so they make a law about the situation, translate it into every language, and issue it **across the empire as a royal decree**.
- Vashti's punishment is not being able to see the king—which is **what she wanted** in the first place.
- A law gets passed for women to honor their husbands—as if **somehow the key to earning a wife's respect** is through making a law.
- Regardless of how silly and absurd this decree might be, **this advice pleases the king, and letters are sent to every province** under his reign about the new law regarding honoring husbands as the head of households (**vs. 21-22**).
- Queen Vashti is **presumably banished**.

THE FOOLISHNESS OF THE PURSUIT OF NOTHING.

- Our culture loves the exact same things the Persians loved: **wealth, power, pleasure, entertainment, comfort, and control**.
- Just like this Persian king, our **culture showcases these idols in front of us** every day in an effort to impress us and get to pursue them too.
- It's not enough to have these things; we **feel the need to flaunt these things**.
- In the end, **these empires we build are incredibly unstable and insecure**—they may look impressive to others, but the slightest things can cause them to completely collapse.
- These **things can't satisfy the deepest longings of our hearts!** They will always leave us empty, insecure, lonely, and **angry (powerless)**.

GOD IS AT WORK, EVEN WHEN WE CAN'T SEE HIM.

- Sometimes **we have to wait and see what God is doing because there are times when it doesn't feel like God is present** anywhere in the story.
- Does it feel like **God is absent** in chapter 1?
- Does it feel like **God is absent** right now in the events happening in our nation? In your family? In your career? In your relationships?
- No feast, **no drunk king; no drunk king**, no call to his wife; no call to his wife, no refusal; no refusal, no banished queen...
- ...no banished queen, no Esther; no Esther, no Jews; **no Jews, no Jesus**; no Jesus, no hope.
- God was still at work and in control in chapter 1, and He's still at work and in control in your life right now. Do you trust Him **when you can't see Him?**

AS BEAUTIFUL AND ALLURING AS THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD MIGHT SEEM, JESUS IS BETTER.

- "This story about a king calling for his bride to come to a feast is actually set in the context of a bigger story, about **another King who calls His bride to come to a feast**" (T. Cain).
- Jesus is a far better King—**He didn't send servants for His bride**; He took on flesh and came for His bride **selflessly and sacrificially**.
- His own people refused Him. As the King, **He could've banished us for our refusal of Him**: but instead **He chose to take our punishment for us**.
- And the feast **Jesus invites us to is unlike any feast this world has ever seen**.
- Jesus offers us **satisfaction, love, purpose, meaning, and joy** that the world can't provide.
- **Have you seen the absurdity, bankruptcy, and the foolishness of all the world offers?**
- **Do you believe that Jesus is better than what the world is offering you?**
- **Do you believe that God is working, in control, and still on His throne, even when you don't know what He's up to?**