

Roy's Sermon for July 19, 2022

Esther 1:22-2:10 'The Stage Is Set; Words; and Torn Between Two Worlds!'

Last time in Esther we looked at ch.1:13-21, 'A Tale Of Two Kings' I called it. I guess I kind of digressed for a moment to marvel at the eternal differences between this king of the earth, Xerxes, and the true King and heir to the throne of the entire universe, Jesus! One full of vanity and pride, plying his subjects with food and drink to win their favour, while the other shows what true greatness is in His selfless humility and wisdom, "coming riding on the foal of a donkey." Yes, one filled himself with his ego; While the other emptied Himself for His people, showing us what true love is!

I highlighted the differences between their kingdoms. One, though vast in human terms, even stretching from India to Ethiopia, yet spanning for only a mere breath in the scheme of eternity, 21 years. While the other rules and reigns from eternity past, present and future! Isaiah 40 "He holds the waters of the universe in the hollow of his hand." And "with the span of his hand He has marked off the heavens." "To whom will you compare God?" Isaiah 61:1 "The heavens are his throne and the earth is his footstool!" Yes God is incomparable! We cannot compare the finite with the infinite. I said it would be far easier to compare a worm to the sun, because at least both of these are created things!

In v13, I suggested that what Xerxes had done in his drunken state, was the same as Adam in the garden of Eden. Cast aside his authority so that he would have someone else to blame, if it all went pear shaped. V15 "According to the law what must be done?" But the king *was* the law. He alone issued the decrees. Yes though he had all the power in reality, he was no leader! V16: Perhaps out of his own indignation and echoing that of the others, Memucan alone spoke. *The queen has slighted us all, the world will come to an end if we don't deal with this disrespect.* Telling the king exactly what he wants to hear. *You issue a decree that all women must submit to their husbands. We'll find a better queen for you. And we'll do it by the king sampling the most beautiful virgins of the Kingdom!* V21 "The king and his nobles were pleased with this advice". And the reality amidst all of this? God was working His Sovereign plan and will!

And so we pick up the text in chapter 1:22- 2: 'The Stage Is Set!' V22: "He sent dispatches to all parts of the Kingdom, to each province in its own script and to each people in its own language, proclaiming in each people's tongue that every man should be ruler over his own household."

Friends, this was a vast undertaking in itself. It would have taken the fastest riders on horseback the better part of a month, riding nonstop, at 160 kilometres per day, to go from one end of the Kingdom to the other! And this is not accounting for bandits, the change of horses and the need for sleep. Having to cross sections of the sea, riding over mountain ranges and other difficult terrain. "127 provinces." Perhaps even conservatively speaking, this would have taken some 500 riders months to achieve. For example, in 2 Samuel 24, it took nine and a half months for David to have the fighting men counted, in that act of vanity! And in this instance, upon their arrival in those chosen destinations, the edict would have been handed to the city officials, and then taken to and proclaimed, throughout all the corners of each particular state!

Now this was an empire of some five and a half million square kilometres. About 3/4 the size of the whole continent of Australia. In comparison, the Roman Empire at its height was 5,000,000 square kilometres. And Alexander the Great's kingdom, 4,800,000 square kilometres. Again, this was a vast

undertaking. And for what? To satisfy the ego and the vanity of a drunken king! And would it have achieved its aim of forcing all of the women into submission? Well opinions are divided of course. But I agree, with those who do not believe so!

Brothers and sisters, as bad as the governments are in Australia at times, we should constantly thank God for the relative stability of the political system that we have. And on the whole, the nature of the society, as far as safety goes in which we live. But as Christians, we should not acquiesce in the ludicrous decisions that these governing authorities sometimes make. And we should, if needs be, be prepared to voice our objections to such things, and particularly so, when they are contrary to scripture and the rule of God in our lives!

For example; the homosexualization of society that is being forced upon us. The blasphemous notion, that a child is not born as God has made them, male and female. And that children are subjected to such lunacy even from kindergarten age! Such things are an attack, not only upon common sense reality, but ultimately, upon the very created order and image of God! Genesis 1:26-28 "Let's make man in our image, and our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it."

Yes "male and female he created them." That they "increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it." Friends, not only is homosexuality an abomination in the sight of God, but also, (without external aids) two women cannot increase in number and two men cannot increase in number. It is a physical impossibility! And neither can someone be a man one day and a woman the next. Or a woman one day and a man the next. Such things are insanities that are infecting the western world, and are an affront to God's created order. And friends we preach Christ whenever we stand in His Name respectfully, against such madness! We say to people, we appreciate your right in this country to have your opinions, (even as diabolical as they are, because they are of Diablos, the devil, they are sent from hell), but yes we appreciate your right to your opinion, but we do not agree. We hold only always, to what the Bible teaches and we stand firm in it! Even as it says in Romans 3:4 "Let God be true and everyman a liar." Or in other words, even if the whole world goes against God's Word, we stand firm! Amen!

