

Roy's Sermon for June 12, 2022

Esther 1:13-21 'The Tale Of Two Kings!'

Last week we looked at the book of Esther chapter 1:1-2 in a sermon I called 'Pride and vanity, the King's folly'. We basically had an introduction into the book by firstly placing it into its` historical context. But I must amend that which I said last time, because these events actually occurred prior to the second lot of exiles being repatriated to Jerusalem. 485BC Xerxes was crowned, so 482 BC and following, do these events occur, which is prior to the second lot of Jews being repatriated to Jerusalem. "In the third year of Xerxes," whose Kingdom stretched from India to Ethiopia.

I explained, that although God`s Name is never mentioned, His Sovereign hand is woven throughout the whole of the book, orchestrating His purpose and plan for the delivering of His people, out of the hands of those who would destroy them. Which of course is what ultimately Jesus does for us upon the cross! He delivers us, from those things which would destroy us eternally. Satan, rebellion, sin and death!

We saw that Xerxes was a tremendous military campaigner, and yet was a weak willed man both personally and politically. We will see more of this today, as he is unduly influenced by those with whom he had surrounded himself! One of the great conquerors of the ancient world, he was not only unbelievably wealthy but also that his vanity knew no bounds. "In the third year" of his reign, he sought to show all and sundry how amazing he was. 180 days of feasting and drinking with the elite of the 127 provinces, and then seven days for all of those who lived within the safety of the citadel. And he made sure that all of his opulence was on show for all to see, v6-8.

But as we learned, after having a skinful to drink, in 10, he then sent the seven eunuchs "commanding" the Queen to come so that he could shamefully display her like some common harlot for sale, but she refused to come! As the commentator explained, like the children's story, the all-powerful king had no clothes, so to speak. Because his great power didn't even seem to reach under his own roof! v12 "He became furious and burned with anger."

And finally I explained that the book is about the "who knows?" ch4:14b. Yes those "who knows" times in our life! We do not know what the future holds and how God is working through our lives. But he does know! Rom 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose."

And so we pick up the narrative in Esther 1:13:-21 'A Tale Of Two Kings!' But before we go there, Duguid explains that it is helpful at this point to firstly examine the difference between this king and his kingdom, and that of the King of kings. Our king, the true King, the Lord Jesus Christ! Firstly we have king Xerxes providing all of the pomp and pageantry that he could muster over a period of 187 days no less, so that he could show off his own magnificence. v4 "He displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendour of his majesty." Yes behold ye everyone I am the king. And you must agree that there is no one like me! And yet clearly, the man lacked any measure at all of what true greatness is. Humility and wisdom, which flows from Proverbs 9:10 "The fear of the Lord. And knowledge of the holy one."

No this king knew nothing about wisdom and humility, otherwise he would have never presented himself in such a way, and treated his queen in such a despicable manner. He basically displayed all of those things, (those shameful things) which are the hallmarks and essence of fallen humanity. He worshipped that other Trinity which I have mentioned before. Me. Myself and I! Yes we must contrast and compare this king and his kingdom, (and I can't but help mention many modern day

politicians here) with the True King. The heir to the throne of the universe! Zechariah 9:9 "Rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion. Shout, daughter of Jerusalem. See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." The all-powerful humility of Jesus. He contained the universe in the palm of His hand, and yet for the sake of His people, the putting on of human flesh, and the countenance of a nobody! In Isaiah 53:1-9 we read: "Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth, he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgement he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living, for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth."

And from Philippians 2:5-11 "Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ. Who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the father."

Yes what amazing, even eternal contrast there is before us. One king seeks glory for himself while the other gives glory to God. One declares his greatness from the rooftops for all to hear, while the other comes "riding on the colt of a donkey as a humble servant, even unto death on a cross." One would ply his subjects with excesses of food and wine and debauchery to win their favour. While the other submits His body to be broken and his blood poured out, to carry them, and to deliver them through the excesses of this life and sin. One acts under the pretence of well-being for his people while actually feeding his own ego, while the other shows what true love is. "For greater love hath no man than this that he laid down his life for his friends." Yes "your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus!"

Beloved, we should always beware and be on guard against the kinds of things that impress us, and the things that people use to impress us. Just as king Xerxes exhibited, the world is filled with bright and shining people and bright and shining things. Our heads can be so easily turned and our minds impressed, if we don't keep our True King before our eyes and within our hearts. Even though just about everything in Xerxes' house was shining and sparkling, his soul was dead. And he had the heart and mind of a dead man! "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."

