

Esther 2:1-18 God, the Only Anchor in a Shifting World

Exegetical Big Idea: The LORD is sovereign over all circumstances for the purpose of accomplishing his plans.

Homiletical Big Idea: **God is the anchor for his people in a crazy world**

Fallen Condition Focus: Christians in North America live in a land of “exile” with fluid morality and ungodly leaders. Without a solid anchor for belief and life, the Christian can find themselves drifting away from God along with the culture.

Background:

One of the most obvious things as you read through the book of Esther is of course, and I’ve mentioned this many times, is that God is nowhere mentioned in the book. This is a significant thing that I keep bringing up because it really does affect the way we look at the events of Esther. There is no condemnation of any characters actions, nor is there any praise given to anyone’s actions. This leads us to be very careful when making anybody in the book of Esther a moral hero. In fact as we’ll see today I think Mordecai and Esther make some immoral decisions themselves.

The fact that God is not mentioned could reflect the thinking that perhaps God is not the God of Jews who chose to stay behind in Persia rather than return to the promised land. Mordecai and Esther were among some of the Jews who decided not to return when Cyrus had decrees that the Jews were allowed to return to their land.

Or it could be a reflection of how the Jewish characters, when you take a close look at what they do and say, how they have drifted from their Israelite religious heritage.

Nonetheless, the name of this series is “The God who is there”. Because we know obviously that God absolutely is there behind all that is going on, we just have a hard time seeing or hearing him.

Remember the overarching theme of this book is to show the sovereignty of God over all things even when he doesn’t seem to be there. That’s why this series is called “The God who is There”. Chapter after chapter we see over and over again the point that God is at work in all the details going on. He’s in the details in chapter 1 where not even is God not mentioned, but no Israelite is even mentioned! He’s in the details in the chapter today in the setup of a great deliverance for his people. God’s in the details even in the seemingly hopeless situation of the Jews facing genocide with no way out.

And that brings us to the second big theme of the book. If the first big theme is *how* God is sovereign over all things, the second theme is *why* God is sovereign over all things. We’re going to see that God is sovereign over all things because of who he is: he is a promise-keeping, grace-giving, supremely glorious God. The most important thing about our chapter today is the fact that God’s plans and his sovereignty and his covenant never ever waiver, even when everything else is going crazy. I think what we can learn from this chapter today is that:

God is the anchor for his people in a crazy world

Pray:

Intro:

I recently put up a fence around my yard so that the kids could play outside without running away or onto the road. The most important part about the fence is the posts. Among other things, they have to go deep enough into the ground to be anchored enough to hold the rest of the fence up.

See what will happen if you don't go deep enough or don't anchor them properly, is that at first everything will seem fine, but as soon as winter hits and the ground freezes, the frozen ground will actually lift the posts up little by little. This of course makes them both crooked but also weak. Well we had a pretty good storm a few weeks back, and all it takes is a good storm and you'll have no fence.

Christians need an anchor for the soul. Sure, when things seem to be going pretty good and there is no pressure on the church, you don't see the need for a deep anchor. But sooner or later, the cold winter comes, it's not culturally popular to be a Christian, or society deems Christian morality as outdated or outright oppressive, and if you are not deeply rooted in your faith, you'll start to get wobbly. And sooner or later some storm will hit and the results are devastating. Now I am all on board with the doctrine of perseverance of the saints. Those whom God predestined he called, those he called he justified, and those he justified he glorified. But we are nonetheless warned over and over again in Scripture to constantly be seeking after the Lord.

In many ways we not so different than Mordecai and Esther.

We're in a land not our home, we're orphans, under pagan rule, we often lose our way, we often fail in being obedient, the odds are often against God's people, we can't control really any aspect of life. And therefore, we need to hope in someone other than ourselves. We need to hope in the God who knows the beginning from the end because he is the author of all of history. When our eyes can't see God, we need hearts to trust him. To make matters more complicated, we live in a crazy world don't we? I mean, just think about 2020 by itself and you have to come to the conclusion that things are crazy. Not to mention, like Mordecai and Esther, we live in a world that is not our own. We live a world, especially in our culture that is very quickly running in the opposite direction to what is good for us, our culture is very quickly running in the opposite direction from God. And God's people live in this world. Our situation is strikingly similar to that of Esther's if we think about it. We see throughout Esther and we know our need today is to remain faithful to God and his commands in these crazy times.

God is the anchor for his people in a crazy world

2:1-4

God is our anchor because of his unchanging nature.

The king is being manipulated by those closest to him. In these first 4 verses, we really see the weakness of this majestic and powerful king. In chapter 1 he starts off seemingly without flaw, and then he throws a temper tantrum when he doesn't get what he wants, and now in just 4 verses we see him display changing emotions, regret past decisions, having a sense of lack, a weakness for manipulation, lustful pride, and actions that are just simply motivated by pleasure.

The weakness of king Xerxes and his need to satisfy his own desires at the detriment of all others gives us a stark contrast to the true Sovereign.