And here's the thing Beloved: Xerxes' drunken vanity is nothing compared to what we face today. Amongst others those things which I have already referred to, the euthanizing of people, and the murdering of children even right up until their birth! Yes this is the world in which we live. And I have no doubt that for Christians, who would seek to hold to all that the Bible teaches, (while opposing new world thinking) things will get even worse till Jesus returns!

Well now the stage is set, for God to introduce His deliverer. And as with Moses in the book of Exodus, it would even come out of the very household of royalty, from the throne of the Pagan king no less! Ch 2:1: please notice the words: "Later when the anger of king Xerxes had subsided." Again friends may I suggest, that it is when his hangover of over six months of revelry had finally passed. "He remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her." I think we can perhaps all imagine the scene. Maybe a day or two or three or perhaps even a week later, (like anyone who has been drunk, and I'm sure some of us have been there) he wakes up and thinks to himself, 'Gee, I wonder what I did or said last night? I hope I didn't embarrass myself or get myself into trouble!' Now not that this king would ever think along those lines, but in effect he comes to himself and thinks, 'What did I do with Vashti? O that's right? I banished her from seeing me. So I

need another queen!' And he needs another queen, because even if he had of felt some kind of remorse about what he had orchestrated and said and done, (which he didn't of course) but even if he did, what the king declared was law, and could not be repealed. Even by the king himself!

Beloved, how tremendously important are our words can be. I've used this explanation in the past saying that there are some things that we just cannot take back. A person gets into a car and drives while they are drunk and kills someone. You can't fix that; you cannot take it back! You raise your children with indifference, harshness and without love. You cannot take that back! You are not selfless but self-centred and self-absorbed in your marriage. You cannot take that back; the damage is already done! Well so too it is with our words at time. We can say certain things that can have such a devastating impact upon those whom we love and care about, that we can't fix it, we cannot take them back. Oh, we can apologise and try and make it right, but no matter what we do or say, something has been broken. And we can't take it back!

Well does James the brother of our Lord say in James 1:19 "My dear brothers take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. Because anger does not produce the righteous life that God desires." Yes "take note." Write this down. Put it under your fridge magnet. This is important. Don't let this go in one ear and out the other. And in another place, as I mentioned last time. "Don't let the sun go down on your anger." Yes our words are tremendously important because not only can they have a powerful impact upon people for good or bad, but they are also a clear reflection of who we truly are!

In Matthew 15, while dismissing the petty accusations of the legal eagles of the day, about eating with unwashed or "unclean hands," Jesus said in v17-20: "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man unclean. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man unclean, but eating with unwashed hands does not make him unclean." Yes our words reveal our heart! While having issued his first decree, and the riders are heading to the four corners of the kingdom; in v2-4 the hunt for the new queen must begin in earnest, so a new edict is given we learn in v8.

Friends, in v2-4 we have the second lot of advice that was given to the king. In 1:21 "The king and his nobles were pleased with this advice." V4b "This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it" In both cases, the idea that seems to be conveyed is, *Oh yeah, I like the sound of that!* It's not that yes, that is wise counsel. Or that promotes wisdom, that will be a wise and prudent thing to do, no. But that it appeals to my senses! And "appealed to him?" A nationwide beauty pageant where he not only picks the winner and keep gets to keep the prize. But he also gets to keep and sample every other one of the contestants! V2 "Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king." V3 "To bring all these beautiful girls into their harem at the citadel of Susa." "Let beauty treatments be given them." V4 "Then let the girl who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." "This advice appealed to the king and he followed it."

Beloved, we really do need to be aware of, and to beware of, those kinds of moments. They are those "Did God really say" moments of Genesis 3:1. When the lustre of the situation can in effect beguile us! The old adage that if it sounds too good to be true it most likely is, is not a bad safety cord to hang onto. But of course far better than that, is the hymn that we sing "Take it to the Lord in prayer!" Yes, "Do thy friends despise, forsake thee (and let me add another beguile thee) take it to the Lord in prayer. In His arms He'll take and shield thee, thou wilt find a solace there". Advice is good, but it is the Word of God that never lies!

Yes the hunt is on for the new queen. And the search is from one end of the kingdom to the other. V5-6 (and notice the words) “Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah.”

