

Esther

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[0 : 0 0] It's an interesting book Esther. You probably know it's the only book in the Bible that God isn't mentioned explicitly. But I think that's very important because it's a picture of life under God, even though God isn't mentioned explicitly. We see very clearly God's hand in this book. It's crystal clear. And it's an encouragement for us to act as Christians because he is acting as God, even though we can't see that. And this is a book that helps us in that respect because it's not explicitly God mentioning. It doesn't give us, and really it doesn't really give us the picture from God's point of view, which the Bible usually does. It kind of is giving us a picture, as it were, under the sun of lives of faith that are touched by God and that are under God and that are relying on God but unspoken. It's a very interesting concept. But yet we have in this book a reminder of the importance of acting for God, even when it seems impossible and also because God is sovereign and because

God is acting. So we've got that great paradox of Scripture which is absolutely true, that God is sovereign. We've been looking at that in Hebrews in the morning all the time. God is sovereign over all of life. But that doesn't mean that we're puppets and it doesn't mean we have no responsibility and it doesn't mean that we're not called to obedience. And that's really in many ways what Esther is about. It's written later on in the Old Testament history, probably about 100 years after the Jewish people who had been in the Promised Land but had turned to idolatry and were taken into captivity by the Babylonians. They were taken from their own country, ripped out of Jerusalem. They were taken into slavery and taken into captivity in Babylon. And then after about 70 years, and a lot of the minor prophets speak about this in the Old Testament, after about 70 years they began, well at least a remnant of them began to filter back in Nehemiah's time to rebuild their life in Jerusalem and Judea. But many of them didn't go back. There was a diaspora spread throughout the whole of Persia. A lot of Jewish people didn't go back home. They stayed where they'd been for maybe 70 or a couple of generations. They're like the Highland diaspora to the cities over the middle of last century. A lot of people moved from the islands and still do and settle in the central belt around England or throughout the world. And we see it all the time. Well that's what was happening here. And in this story Esther is a young Jewish girl and when we get to where we are, she's become the queen in this massive Persian empire under King

Erkseys. Now can I just briefly introduce that story? You're not going to go to sleep. It's a good story and it's an interesting story. But there's in the first kind of up to the first four chapters or so where we come to Esther becoming queen, there's at least three strands going on. It's like you know sometimes you watch a film and it jumps. There's one main theme but there's maybe three subplots going on. You go there's one main character but then there's a secondary character and he's got a subplot and then you move to a third character and there's something else happening there and it's all going to come together. Well there's kind of at least three strands in this early chapters of Esther. Esther very very quickly Esther's story is that she's an orphaned Jewish girl, her mother and father and no law living and she's been brought up by her uncle cousin type guy Mordecai. He's looked after her and he's become some kind of counselor or political person within King

Erksey's lawshed ruler, Theftim in the city and he's at various points quite significant in the story. But before all that happens this King in chapter one if you've got time to read it go home and read it. It's a great story. This King, King Erksey's is a hugely rich and powerful King, most powerful man in the world at the time and he wants to show all the surrounding vassal states and vassal leaders his wealth and his honor and have a big party and they have a tremendous kind of celebration and the most opulent kind of celebration you could imagine and it describes one or two of the things, it even describes that they've all, everyone who's there is given their own individual gold cup and they're given their individual kind of waiter to pour as much wine as they're used to. So you know you could go there and have a just some time at his party with the best of wine and being poured out just

exactly as you like it as often as you liked it. And as this party went on and King Erksey's was kind of maybe getting, maybe had a little bit too much to drink over that period, he wanted his queen to come in and he wanted her to be shown off to all the other political leaders, just come in Queen Vashdie he said and just parade in front of all these people because I want to show you off, you know kind of thing happened, it's happened in another story in the Bible not dissimilar to that in many ways but she refused and no chance. I'm not going to have all these drunken guys and showing off my beauty to them so he deposed her. I'm sorry you can't disobey the King, you're deposed, we don't hear of Vashdie ever again. And so he decides he wants another queen and he pulls together all the most beautiful women in the, really in the whole area and that includes Esther, beautiful young Jewish woman and as things go on it gets narrowed down and it gets narrowed down and narrowed down and Esther is chosen. Six months preparation for skin treatment, six months for dietary concerns so she comes to the King one year later as the new queen, she is chosen. This orphaned Jewish girl, she doesn't tell of her Jewish background, she doesn't, well we presume she doesn't say much about Mordecai either her cousin. That's one strand. There's another strand is one of the leaders in King Erzie's Parliament or government is a guy called Haman and Haman gets promoted at one point and it's such a promotion that the King's decree in command is that everyone should bow down when they see him. He was a second only to the King but Mordecai, remember the uncle, cousin, and look he would not at any point bow down to Haman and Haman hated him for that. Now there's a hint there of Mordecai's faith even though he was exiled even though he was part of the diaspora and he hadn't gone back to Jerusalem he knew that there was one living

