

Ancient Cliff Notes

Esther

September 30, 2018

Courage Church, Detroit, MI.

scriptures: 2 Timothy 3:1-5, Esther, 1 Samuel 15

As I was working on this sermon and thinking through this story...I was just feeling like... “man... I don’t want to ruin everyone’s childhood memories by sharing what really happened in the stories that

Veggie Tales doesn’t always give all of the details on.” I fear that I have done that for some of you with a few of these stories.

And today I am going to paint a picture for you that quite frankly is dark and gruesome and unexpected... its cinematic... its bizarre. its violent. and its sexual... because its telling us what happened even though just about all of it is NOT GOOD... and that is the book of Esther.



and to start this off, I want us to all ask ourselves this one question, and I want you all to keep this in your mind this entire sermon:

Do I trust God?

Really... truly... deeply... FULLY.

Do you believe that God can do anything? That He can work through

anybody... and that He can overpower even the biggest empires and overcome even the worst circumstances?

Before we get to Esther, I want to read a passage NOT in the book of Esther, just to get our minds in the right place going into this. This whole message is going to be a bit bizarre... but I want us to start by reading a warning that the Apostle Paul issued to Timothy. It is found in 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, **having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.**”

Let's Pray and then we will get into the book of Esther.

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Did you know that IN the book of Esther, never... even one time... does God get mentioned?

Never, not even one time... does anyone call on the name of the Lord.

Never, not even one time does God speak to anyone.

The book of Esther is NEVER mentioned in the New Testament. Its NOT referenced by Jesus. Its NOT referenced by Paul. The writer of Hebrews doesn't count her as a mighty woman of faith who rose up to defend to Israelites. You would think that if Samson would make that list, Esther would... but no.

But this is what makes this so interesting... This story takes place when Israel is in exile... when as far as Israel can tell... God is silent. He abandoned them. He gave them over... He isn't there.

But really it began at a time when things were starting to look more hopeful for them. So, Israel was taken into captivity by Babylon, but then the Persian Empire, under the leadership of Cyrus the great... DEFEATED AND OVERTHREW THE BABYLONIAN EMPIRE. (somewhere around 538 B.C.)

and when Persia took control of the empire, they actually allowed the Jews who were in exile to go back home, or go wherever they wanted to go. And so they dispersed... some went home, some stayed, and others went to new places. It is what is called the "Diaspora" or the Dispersion of the Jews. At one point they were all together in one place, but after they were freed from the exile, they dispersed.

So they weren't being held "captive" to one certain place, but they were still under the rule of the Persian Government. Esther and her family did not go back to Jerusalem, they lived in Susa, the capital of Persia... what would be modern day Shush, in Iran.

The problem with that is, the more they lived amongst the Persians, the more like the Persians they became, which is somewhat poetic in and of itself, because all throughout the Old Testament, what is the Jews great sin against God?

God calls them to be set apart, to worship Him alone... and yet they constantly allowed themselves to be assimilated into other cultures and yoked themselves to the gods of those cultures. The Jews great sin throughout the entire Old Testament was that they became products OF their environment when they were called to be DIFFERENT.

So when we meet Esther and her older cousin Mordecai (who had raised her because she was an orphan)... though it tells us they are Jewish, they seem to have no problem going along with much of what was going on in that culture. It was very obvious that they were products of the culture that they were a part of, rather than a light in a dark place.

So they are under the reign of King Xerxes and the Persian Empire.

and the story begins with an enormous party being thrown by King Xerxes. This guy really knew how to throw a party... and the one described in the story was already six months in.

They had been partying... for six straight months.

Now this may seem totally unrealistic and absurd, and Xerxes certainly took this PRETTY FAR... but its important to note that he was leading the charge of an empire that was seeking control of the world.

The book of Esther begins by telling us that Xerxes was King from India, all the way to Ethiopia. Over 127 provinces. And when you are trying to take over the world... yes, you use military force when necessary... but the goal is not to kill everyone everywhere else, the goal is to CONVERT everyone, everywhere else.

The more people who call you King, the more powerful you are.

So these extravagant parties were meant to be a demonstration of what life under the reign of Xerxes is like. It is not oppression, it is life and fun and drinking.

That was one thing that made the Persian empire different from some of the other empires, was they wanted people to “feel” free - even if they weren’t free. So, for instance, when it came to what gods you worshipped... it was okay to keep worshipping your god as long as you understood that your god is not the only god but one of many. (pg. 10, Cosper, Faith...)

you were NOT allowed to worship your god as THE ONE TRUE GOD or the one and only God... which of course is exactly the path that our culture has been going down for a while now. YOU DO YOU... but don’t you dare think that you are right and someone else is wrong... don’t you dare think that you have some how stumbled on to “truth” because truth is in the eye of the beholder and just because it is true for you does not mean that it is true for me.