What a crazy world Persia would have been! You have no idea from one day to the next what your king is going to do. One day he's throwing a party, and the next he's rounding up all the young women in the kingdom for his own beauty contest. What a stark reminder than in a world with crazy rulers who can't make up their minds, our God does not change.

God is neither changed from the inside by a change in desire or emotion, nor is any force able to act upon him to get him to change. God is immutable. God doesn't change. When God made his covenant promise to Abraham in Gen 15, it was established for eternity.

God does not change, either by anything in him, like changing his mind, or by anything outside of him, like someone persuading him threatening him. That's good news.

[We had a swing set when I was a kid. You know,

How comforting it is to know that the Sovereign over all things does not change. Think about what that means for his people. The grace and mercy that he showed to us in Christ Jesus, neither fades nor diminishes in any capacity whatsoever.

His promise, his faithfulness, his presence, his forgiveness, his justice, his power. All these attributes of God never ever change. The God of Esther is the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob. He's our God today. In this crazy world God's people to anchor in the hope that God will never change.

God is the anchor for his people in a crazy world

2:5-11 God is our Anchor because he has given his people a unique identity.

Take a look at these verse, you'll see a theme here about Mordecai's and Esther's identities.

V. 5 – Mordecai is a Benjaminite, descendant of Saul.

V. 7 – Esther (Hadassah) is also from the family of Saul.

Why does the author bother to link them with historical Jewish lineage? After all, these Jews did not return to the Promised Land, so their bloodline are not important like they would be in Ezra and Nehemiah when determining who can settle where and who can join in temple worship.

I think what we see here is that wherever they are, God has given his people an identity that they belong to him. Mordecai and Esther are first and foremost people of YHWH. As such, they are expected to live like people of YHWH. Paul reminds us in Romans of the special nature of God's people and how they are the apple of God's eye. Theirs is the adoption as sons and daughter out of every other nation on the planet, theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship, and the promises. True, some of these things are put on hold because of Israel's rebellion against God and his punishment by exile but they are still God's people.

But Mordecai and Esther betray their citizenship.

V. 8-9 – Esther gives in to the cultural pressure and eats the food unlike Daniel

V. 10-11 – Mordecai forbids Esther from revealing her nationality.

Esther isn't her first name by the way. We see here that her Jewish name is Hadassah. She takes on the Persian name Esther, which many commentators believe is a name that is in honour of one of the gods of Persia.

Can't help but feel bad, they are products of their captors, in much the same way that we are influenced by our culture. But while we can have sympathy for that, it's no excuse.

The problem here is that Mordecai and Esther are acting like cultural Jews, not believing Jews.

[I can't help but see a striking contrast to Daniel and his friends in Babylon. They of course were carried into exile by Babylon and put into the king's court. They of course were brought to be advisors to the king and given the royal treatment, complete with unclean foods and drink that they knew was against their God's laws. So what did they do? They refused it. They held to their identity as God's people and refused to compromise on who God had called them to be.]

The identity that God gives his people is not something that can be tacked on when it's convenient, but it needs to define who we are.

[Christ is not an app on a phone, but the operating system itself.]

God's people have a citizenship, and that citizenship is in heaven. We are to be in the world but not of it.

God's people have an identity. Our identity is in Christ. Christ defines us. Christ is not just a nice part of our lives that we can hopefully make co-exist with other parts that are deeply rebellious against God. If Christ is our identity as Christians. We live in a culture that says "believe what you want, as long as you don't say that your belief is true and other people's faith is false". Or "believe what you want, as long as you celebrate other people's beliefs". The problem with that of course is that Christianity is a truth claim that rejects other claims of truth.

Paul writes I have been crucified with Christ, I no longer live but Christ lives in me. His identity in Christ supersedes any other identity that he has. Our identity in Christ as fellow believers supersedes and trumps any other identity we have. Whether you are a Canadian or Australian, young or old, male or female, white or black, if you are a Christian, that is your primary identity.

Let us not consider our identity as Christians to be something to integrate with the rest of life, but let your faith in Christ be the foundation for how the rest of your life is lived.

God is the anchor for his people in a crazy world

2:8-14 **God is our Anchor because he has given us his morality, laid out in his Word.**

Part of having an identity as one of God's people is having a morality that reflects that.

Here the king thinks he can do as he pleases. He believes he can do as he wishes to please his own desires. So he develops this scheme to satisfy his desires, even though it destroys lives.

Now I understand the all-ages nature of our service today so I won't go into detail with what the king is doing, but we can easily see from reading this that he is being selfish and lustful without the slightest care for anyone else.

The morality of the king was whatever he wants it to be. He is not only disregarding God's intention for marriage, but the women, after attending to the king are then confined to the harem basically for the rest of their lives. He's effectively widowing a great number of women, and depriving men of the kingdom of wives.

Let's be honest and look at Esther and Mordecai as well. They are compromising what they should know as right in the light of cultural pressure and personal gain.

We live in an age that is not just asking the question of "what is right and what is wrong?" we live in an age that says "there is no such thing as right and wrong".