Friends, what of the differences between the two kingdoms? As we saw last time, King's Xerxes was one of the three great conquerors of the ancient world whose vast kingdom stretched from India to Ethiopia. And yet his reign spanned for a mere 21 years, only to then be assassinated and succeeded by his son Artaxerxes. Just as we see in the book of Daniel. Kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall, even as they have always done and will continue to do so until the true King of all kings powers, authorities

and kingdoms returns. So although yes his kingdom was vast in human terms, it was but as nothing not even a blink, in the scheme of eternity! But what of the Kingdom of the True King Jesus Christ? He Himself said in John 18:36 "My Kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my Kingdom is from another place." And in Isaiah 40:12-18: "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? Who has understood the mind of the Lord, or instructed him as his counsellor? Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding? Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket, they are regarded as dust on scales he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor it's animals enough for burnt offerings. Before him all the nations are as nothing, they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing. To whom, then, will you compare God?"

And Isaiah 66:1 "This is what the Lord says: "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool." Beloved, how can we compare the two kingdoms? One is but for a mere breath. 21 years his authority ruled and reigned in vanity. But the Rule and Authority of Jesus is from eternity past, present and future! After His ascension into heaven in Acts 19, and He is accompanied by angels as we see in Psalm 24, and then he is led into God's presence in Daniel 7:13-14: "In my vision at night I looked and there before me was one like a Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the ancient of days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power, all peoples nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his Kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."

Again O friends, how can we compare the finite with the infinite? Well of course we cannot. It would be far easier to compare a worm to the sun. And yet even as seemingly immeasurable and impossible to do such a thing as that, that would be far more plausible and far more possible. Because at least we would be comparing 2 two created things. The distance between the two could still in a sense be measured. But to compare a man of dust and his achievements, to the great I AM WHO I AM of the universe, no! No, "The heavens are his throne and the earth is his footstool." "He measures the heavens with the span of his hand. To whom will you compare God?" So now that we have placed this king into a bit of heavenly perspective, (and I must confess that I got a bit consumed in my doing so) but yes now let us pick up the narrative as God weaves His Sovereign Hand through it all!

So, full of anger and rage having been disrespected by the queen in front of everyone in his drunken state, the king is at a loss. Then v13 "Since it was customary for the king to consult experts in matters of the law and justice, he spoke with the wise men who understood the times and were closest to the king, Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan the seven nobles of Persia and Medea who had special access to the king and were highest in the Kingdom."

Now brothers and sisters, there was much discussion at Bible study about this consulting by the king of his close council. And it was rightly pointed out by Tom, that this was, and indeed still is the practise of most ruling and governing authorities around the world, by the head of those nations. And it goes without saying that wisdom and prudence, instructs us to seek counsel in all important matters of life. But of course the problem arises though, when the advice that is given comes to us from either impure or devious motives. And problems also arise, from the reasons that we asked the questions in the first place, and the nature of the advice that we are seeking! Are we asking those who always agree with us, and are going to give us the kinds of answers that we like to hear? Or are

we truly seeking out wise council? Do we even avail ourselves of those who we know are going to tell us the truth?

I think we can sometimes all be like that can't we? It's that ostrich with its head in the sand kind of thing. Like going to the doctor, but not telling them all that's wrong with us, because if we hear him tell us all seems well, then it must be OK. But of course no, it's not! Now my take on this situation, (and there are those who disagree with me and that's fine) but yes my take on the situation is that yes, although it was indeed "the king's custom to consult experts in matters of law) ultimately, he is the law, because he is the one who must bring down the decisions because he is the one who issues the edict. So he is the one who makes the law!

So again, as I read this situation and in light of the rest of the book throughout, in which basically the king seems to make no decisions of his own, I can't help but be taken back to the garden in the book of Genesis! Where Adam casts aside his God ordained authority and responsibility. That's the difference between true leadership and being led. So may I suggest that in his drunken state, the reason that the king has sought this council is twofold. Firstly, like Adam, casting aside his authority and responsibility, because he doesn't want to deal with this situation himself and if it all goes pear shaped, he has someone else to blame. And secondly, he knew that these men would come up with some kind of answer and solution, that totally suited him, and that would restore his pride and appease his ego. And of course they did!