That is our world. And essentially, that was Esther’s world as well.

Now, To conclude the party, the King threw a feast that would last seven days...

and during this final period of the longest party ever thrown... when the King's heart was "merry with wine" as the Bible describes it (1:10) - the King calls for his wife to come to the party, and to be the entertainment for his guests. The King asks for her to come. And we really don't know exactly what this means, a lot of people believe he was telling her to come and dance... the Bible does say that she was lovely to look at (1:11) so there is speculation of just how much looking, or displaying was expected here.

At any rate, the Queen decided that she was not willing to be the object of her husbands drunken attempt to entertain his friends... so she simply says "no."

"I won't do it." I won't be your entertainment.

"I won't go."

And the King is humiliated. We are talking about a guy who reigned over 127 Provinces. He was King over everything from India, all the way to Ethiopia... and to be told "no" at a moment where all of his friends were watching... it was displeasing to him.

And this is what happens:

all of the men approach the King, and they are like "dude... you need to get a handle on your wife. She is the Queen, and is setting the example for all of the women in the land. And if you let her get away with telling YOU NO... then every woman in every household will think that it is okay to tell their husbands NO.

It is very obvious from a simple reading that this was a society in which men lorded over women, and yet we will find that it is a woman who God ends up using to bring justice to the land and some order to its corrupt government.

So, in order to set an example to the women across the land that you don't say "no" to the men... that you live in submission to them... the King divorced his wife and said "we will find a new queen."

I wish I had more time to dig into this... just like with Ruth, trying to do it in a cliff notes style definitely makes me want to do a whole series on it at some point...

but what happens next is also absolutely disgusting. There is a contest among the virgins in the land. Please make note of this. Please don't miss this. The culture that they were living in during this exile was just like this.

They gather all of the virgins, and they prepare them for one night with the King... and whichever of these girls pleases the King most is the one who wins the contest and is made Queen.

and notice this... in an effort to elevate her position... Esther joins the competition. In fact, her older cousin Mordecai actually encourages her to!

This is, right here, the first place that we see clear as day that:

you begin to become that which you connect yourself to the most.

Esther was Jewish, and the Jews had very strict laws about sexuality and marriage... yet as slaves in Persia for so long, it became very easy to take part in whatever the currency of that Kingdom is, in order to stay ahead in that Kingdom.

This move, which I will say at the beginning THAT GOD DID USE... God did use Esther through this... but there is something fundamentally wrong with a child of God giving herself to a worldly system in order to gain influence in that system.

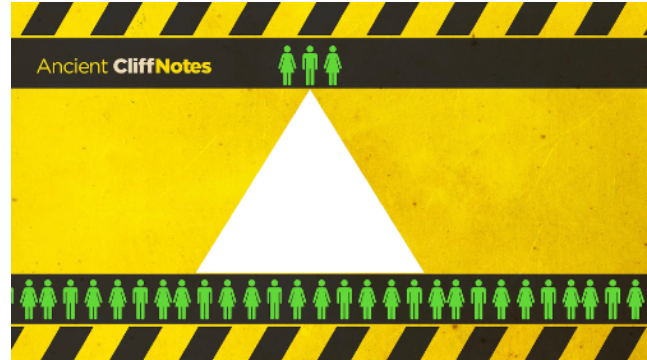
The way of Jesus is upside down and counter cultural...

It is OPPOSITE OF THE WAY OF THE WORLD. In THIS world, research will tell you, as much as we want to resist this, that CHANGE TAKES PLACE from the top, down. It takes place when the people in powerful

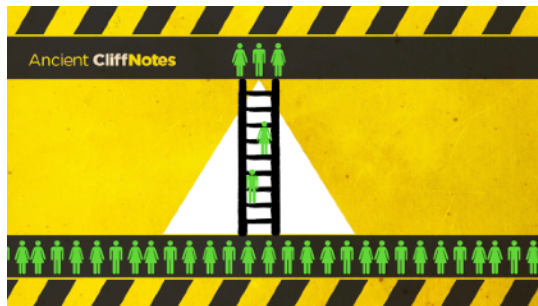
positions, like the one Esther was seeking here... when those people want change, it changes.

But that is NOT THE WAY OF JESUS.

Listen... this is more obvious than ever right now, and its why I get so frustrated when Christians put an over-emphasis on politics... The world systems ARE CHANGED BY THE PEOPLE IN POWER.