Now let's remember the scene. There are hundreds of riders going into all of the parts of the kingdom taking the king's fool's errand that every woman must submit to their husband. And now, there are yet hundreds more riders, taking the king's second decree, in the hunt for the new queen. And we actually learn in v16 of this chapter, that 4 years will pass, before Esther is chosen by the king! It is believed that at its peak, the population of Persia was 50 million strong. Basically twice the size of Australia today. So this was going to be the proverbial search for a needle in a haystack.

But yet again, notice the words: “Now there was in the citadel of Susa.” We might even read the words like this. Now as it turns out, there just happened to be a Jew named Mordecai who lived in the citadel of Susa. Oh and coincidentally, Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father or mother. This girl, “who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.”

Brothers and sisters, I do hope you realised that when I used the word coincidentally, that it was tongue in cheek. Because as you have heard me say that there is no such thing as coincidence in the universe of God, at least in the sense that we use the word today, which conveys the idea of chance! If chance existed, it would mean that there would be places in the universe where God is not in full control. But such places do not exist, because God “holds the waters of the universe in the hollow of his hand.” And “he measures the heavens with the span of his hand.” Isaiah chapter 40.

Colossians 1:16-17 Paul writes of Jesus: “For by him all things were created. Things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” And with Paul's reasoning being, that not only did God through Jesus create the entire universe and everything in it, but that Jesus is the very fabric, through Whom that universe is knit together. Were He to turn His back on it, it would cease to be!

So no, it was no coincidence that under the king's very nose, “in the citadel of Susa,” there was a Jew whose name was Mordecai and he had a beautiful cousin whom he had taken as his own daughter, whose name was Hadassah who was also known as Esther. So the first things that we learn about Esther, are that both she and Mordecai live in the citadel, so they would have been part of the garden celebrations. She is fully qualified for the pageant, because she has a lovely figure and is also beautiful to look at. And finally, (and perhaps most importantly at this point) is that she is known by two names. Her Jewish name Hadassah meaning myrtle, and her Persian name of Esther. Derived from the word star, or even it is suggested from the Babylonian goddess Ishtar. Which according to Ian Duguin, this reveals to us at this time at least, who Esther was happy to be. Someone who was able to live in two worlds!

Now brothers and sisters, there is a comparison, (whether fairly or unfairly) that is drawn between Esther's willing acceptance of all that was happening to her, for example v9, “eating the special food” with that of Daniel and his three friends: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, when they were carried off into exile by Nebuchadnezzar who respectfully declined the king's food of idols, asking to eat only vegetables. And though given new names, they maintained their Jewish names! Now is this

a fair criticism of Esther's position? I don't really know. We do know from v10, that she was obedient to all that Mordecai had instructed her to do. Even concealing her true identity of being a Jew. While Daniel and his friends, were all about being seen to be different from those around them. As they would boldly and yet respectfully testify, to the only God whom they served! But yes it does seem that Esther has assimilated herself well into Persian culture. And it makes sense, being a third or fourth generation exile, it's all she's ever known! But without wanting to be unkind, it does also seem that she uses her God given assets well, she listens to Mordecai, but she also, v9 "won the favour" of Heggai, the head eunuch. You see the commentator explains that the Hebrew word for "Won" here, is not in a passive sense, but that she did indeed work, toward garnishing his favour.

Now I'm not making any assertions about whether or not this was good or bad in this instance. But it does seem clear at least at this time, as I mentioned earlier, that Esther did fit very well into both worlds! Though through her at that time God was using her chameleon like existence, (for want of a better description) for His people's deliverance as He "works all things for the good of those who love Him and are called according to his purpose."

I guess the questions are: Is this a good example for us and does it give us licence to live in the same way? And of course my answer to those questions is no! All throughout the Old Testament God's people are called by Him to come out from the other nations and be separate. The way they lived, the food they ate, the food they didn't eat. The way they were governed, was all to be a reflection of the God whom they worshipped! Jesus Himself said. "Be in the world but not of the world." Yes of course God did orchestrate all of those things for His glory. The concealing of Esther's heritage. Her being called into the king's harem and Esther's apparent efforts at being the chosen one.

But we need to be careful that we don't become chameleon like in our own walk with God! We can become so concerned at being liked, and prospering in a worldly sense, that we conceal our heritage in Christ. That we become so enamoured by the world and blending in so well, that it claims us as its own. Because in that there is great danger! James 4:4 "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God?" Now James is not saying that we must hate people, Jesus tells us to "love even our enemies and pray for those who persecute us." But to fall in love with the shining things of the world such as Xerxes and those like him offer, to the detriment of our relationship with God, even turning our back on Him. Is an act of spiritual adultery against Him, as we fall in love with and worship someone, or something else! Beloved as in our marriages, it is crucial that we remain faithful to God. Otherwise we will be constantly being torn between two worlds!

Let's pray.