God and he didn't worship and bow down to any human being let alone Haman. Maybe they were political rivals maybe there was something going on there that were not told a great deal but he was outraged that Mordecai wouldn't bow down. Found out that Mordecai was from the Jewish people so he went to the King and said to the King I want you to give me a decree so that I can annihilate the strange people with strange customs who live all throughout your kingdom get rid of all of them of whom Haman is one. He didn't just want rid of Haman he wanted rid of the whole lot every Jew ethnic cleansing by royal decree. That's the second strand in these early chapters that lead us up to chapter 4. The third is there's a spiritual strand going on. You remember from Genesis chapter 3 that God had promised from the seed of the woman the seed of Eve would come a savior who would crush the serpent's head and from that moment on the serpent Satan made every effort to destroy Eve's seed. God's people in the Old Testament whether it be in Egypt or whether it be through the Amalekites or whether it be through various ways that they would be destroyed and this was another attempt of Satan to destroy the people of God so there's different levels there's layers going on there and that brings us to the point where Esther as queen is challenged by her uncle Mordecai or uncle cousin Mordecai. I can never quite remember what it is in the story. To act and to use the position God has brought her to. You've come to the kingdom he says in this section you've come to the kingdom for such you know it's a famous text in the Bible who knows but you've come to royal position for such a time as this. The subtext is that you've been brought here this isn't happened by chance you can influence this situation God will use you you need to remember God has placed you here and that's the challenge that we come to in this story and there's a subtext of faith running through

[11 : 05] Esther and it's one for us that we can see with our knowledge of the rest of scripture one being that God is working through all of life circumstances. God is working to bring Esther to this place she maybe doesn't know it she maybe has no idea up to this point what's been happening there like maybe she just think hey I've got lucky here I'm just an orphan Jewish girl and now I'm the queen and I can do and I can say and I have whatever I want and maybe she didn't see God's hand in that but God is working to bring her to this position for a specific spiritual purpose even when Satan is working even in darkness even in evil even what Satan it seeks to do to destroy our lives we find that God is a purpose and God is sovereign and is responsible and sovereign over these things and we have a responsibility to act as believers in a obedient and in a wise way and he always has we can see here and always has a higher purpose through faith so we've got a situation which is a desperate human situation now God could have at any point come and zapped him in couldn't he he just got rid of him he chose not to because he recognizes that there's this mystery between God's sovereignty and our responsibility we are co-workers in the kingdom and Esther is an example of that she becomes a co-worker of God God's kingdom and God's kingdom progressing we are servants of living God in his kingdom and you may feel this evening that your

life is directionless as a Christian you may feel the events of the last week or the events of the last month or the last year appear to have absolutely no purpose and meaning they may be random to you you may feel old and unused or just a pretty face with no other gifts and talents you may feel unnoticed unloved and valued in the Christian community you feel your work is mundane your circumstances are inexplicable way on God your life is not is blessed by being a co-worker to develop and to grow God's kingdom it may sometimes not be clear but you have a responsibility and I have a responsibility to live by faith and to live by the truth and to live in obedience and see where that will take us we see that work in it we will see that as we quickly go through Esther because we see not just the becoming queen and what that means but then we see her face with this great faith challenge okay in this chapter that we are reading she is in this position of privilege and Mordecai says to her you have to act I think it's a great film love to watch is it a film Esther