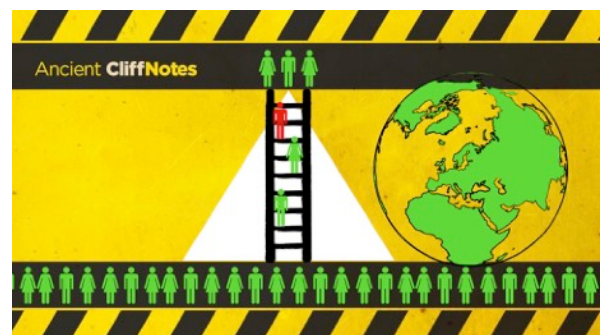
And because of that, Christians think that they will help usher in the Kingdom of God by positioning the right people in places of power. And it makes sense, logically... but its not the Biblical model for how the world will ultimately be won.



The idea is simple... you go into politics or any other arena of influence, so you can work your way to a top position and from there you can enact the change that you have always believed in...

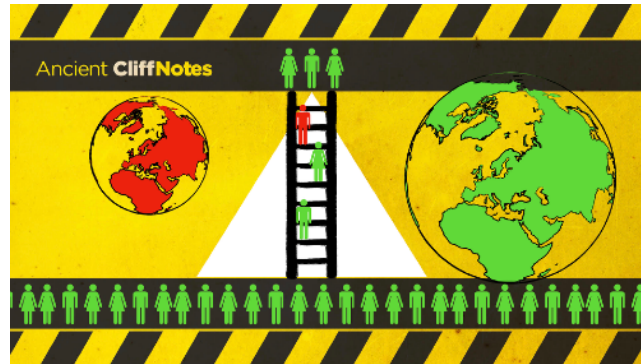
“you climb the ladder”

BUT THAT IS NOT THE WAY OF JESUS, AND IT IS NOT THE WAY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD. Jesus could have come as a lion, instead He came as a lamb to be slaughtered. He could have called down 12 legions of angels to rescue Him (Matthew 26:53), and instead He let an oppressive government MURDER HIM.



When Pilate asked Jesus if he was a King, essentially questioning whether Jesus was or was not a threat to the Roman government, Jesus said MY KINGDOM IS OF NOT FROM THIS WORLD... (John 18:33-38)

which we usually view as something like this:

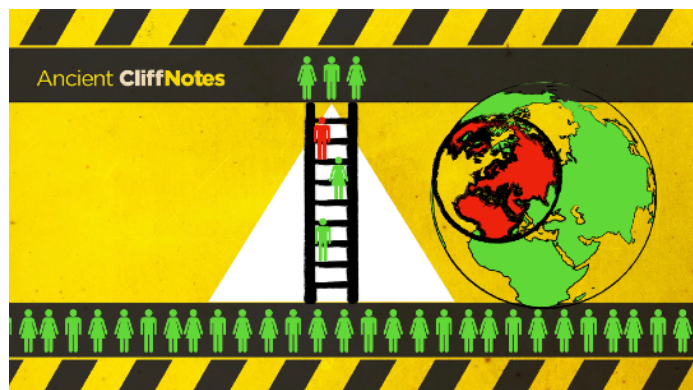


totally off in outer space somewhere... God is there, the world is here... someday we get to GO THERE... but until then we have to just sort of HIDE OUT HERE.

Which obviously is not the Gospel.

but you would get a little closer if you think of it this way... think of what Jesus said as something more like this:

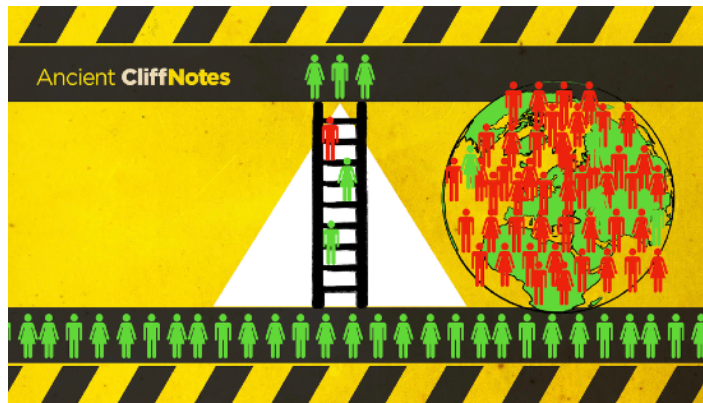
I am not trying to take over this world's system... I AM INSTITUTING ANOTHER ONE, right in the MIDDLE OF THIS ONE!!!



So then we view it like this:

and this is closer... But even this wrong... even this is a world sheltered off to itself that is ALIVE AND HEALTHY... in the midst of a dying world.