Beloved the reason that I take this view of things begins with the king's very first few words. "According to the law." Brothers and sisters, you know what true wisdom would have done in this situation? Go home and sleep it off. And then deal with things in the light of the day. Approach the queen himself and then seek to manage things in house so to speak as far as possible. And then after that, if there is no resolution, deal with the political fallout!

At bible study a couple of weeks ago, Alan made the statement that if there were two times when someone should never make any decision of any importance; One was when you were angry and the other was when you were drunk. And let me add one other, when you are tired and weary, with a lot of pressure on you. Because inevitably, it will be a bad decision! And I believe this bad decision of the king in his anger, is made on the back of his other bad decision. When he demanded that the queen parade herself even as some harlot, before a drunken crowd! Yes wisdom would have waited for the next day, but no. "According to the 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."

Dear friends again, I can't but help to feel the need to point out the differences between the two kings. All this king has within him is the burning anger and need to have his vanity appeased and save face. And we can all understand that feeling. Because we can all fall into that trap at times. No one wants to be made a fool of, it goes against the grain. But for the believer, (when we are of sound mind at least) well does the scripture say, "Don't let the sun go down on your anger." And particularly so in marriage! Because Satan will get a foothold whenever he is given opportunity. Yes this king, (and many powers and authorities of the world today) are all about self. How grand and magnificent do I appear to be. But friends all that glitters is not gold. Because the sum of a person's life is not in their possessions!

But what of the King Jesus? Even the Creator, the Sustainer, and the Ruler of the entire universe? Born of woman in a feeding trough. No pomp, no pageantry, living as a common man. And whose sole purpose for coming was to rescue His people no matter what it would cost Him. Yes He would do whatever it takes. Even as we sing, "Man of sorrows, what a name for the Son of God who came,

ruined sinners to reclaim. Hallelujah! What a Saviour!" Yes Hallelujah! What a Saviour! Another song we sing: "My Lord, what love is this that paid so dearly? That I the guilty one may go free? Amazing love, oh what sacrificed, the Son of God given for me. My debt he pays and my death he dies. That I might live. That I might live!"

In v16-20, it seems only one person spoke up Memucan. Perhaps he was the only sober one amongst them, we don't know. And he puts it to the king that the queen has not just wronged you, she has wronged us all! Now friends, is it that the king is not the only angry one at being snubbed by the queen? Is it that Memucan is speaking on behalf of the others of their own indignation of what has taken place? Again, we don't know. But if they have been part of the celebrations which is most likely, that is not a stretch! Well, the conclusion which is arrived at is that all of society will disintegrate if the queen is not dealt with and immediately so! But was this true, really? If the king showed some humility and dealt with the queen with compassion, (in light of the role that he had played in the dilemma) would the world have come to an end? I don't believe so. And it may well have had the opposite effect, even instructing how husbands ought to love their wives. Even amongst these Pagan people. But again, we don't know.

But of verse 19, like a child who won't eat their vegetables and has to go to bed without dessert. If the queen wouldn't come to see the king, she will never get to see him again. Such is the sense of this knee jerk reaction! V20 "All the women will respect their husbands." O and also in v19 "Give her position to someone else who is better than she." Now friends what this actually means, is hard to know. What we do know, and what we will see, is that all that is required to be a participant in the king's hunt for a new queen, is that she be a virgin and that she be hot looking. And out of all of the women who would be selected, (and they had no choice in the matter) only one would be chosen as queen. They would get their up one opportunity to please the king sexually and if not chosen) they would then live their lives in the king's harem. Yes being cared for, but in obscurity, less the king summoned them for his pleasures!

And what is the footnote to these things? v21 "The king and his nobles were pleased with the advice, so the king did as Memucan proposed." Well it's no brainer isn't it. The men get to further seek to lord it over their wives, and the king is going to sleep with the most beautiful young women throughout the whole empire!

And brothers and sisters it is suggested, that this "better," simply means that she will do all that she is told! So as I closed this morning brethren, as we've continued to see the folly of this king and we ask what has this got to do with God? How do we see Him in it? Well, as I have been explaining, what we see, is God orchestrating all things for the purpose of His plan of preserving His people. A King's drunken vanity, a Queens propriety or even obstinance. And a single voice amongst seven men who had the King's ear! All of these things are setting the stage for God's favour and deliverance, to be poured out upon His people. Yes all of those seemingly inconsequential things, that God uses in the governing and directing of our lives! Romans 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose.

Let's pray.