I don't know it would be a great Hollywood film anyway Esther face the great challenge she's in a position of privilege and she's been asked to go into the king's presence now remember Queen Vashti said no to the king and she was deposed it wasn't a good thing you could just die for going into the king's presence it wasn't it wasn't like what it is for us today going into the queen or anyone's significance presence it was these are different and difficult days and she she recoils a little bit where Mordecai says look you've got to do this you've got to go and beg for your your people and beg for their lives and she says well look you know no one approaches the king if you do you get killed if you're not asked and even sometimes absolutely if you do get into his presence and he puts out the golden scepter you might get an opportunity to be heard but I've not been asked to go and see the king for 30 days she says it's not looking good and she kind of is a slightly reluctant understandably she hesitated but then Esther Mordecai comes back to her and says look do you think you're going to escape just because you're the queen do you think your people don't depend on you and that you have you have this position where you need to act or you will perish God's will will be done amazingly he says here but you have been brought to the kingdom and God is wanting to use you to do his work and that's a great challenge and we have Esther's beautiful response don't we that she tells the people to go and fast for three days again doesn't say she's going to fast and pray but we presume they didn't just fast for the sake of it they fasted for a spiritual reason and they fasted to find out God's will and to implore God and she asked all people to fast she says I will go to the king even though it's against the law and if I perish I perish that's her statement that's her testimony of obedience and of faith at this time Esther made the choice to put herself in God's hand to call the people and herself to prayer to stand up and be counted whatever the consequences she was going to stand up for the truth stand up for her people stand up for God's work among their her people and if she died if she perished she perished she believed she was in God's hands she obeyed whatever the circumstances and there's a there's kind of simple challenges for us in that also is there not that we have to recognize God is working in our lives that we are part of his kingdom and he wants to use us to further his kingdoms or might not be as dramatic as Esther but God has many crossroads for us and you might say there's one great crossroads in life do you obey or do you disobey but

I think probably every day there's crossroads of faith that we have to decide are we going to be Christians who recognize see with the eye of faith even though God isn't that visible just as he's not that visible in the story but with the eye of faith he is clearly visible are we going to look with the eye of faith and be challenged to make the right faith choices in our life every day follow God and leave the consequences to him sometimes we don't know what the consequences are sometimes it's very hard to do the right thing and again I'm not might not be like Esther it might just be in every day little things but we're asked in the kingdom to be used by God and to make the right decisions for God pray and do what's right as many times as a Christian we're reluctant to do the faith thing it might seem impossible like it seemed for Esther but are we going to stand up and be counted for Jesus Christ or are we going to just be interested in our own selves and our own security and safety there are many faith junctions and it's important that you pray for wisdom and then do what's right whatever it might be in your life now there are many maybe many people just now who are at a faith junction maybe it's starting university you've left home you're freed from the shackles of your oppressive Christian parents and you can you can let go and you can fly or you can follow Jesus Christ or it might be in your job that you're across roads of faith where you're being asked to compromise your faith or do what's right and leave the consequences to God although there might be fear and a sense of impossibility there it might be in your church life it might be in your marriage

it might be in many different ordinary things and God may be saying to you tonight who knows but you've come to the kingdom for such a time as this to serve him to witness for him to share your faith in a way that is standing up for his truth and for his honor and also think that even within the church context I think it's fair to say I think we're living in fairly unique days and you're part of this church and I want you to be part of this church but more importantly than that I think God wants you to be part of this church and for you to think that you've come to the kingdom for such a time as this and this church with this community of believers to serve Christ in this place to use your knowledge of the friends that you have and the contacts you make for his glory in this community that you've come to the kingdom to share your faith for these days and for this time are we going to be those who move forward in faith and do what's right tomorrow or we're going to shrink back and not be part of the kingdom work it's really a great picture of an ordinary person being used by God to further a kingdom's work God's kingdom work and we are privileged to be part of God's kingdom work and we're asked to play our role with all our uniqueness

and with all our talents and with all our time and with all our unique friendships to recognize that we have we have this spiritual dimension to our lives that isn't just about our career our future our happiness our contentment our joy but it's about belonging to this kingdom and seeing God's providential hand at work in our lives and trusting him for that because it takes us to this reality of Esther seeing faith's results and she does what she prayerfully and fasting says she's going to do she goes to the king and when she does when she and this is the important I think for me it's important point of Esther when she does what's right all she does is go to the king when she does what's right we begin to see that God is working in ways far beyond her involvement so you see she goes to the king and the king previously has been unable to sleep okay she's got no control or power over that he can't sleep one night so like any good ancient king he gets out the books that tell about all his great acts that he's done in the past and what's happened in this kingdom great life isn't it you go and read about all the great things that people have written about you so you can get to sleep at night so that's what he does he gets out this big book and he finds out in this book that there was a plot to assassinate him two guys that were plotting on the city gate and Mordecai uncle great uncle Mordecai cousin Mordecai he was the one that heard about it and told the king or told it was passed on to the king so that the assassination attempt was stopped and a kingdom realises he said why is Mordecai not being given honour for this and so he invites who does he invite he invites Haman and when the guy wants to assassinate everyone he invites Haman into the palace and says Haman what would you do for someone in the kingdom that really ought to be honoured and Haman thinks yeah it's me it's obviously me so he lists off all these great things that he would do to the person who's going to be honoured because he thought it was going to be him and the king says go and do that for Mordecai can you imagine Haman can you imagine just his knees would knock together he probably would just feel like collapsing this Mordecai that he hated all of a sudden the king's going to honour him with what was due for me and by the way he had had his family had goaded him to build a gallows in his garden for Haman and for Mordecai to be hung on when the time came so Esther invites Haman and the king for a meal kind of subsequent to that and in between that and Haman thinks I'm very honoured there's only me in the audience of the queen and the king and then of course this happens in between and then he goes back and he's a bit worried by this point and Esther exposes to the king that her life is in danger and her people's life is in danger because of what this evil man Haman had done and of course the king story goes on and the king