I would say that the Kingdom of Heaven on this earth actually looks more like this:(and I am going somewhere with all of this bad clip art)



This is what made the “dispersion” so powerful (even though MANY GOT IT WRONG). When Persia let Israel go wherever they wanted to go, suddenly God’s people began to spread out to different cities and even different countries. And we think that things like the ten commandments are so awful, like we talked about two weeks ago... but they weren’t.

The covenant that they had with God caused them to stand out in a world that did things VERY DIFFERENTLY THAN THEY DID.

When it became about Jesus it was even more powerful...

like when the government spoke of the Apostles as being men who had turned the world upside down... They lived amongst the people and demonstrated a better way... and it was attractive that so obviously genuine that it turned the world upside down... but this is what was said about them: they are confessing Jesus, a different King than Caesar... but what people failed to understand is He was a King of a DIFFERENT PLACE THAN CAESAR.

You don’t bring down Caesar by becoming Caesar. You don’t change the world by becoming the world.

because the world systems NEVER LAST.

Babylon took Israel captive, into Exile, until Persia brought down Babylon.

Rome built the greatest empire the world had ever seen, and even killed Jesus in the process... but they fell.

And when they reigned, and were controlling people through violence and killing people who confessed anyone other than Caesar as Lord, we get Jesus coming on the scene saying things like “the meek shall inherit the earth.”

not the ones who fight their way to the top.

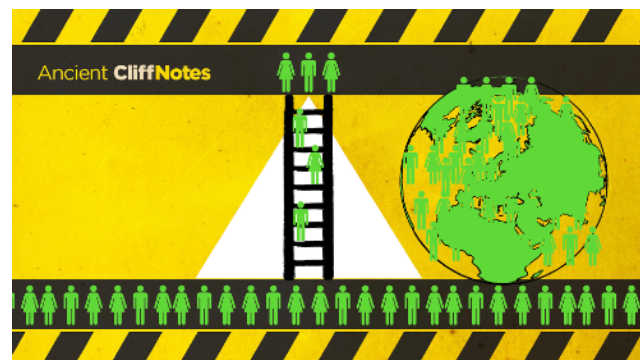
Everything about the Gospel is UPSIDE DOWN.

when God puts His hand on something, or someone... there is no culture, no King, not even an Empire that can stand in His way! You only have to look to world history to see that... that somehow even today, the Jews are still standing because God put His hand on them... yet all of the Empires that oppressed them are gone, most of them completely EXTINCT today!!!

Because God is simply BIGGER.

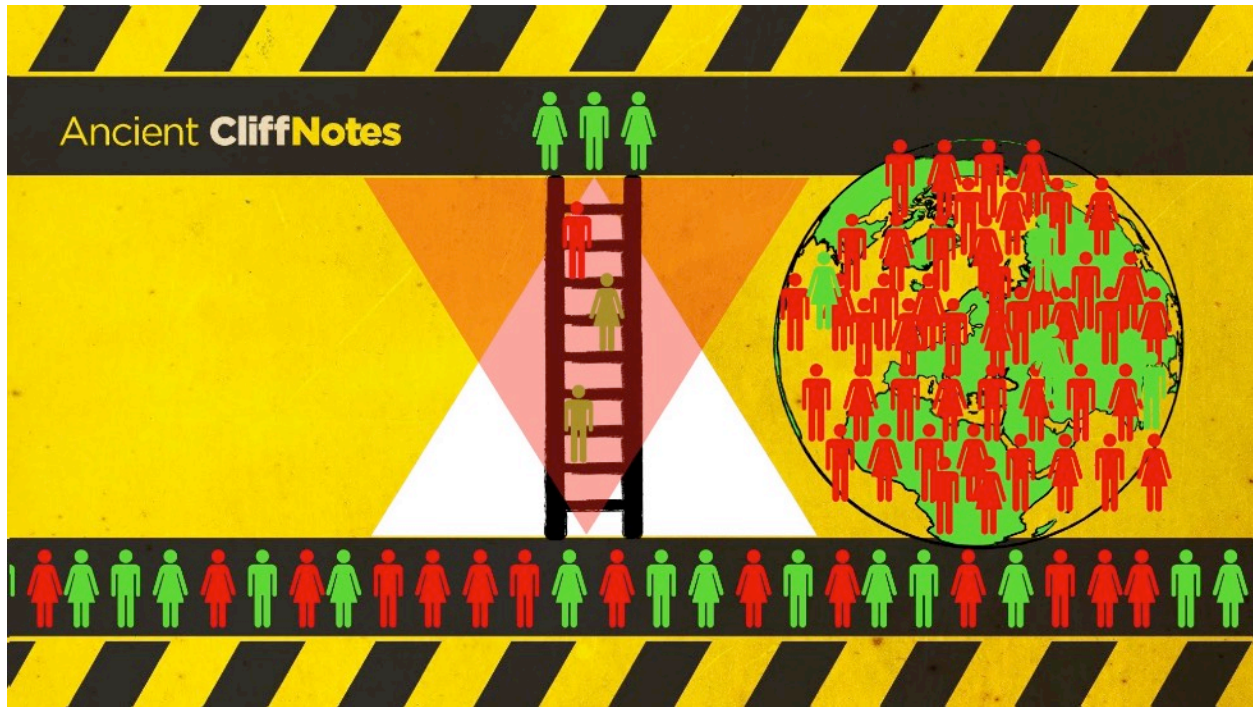
Yet human nature is not to trust God, it is to try and do it our own way... which, when we act on that, it leaves us looking no different from the world,