[ever heard the phrase "it's like nailing Jello to a wall"? Morality to the king, and in our world today, trying to find a common sense of morality is like trying to nail Jello a wall. You can't do it! It all just falls apart!]

Morality today apparently is whatever anyone wants it to be.

There is tremendous pressure today to jettison true Christian doctrine and morality to get in line with what the culture is demanding, but it's not worth it.

God has not left us without knowledge of himself and knowledge of what he desires. God has given us the Scriptures through which we gain knowledge of God and his holiness, and our sin and need for holiness. Here's the thing, Mordecai and Esther should honestly know better. I know they are children of the exile, but they nonetheless should know better.

To ignore true sin does nobody any help. It is not a loving this to ignore sin, or to call sin good.

Isaiah 5:20 says "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter"

The loving thing to do as God's people is to hold to the morality that God has laid out for us in his Word, both as an example of the joy that God's law brings, but also show the seriousness of sin. Sin is our great problem as humans, sin is what makes the world broken, and sin is what separates us from God. Why on earth would we call sin "good"!?

Sin is what put Christ on the cross! Sin is the reason Christ hung there taking the wrath of God upon himself.

A passage like this really spotlights the mercy of God doesn't it? How many times in my life have I chosen the path of sin rather than the path of righteousness, and instead of rightfully facing judgement for it, God had spared me and had mercy on me, and even turned my weakness into his strength for his glory.

If you're a Christian, you know this joy. If you're a Christian, anchor yourself in the morality of God, and hold out your life as an example to others of the joy of salvation in Jesus name and the hope of eternal life.

Where is your anchor? In whom or what do you put your trust? Your own desires? Your own imagination? Or do you put your trust in the Living God as revealed to us in Holy Scripture?

If you're not a Christian here today, I plead with you to put your trust in the Lord Jesus. Do not follow the ever-changing morality of this world, it will only lead to death. Trust in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and joyful follow Jesus according to his Word.

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2:15-18 God is our anchor because of his sovereignty

Though the odds are stacked against Mordecai and Esther, God doesn't leave anything up to chance.

It was 4 years of this beauty contest and he chose Esther out of all the other women. Any way you look at it, the odds of Esther becoming queen are slim to none. So she's beautiful, that's great, but so is every other woman that is brought to the palace. The king's idea of what beautiful is is who know what, and Esther brings nothing with her except what the attendant suggests. The odds are against her.

And yet, look what happens, Esther won the king's favour and becomes queen.

What happened? What can explain this? Nothing but that the sovereign God of the universe decreed it so for his glory and to bring about his purposes. Nothing can stop God's plans.

Now, again, she really should have refused the contest altogether, but God nonetheless uses the contest to place Esther in a position to save her people from extinction.

The odds are always stacked against God's people.

Think of the nation of Israel as it wanders the desert. Think of the world powers at the times of the exiles and how easy it would have been to just wipe Israel off the map.

Think of the times of persecution of the Church since the death and resurrection of Christ. From the persecution of Nero and other emperors, and from the Catholic Church in the medieval times. Think today of nations hostile to the Church like China and many countries in the Middle East. Think of the cultural shift even in our country and the danger coming from within the church or liberal theology and a version of Christianity that has lost all semblance of true Christianity.

[I love to tell my 3 year old "trust daddy". She's at the age where she realizes the world is not perfect and some things are scary and there are often times there will be something new or she'll be nervous about something and I like to hold her when those times come look at her in the eyes and say "trust daddy". I want to let her know that there are things that she can't control, and yes there are things that look scary but she can trust in her dad who can is strong enough to make sure it's going to be alright. Even more than wanting her to trust her dad, who can only control very little really, I want her to know she can trust her God, who holds all things together controls all things for his ultimate glory and the good of his people.]

We can trust our heavenly Father.

The deck is stacked against us and humanly speaking our odds of survival, let alone being effective in ministering the gospel to our world, are pretty slim. They're about the same as Esther finding favour in the eyes of Xerxes within a group of 4 years worth of other women.

But our God does not roll the dice. Our God is not concerned with chances and probabilities. Our God declares a promise and there is absolutely no revoking it. Unlike Xerxes, who declares something into law and then realizes the foolishness of it. Our God in his wisdom has ordained praise from every tongue that has ever been made, and he has ordained that every knee bow in worship, and by his sovereignty it will happen.

We can be assured church that when it seems that God has left or is busy somewhere else, he is intimately involved in every single process of your life.

And he is always at work in the lives of his people. This book full of irony. How is it that that 2 exiled Jews, one an orphan, condemned to be eradicated by a king's rash and irrevocable decree, and instead end up being queen and second in command, triumphed over their enemies that were bent on destroying them? How does that happen? The forces of evil will always be against God's people, but against all odds, God's people will not only survive, but will be more than conquerors through Christ, and will beyond any doubt reign victorious with him forever.

There is no doubt that we live in a crazy world, how are God's people ever to survive? The only answer is Christ.

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

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