recognises the evil perpetrator and he ends up being hung on his own gallows and the enemies of the Jewish people are destroyed and the people celebrate the Jewish celebrate and go on celebrating for years to come the day of their freedom and the day of their salvation and the day of their redemption brought about by her act of obedience it's above and beyond her involvement isn't it she at one level she's a kind of bit player but there's lots of things happening here that God is sovereignly governing because he's in control but yet he uses her and we will find that again and again that when we simply do the simple things when we're challenged by the word of God to act in faith to do what we should do because we belong to the kingdom of God to serve to obey to do what's right to pray to watch to serve then God will use us and miracles will flow around about us in ways that we can never manipulate or manage ourselves he will use our lives far more than we can imagine just as he used Esther's life and made things happen around her obedience that she couldn't do anything about but glorify God when she recognised and we will find that you will find that when you do the simple things that God commands in your simple ordinary life and in my

simple ordinary life we will find that he is he is breaking down walls and he is changing people's minds and he's keeping people from sleeping and he is phoning making people phone certain people at this certain time because we will see God's hand of miraculous hand of providence at work and that's what it means to follow God and to live a life of faith and to be part of this sovereign plan of his and you know his place it's a safe place to be.

[27 : 58] Haman made that clear, Mordecai made that clear to Esther he said look you're not going to escape if you deny what you're supposed to be doing here and for us in Christ and in obedience can I say that in the simple obedient things that you'll be asked and I'll be asked to do tomorrow that's the safe place to be.

I'm not saying I can be completely contradictory and say it's a dangerous and a risky place to be but it's safe. It's dangerous and risky because we will be exposed to Satan's attacks and to opposition in many different ways but his times are in God's hands and he is sovereign over these things so it's the safest place to be.

The walk of faith is the safest walk to walk even though in our unbelief we often think it's a dangerous and risky place.

In Christ we are privileged to be in a safe place it might not be the nicest place it might not be the place we want to be we might want to just deny our responsibilities and just leave me alone God but it's the safest place to be as it was for Esther and you know she she worried about going into the king's presence but she followed that fasting and prayer decision to do so and we see that the way the safest place to be is in God's will.

Satan's thought his greatest moment to be was killing the son and the inheritance would be his that's what he thought he was doing on the cross killing the son of God and the inheritance would be his his would be the kingdom.

[29 : 49] His that darkest moment and that most dangerous moment became the safest place for the Christian for the for God in Christ to be and for the Christian to be that became the place of his greatest defeat the birthplace of his ultimate destruction and to be in Christ is to be in the safest place and the Esther story does also remind us as we close that his kingdom will come and his enemies will be destroyed.

Days of truth and of righteousness the enemies of God will be destroyed because unbelief is culpable as we saw this morning and safety and security is only in God's family and in God's home. His kingdom will come and it doesn't look like that does it? We are living in days when it doesn't look like his kingdom will come but it will and Esther is this orphaned probably uneducated refugee who was beautiful and was used greatly for her simple faith and allowed God to work great miracles through her and I believe in the simplicity of our own faith we can learn from her and also be gloriously used in his kingdom.

Let's bow our heads and pray. Lord God help us to work for you and live for you and love you and when the crossroads of faith come into our experience be it today or tomorrow or in the coming days and we are presented with the opportunity to almost save ourselves or obey the Lord Jesus Christ and follow him.

May we live and serve for the kingdom and move forward in faith and in prayer to do the simple things that are right and leave the rest up to God.

[32 : 23] We thank you that you are a God who condescends to use ordinary people like Esther and like us to fulfill your kingdom's work and each of us have undoubtedly been brought to the kingdom in Edinburgh at this time for a specific purpose and may in the ordinariness and sometimes randomness of our lives may we be able to see that.

Pray to God and pray for guidance and obey you. For Jesus' sake.