and not doing any good in the world.



So yes, it makes sense that Esther would play the King’s game in order to gain the influence that could come from it, because she had been assimilated into that way of life and bought into the lie that if she was going to be anyone, she had to do what she had to do to climb this ladder... but just because it positioned her for something powerful AND JUST BECAUSE God used it, does not make it right.

And in the tense political climate that we have been in over the last several years, and even with everything that has taken place this week... I want to remind you all that the world system is not overthrown the way that we often wish that would be... but the world's system IS NOT THE FINAL WORD, NOR IS IT OUR JOB TO CHANGE THE WHOLE THING.



Jesus did not overthrow Rome... Jesus comforted the people who were being oppressed by Rome. He stood up for them, and He called them blessed. And He showed us that another Kingdom exists RIGHT HERE IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS ONE, and in THIS KINGDOM... and its a place of safety, where everyone is welcome... where the poor are blessed, where the meek get the earth... where mercy circles back on you... its a place of safety when the world persecutes you because of Jesus...

The churches job in a world that is totally broken, is to be a Kingdom right in the midst of this broken one, that IS LOVE, and that meets people where they are and that teaches them that even if the world has counted them as lost, that Jesus still Loves them enough to die for them.

The churches job in a world that is totally broken is to be a place that is not.

It is our job to show people what Jesus is like.

We won't win THE CULTURE WAR. That doesn't mean we won't help shape culture... but ultimately the church will and will always be A COUNTER CULTURE.

and the more we think that its our job to change the culture of the whole world, the more we will become like that culture.

Thats what happens in our story.

So Mordecai tells her to join the contest...

But he tells her to NOT TELL ANYONE THAT SHE IS JEWISH.

And the preparation for this one night is an entire year. She has one year to prepare herself for this one moment. And yes, this is what you think it is... so we are talking about a bunch of virgin girls (some scholars say as many as 1,000 of them!) all being prepped for the moment where *that* will be taken away from them, not by someone who they love... not by someone who will commit to be by their side through thick and thin, until death due us part...

but who will have a pleasurable night, and then eventually make a choice of which ONE of all of these girls he wants to replace his previous wife with... and you remember what little it took for her to get the boot?

But the Bible says that Esther won favor with everyone, everywhere that she went.

and to make a long, disturbing story short... Esther wins the contest. They put a crown on her head, she becomes Queen.

So... now that Esther is Queen and has an ear to the King, something very interesting happens. A couple of the Kings Eunuchs became angry at the King... I wonder what a Eunuch would possibly have to get angry about?

But they got mad, and they developed a plan to attack the King. And Mordecai heard about this plan, and he told it to Esther... and when they

investigated it it turned out to be true. So the two Eunuchs were put to death, and Mordecai saved the King.

It was recorded in the book of chronicles in the presence of the King, but King Xerxes soon forgot about it.

Not long after that, King Xerxes promotes a man named Haman the Agagite to be his right hand man. Now, when the writer of Esther refers to "Haman" - he typically does the same thing that the writer of Ruth does when they keep saying "Ruth the Moabite" - in Esther we are getting a clear picture that this guy Haman is an Agagite.

And Haman LOVES power. And one day he comes out to the Kings gate, and everyone was bowing down to him. The King had commanded them to do that, but the Bible says that Mordecai, who was at the gate as well... DID NOT BOW.

Day after day this continued. Mordecai would not bow. So the kings servants told Haman that Mordecai wasn't bowing... and they told him why he wasn't bowing... Mordecai said that he would not bow because HE IS JEWISH.

Watch what happens. Haman is really mad. Esther 3:5, 6

"when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury. But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus (Xerxes)."

So Haman is so mad about this one Jewish guy who won't bow down to him, that he decides "I am going to make this dude's entire race pay for what he did. I am going to destroy all of the Jews."

well, like we said earlier... history, even to this day will tell you, that it never goes well for you when you determine that you are going to destroy all of the Jews. But like in most stories, it has to get worse before it gets better...

So Haman the Agagite approaches the King, and rather than focus on Mordecai, he paints this picture of a “specific people group” who does not follow the laws of the King... who live their own way in the land... and in a way that plays off of the King’s ego, Haman tells Xerxes that as King, Xerxes should not tolerate that. So Haman proposes an absolutely absurd plan that says that on the 13th day of the 12th month, all of Jews... men, women, children... were all to be annihilated. The King gives Haman his signet ring, and its signed into an irreversible law that on the 13th of the 12th month (typically March for Jews, obviously we would think December), everyone was to annihilate the Jews.

I want to read to you one verse in particular that really stuck out to me as I was reading through this this week, its 3:15... the decree had already gone out to the land, and it says:

“the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was thrown into confusion.”

At the top, the oppressors were enjoying themselves, while the world that they oversaw was thrown into a state of confusion. And it doesn’t just say the Jews were confused... it says the whole city. People did not understand why all of the sudden they would be told to kill their neighbors... some certainly rejoiced, but there was a sense in the air of “this *is not right*.”

Listen, It is okay, normal, *understandable*, and quite frankly obligatory to not just go along with whatever you are told to do, no matter who is telling you.

We resist what is evil!

There will be times when you have to stand up to the empire if you are going to stand by the marginalized, and there will come a time when you will have to draw a line in the sand and determine who your allegiance truly is with.

Jesus tells us that He is SENDING US OUT as sheep in the midst of wolves (Matthew 10:16). But the temptation will be to align ourselves WITH THE WOLVES in order to not be eaten by them.

That has always been the temptation.

So the King and Haman are drinking while the whole city is in confusion, but by this time, Esther is Queen of Persia... and she is also happens to be a Jew. But nobody knows that she is a Jew, because her cousin Mordecai told her not to tell anyone that she is a Jew. Including her husband who just agreed to kill all the Jews.

So Mordecai hears the news, and sends word to Esther and tells her “Esther... you are queen. You have been put in a position to save our people from destruction because you have the ear of your husband, the King. Do something. Say something.

But here is where it gets a little complicated. Esther replies by sending word to Mordecai reminding him that if ANYONE approaches the King without being invited, which, Esther had not been invited... then that person would immediately be put to death, UNLESS when the King sees that person he extends his golden scepter to them.

She explains that the King has not asked to see her in over 30 days, and just by approaching him to talk about this could get her killed.

And it is at that, that we finally get to what is without a doubt the most famous moment in the book of Esther. Esther already laid out the reasons why she can't do what her cousin is asking her to do... and here Mordecai pulls out all the stops, and gives her a motivational speech that we all imagine taking place at the very least during a face to face conversation, but the Bible actually says that its all being done by correspondence, it says that Mordecai tells them to respond to Esther saying: (Esther 4:13-14)

“Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

He says “you were put in this position for a reason, and its not to be pampered and live in a palace while all your people are slaughtered. You too are Jewish, and you won’t be able to hide that forever.”

So Esther agrees. And she says the most spiritual thing in the entire book... she says “call a fast! I and my young woman here will also fast, and then I will go to the King.”

and if I perish, I perish. (4:16)

It is here and only here that a character truly reflects the heart of Christ and the type of life that we are in fact called to model here on earth. One that is willing to lose everything for the sake of the people we love. Jesus says that no greater love have we than this, that we would lay down our life for our friends. (John 15:13)

And Esther, at the very least, now recognizes that she in fact has come to the Kingdom for such a time as this, and in order to attempt to save the people, she has to be willing to lose her own life, should the King not want to see her.

Moving quickly through this... Esther approaches the King, and the King EXTENDS the golden scepter... he asks Esther what her request is, and he even says to her “I will grant you anything, even up to half of my kingdom!”

and this is what she does. She says “I want to have a banquet with you and Haman, TODAY. It is already prepared and waiting for us (5:4)

So they call for Haman, and the three of them sit down and are eating and drinking and having a great time, and again the King asks Esther “what do you want? I will give it to you, no matter what it is, even up to half of my Kingdom.”

so Esther asks for ANOTHER BANQUET.

Which is strange. It seems like she could have settled this thing right then and there, but instead she said “can we have another banquet, just the three of us, tomorrow?”

The King grants the request, and they all go home.

Now, the focus then shifts to Haman the Agagite... who goes home, and the Bible says that as he is leaving he is joyful, his heart is glad... he is feeling powerful... but then he passes by Mordecai... and JUST AT SEEING Mordecai, he becomes angry and is reminded of how much Mordecai has disrespected him.

So Haman is at home, and sharing with his family about the day, and how great the feast was, and talking about how powerful he is... But watch what he says: (5:12-13)

“Even Queen Esther let no one but me come with the king to the feast she prepared. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king. Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.”

Everything is worthless as long as I have this thorn in my side!

and this is what his family tells him to do... they say “build a gallows, 50 cubits high, and in the morning tell the King to hang Mordecai on it.

Then go to the feast and you will be able to go joyfully because you won’t have anyone disrespect your authority again...” So Haman HAD THE GALLOWS MADE that night.

Which leads us to a complication... because Esther, the niece of Mordecai who was RAISED by Mordecai... who is ultimately a messenger on behalf of Mordecai to save the Jews... HAD THE KING’S EAR THAT DAY and did not say a thing. instead, she asked for another banquet the next day... and now Haman is planning on KILLING MORDECAI BEFORE THE BANQUET.

So for Mordecai, death was now imminent, and for all the rest of the Jews, it was coming soon, all at the hand of this Agagite.

Now, if you turn your Bibles back to 1 Samuel 15, there was a battle between Israel and the Amalekites. And in another one of those passages that is a lot to explain, and we won't even try today... the Bible tells us that Saul is told by God to not spare anybody in this battle, and to not take anything but to destroy it all. But of course, Saul was horrible at listening, and he and his people actually SPARED the King of the Amalekites, and took for themselves some of their goods, the best sheep, the fattened calves... basically anything that was good.

So, Saul, KING OF ISRAEL... disobeyed God.

And do you know the name of the King who was spared?

King Agag.

A sole survivor who, before eventually being killed, was able to continue his family line and now, several generations later, we have Haman, the AGAGITE... threatening EXTINCTION TO ALL OF THE JEWS... The descendants of Saul.

Saul didn't do what he was supposed to... now all of his people are about to be killed.

Genocide awaited everyone on The 13th, and imminent death by way of gallows awaited Mordecai because NOBODY DID WHAT GOD TOLD THEM TO DO.

and this is where God, who is never mentioned in the entire book... HAS TO show up.

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King Xerxes that night can't sleep. He doesn't know why, something is just keeping him awake.

And so he gives orders to bring out the book of memorable deeds, and he has his servants read them to him. And in hearing of the deeds, they got to the one about the two angry Eunuchs who plotted against the King, and this guy Mordecai who saved the king's life by revealing the plot.

And the King asked "what have we done for that guy? To honor what he did?"

and they told him... nothing. we did nothing.

And the King asks, "who is in the court right now? someone who can do something?" - and just then, Haman walks in, prepared to ask the King permission to hang Mordecai on the gallows. But before he could ask his question, the King had a question for Haman:

the king asks Haman:

"what should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?"

and Haman is sitting there, thinking to himself... "who would the King be more delighted in than me? He has to be talking about me!" and so he gets all stoked and wide eyed and he says: (6:7-9)

"For the man whom the king delights to honor, let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and the horse that the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown is set. And let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials. Let them dress the man whom the king delights to honor, and let them lead him on the horse through the square of the city, proclaiming before him: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.'"

Haman thought that he was building his throne, but really he was digging his grave.

Verse 10

“Then the king said to Haman, “Hurry; take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king’s gate.
Leave out nothing that you have mentioned.”

So Haman goes, and he takes the robes and the horse and he dresses up Mordecai and he marched him around the city shouting “thus it shall be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.”

and when he had finished, he went home in a panic. And he told his family what had happened, and his family basically told you “you lost. you will not overcome him.”

and while he was still talking to his family, the Kings Eunuchs came to pick up Haman and bring him to the banquet. A banquet he was not so excited to attend at this point.

And the King asked again during the second feast... “Esther, what do you want? It is yours, up to half of my Kingdom”

and she lays it all out: (7:3-6)

Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request. For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have been silent, for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king.” Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?” And Esther said, “A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!” Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

And one of the Kings servants tells the King: “there are gallows in Hamans yard, 50 Cubits high that he built in order to hang Mordecai (the guy who saved the King) on.” and the King responded:

“Hang him on that.”

and Haman the Agagite was hung on the very gallows that he had built to hang Mordecai.

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The story concludes this way. Esther again asks the King for help, asking that he revoke the command that Haman the Agagite set into motion that everyone was to slaughter the Jews on the 13th day of the 12th month... and the King tells her, "it is impossible to revoke an order sealed with the Kings ring" - so what he does is he GIVES ESTHER THE RING.

and they issue a new decree, saying that if anyone does go after the Jews that day, though they are within the law to do so, the Jews are now also within the law to defend themselves, to fight back... and so when the day came, and the people who hated the Jews rose up overtake the Jews, the bible says that "the reverse occurred" - The Jews gained mastery over the those who hated them, and they defeated their enemies.

The book ends the same way that it starts... with a giant party. They inaugurated something called "The Feast of Purim" to remember what happened here...

it is still celebrated today... as a reminder that God is bigger than our biggest adversary... that if God is for us, who can be against us... The Jews overcame the Persian empire and are the ones who are still standing today, because when God says that He is going to do something... He will do it.

and finally, Mordecai is promoted, next to Xerxes... the right hand man, in the place of Haman.

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Now, you may wonder, why did we read a passage from a letter that the Apostle Paul sent to his apprentice Timothy, before learning about Esther?

Paul warns that times are going to get more and more difficult.

People will care about all the wrong things, try to make changes in all the wrong ways... people will be brutal toward one another to get what they want... They will even LOOK TO BE GODLY SOMETIMES... but they will deny the power... and I read that line differently this week... I of course believe that people will deny the power of the Holy Spirit... I believe that... but I was convicted in a different way when I read this on Friday... and it reframed some of this for me a bit.

See, when we claim that we love Jesus... that we are Christians... that Jesus is LORD... we have a form of godliness as some translations put that... and I always read that categorically... like... one part of our life is godly, not others still need some work. But the translation we read did a much better job when it said an “appearance”

because the Greek word there “*morphōsis*” - an even better translation would be a “semblance” as in... on the outside it looks like *we believe this*, BUT REALITY TELLS US SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

We certainly portray a “picture” of godliness.

No matter what we CLAIM WITH OUR LIPS... when we live our lives as if the change we are believing for is going to come from any place other than the way that the Gospel describes it... WE ARE DENYING ITS POWER. Power is the Greek word “*dynamis*” (dune-a-miss) and “power” is a great translation or you could also say it like this:

you deny its ability...

You deny, by the way that you live your life... that you actually believe that God has the ability to do what he promised He would do... that he needs us to conform and put our trust in a system that He is not a part of...

He can still work through it... he obviously did in Esther... but it is not His system. The way of Jesus... the way that truly turned the world on its head DID IT BECAUSE IT DIDN'T MAKE SENSE... yet it had POWER.

In these days people will slander us, they will be unholy... they will BE HEARTLESS... its all in there! 2 Timothy 3:3... PEOPLE WILL BE HEARTLESS.

Like... “do you even care an ounce about anyone?”

That is the world that Paul warns Timothy of and that is the world we are living in today.

and we can fall victim to being on the wrong side of Paul’s warning, if we live our lives SUBTLY denying that God is more powerful than the systems that seem to be making all the decisions.

Ultimately, the story of Esther is a story of a God who is bigger than the systems.

it is a story about how God is moving even when He sometimes seems silent...

Its a story about how God can take all of the broken pieces of your life that you have let define you and you have let drag you down and rob you of your purpose... Esther teaches us that God can breathe so much life into your mistakes that it literally LEADS YOU TO YOUR PURPOSE.

He is NOT beyond doing that.

God in this story, took a mistake, and truly did turn it into a “such a time as this” moment for a girl who lied her way to the top.

See, here is the problem with the way that we read the Bible as if all of the characters that God seems to bless are hero’s... If we set them up on that pedestal, they become out of our reach... and it can be very easy to in our own lives conclude that the things that we have done mean that God can NOT use us anymore... because we read stories like Esther and we think that she did follow God’s every step... but she didn’t.

Esther didn’t follow the plan that God dreamed for her life... Esther made her own way and God had to clean it up.

Esther slept with the King for a chance to be Queen.

Esther lied about who she was, Esther played the world's system...

and by us, only focusing on the way that she saved the Jews, she becomes an idol. Someone we can look up to, thinking that she achieved some sort of glory that we NEVER EVER WILL... but the story of Esther is not that she did something right.

Its that she did a whole lot wrong, and God STILL SHOWED UP. And never gave up on her... and through that, ESTHER GREW. She got better... She took a stand.... she put herself in the gap between the oppressor and the marginalized.

and God moved in a mighty way.

But the story is not about a girl who rose to power and eventually saved God's people.

The story is about a God who NEVER GAVE UP ON HIS PEOPLE. God promised Abraham that from His seed he would build a great nation. God promised that from the line of David would come the Messiah. And God was not about to let some tyrannical power hungry leader wipe out all of His people and destroy all of his plans.

The hero in this story is God. The POWER in this story is GOD.

That he would meet these broken people right where they are, and work through the disaster of a world that they created for themselves...

That without even be asked, he still stepped in and blessed people and kept his promises.

And the hero in your story is God.

and I am telling you... He will do it for you too. No matter what you brought into this place today that makes you feel dirty... you can leave it clean... Because Jesus took it all with Him to the cross... and He died for you.