

The Greatness of Mordecai

- Esther 10
- For me, this is like the end of a great book that I don't want to put down. Or the end of a movie that is so captivating, you don't want it to end. And you can't wait for the sequel to come out, even though you know it can never be as good as the first. As literature and as a short story, Esther is top shelf. But we have had the added privilege of learning from this book that is also the inspired Word of God. What have we learned?
- Remember the big idea of Esther? I quoted Mark Dever early on who said that Esther is a narrative illustration of the providence of God. **That's the big idea: God is sovereign**, and He is there, even when we cannot see Him, even when His name is never mentioned, even when there are no big miracles, even in a foreign land or a culture that doesn't believe. God is there. Not just there. God is in charge. **We have learned** that God will give relief and deliverance to His people, sometimes through death and sometimes from death, but He will never leave us or forsake us. **We have learned** that He calls us to live a celebratory life, not a joyless existence that we just grind out, day by day. **We have learned** that He works through the mundane events of life and He uses ordinary people like you and me to effect change in families, churches, communities, and even nations. No one would have ever guessed in 1000 years that an exiled Jewish girl living in Persia would be chosen to be the queen. Any more than anyone would have ever guessed that the man who just a few months earlier was sitting in sackcloth and ashes outside the gate, a nobody in the kingdom and a despised Jew to the 2nd most powerful man in the land...would now be the 2nd most powerful man in the land! This is not a Hollywood script; this is the truth of the Word of God. "For not from the east or from the west and not from the wilderness comes lifting up, but it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another." (Psalm 75:6-7) That's the truth behind Esther's appointment as Queen, the second edict that saved the Jews, Haman's destruction and Mordecai's honor: IT IS GOD.
- Now we are at the end; the story for all practical purposes ended with the 9th chapter and the Feast of Purim. The 10th chapter is a postscript. It's the epilogue. The first thing you may have noticed when David read the chapter this morning is that Esther is missing. She is not mentioned at all in the final chapter of the book that bears her name. She is still there and still the queen, but the writer did not see that as the most important information to put in the postscript. Let's look at these final verses with just two final points: king's business and Mordecai's greatness.
- **King's business**
- The king did what kings and governments do: impose taxes. We have to give him a little bit of a break, because remember that after he got married to Esther in chapter 2, the king gave a great feast for all of his servants and officials, AND he granted a remission of taxes to the provinces. (2:18) Well, that was more than five years ago, and now there are 75,810 fewer Persians on the tax rolls, and so the king takes decisive action (which is rare for him), and imposes a tax on the land.
- I cannot say this with authority, but it seems to me that the author tells us this to let us know that the king never changed. He always just did what he wanted to do, and sometimes what he wanted to do was to do nothing – to abdicate his authority by handing over his signet ring to someone else so they could make the hard decisions. But when it was something he wanted to do – like have a beauty contest to find another young virgin to marry...or come to a sumptuous feast with his wife and his right hand man...twice...or impose a tax and get more money from the people, well of course that was not a problem. The king was like so many in leadership today who have no moral compass and just do what is right in their own eyes. Their actions are almost always selfish, motivated toward getting what they wanted, no matter how it affects the lives of others.
- In his book, *Leading at the Edge*, Dennis Perkins contrasts the leadership values of two different explorers: Earnest Shackleton and Vilhjalmur Stefansson. In 1914, Shackleton led a daring expedition to reach Antarctica in the South. A year earlier, Stefansson led an expedition headed in the other direction to explore the North Pole. Both ships, the *Karluq* in the north and the *Endurance* in the

south, found themselves trapped by solid ice packs. Each crew was faced with a fight for survival. But the outcomes of the two expeditions couldn't have been more different.

In the north, the crew members from the Karluk, led by Stefansson, degenerated into a band of selfish, mean-spirited, cut-throat individualists, ending in the death of all 11 crew members. In the south, Shackleton's crew faced the same problems--cold, food shortages, stress, and anxiety--but his crew responded with teamwork, self-sacrifice, and astonishing good cheer.

In the end, each leader stayed true to his core leadership values. Stefansson valued success above caring for people. He consistently communicated his ultimate objective: getting to the North Pole. In Stefansson's words this meant "that even the lives of the [crew] are secondary to the accomplishment of the work!" To the very end, Stefansson denied that his drive for success led to a tragedy--for himself and his crew.

In sharp contrast, Shackleton's leadership focused on the value and dignity of his teammates. At one of the lowest points of his trip, Shackleton wrote, "The task was now to secure the safety of the party." The well-being of his team drove him to put others first. Shackleton even gave away his mittens and boots and volunteered for the longest night watches. By valuing each person, Shackleton forged a team that was willing to share their rations with each other, even on the brink of starvation. Through his example of sacrificial leadership, Shackleton was able to accomplish his ultimate objective: saving the lives of his crew members.

- **Mordecai's greatness**

- The last verse in the book of Esther is an epitaph to Mordecai, and it would be one that all of us would be grateful to have on our grave markers one day. The first part, "he was great among the Jews." Who was he when the story began? He was nobody in the kingdom. Just a man with a beautiful daughter, living in obscurity, serving the God who created him. Just like you and me (except you may not have daughters, but if you do, they are beautiful). But that was Mordecai's lot. But because he waited on the Lord, because he feared God more than he feared man, because he lived his life based on convictions, he became great. But that's not really the important thing, that Mordecai was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brothers. I think his epitaph really starts after that. What would be the epitaph of Mordecai, then? What made him the man he was, loved by his people and honored by the king? Two powerful qualities.
- **He sought the welfare of his people. AND, He spoke peace to all his people.** (just the opposite of his predecessor, Haman, who sought only his own welfare, and who sought to bring destruction, not peace, to God's people). Mordecai loved people in deed, by seeking their welfare, seeking to do them good and not harm. Mordecai also loved people in word, by speaking the shalom, which is right relationship with God and right relationship with your fellow man. When we pray for those in office and for those running for office, pray this! That they would be men and women who fear God more than they fear man, that they live according to their convictions, and that they seek what is best for the people they serve, that they speak of right relationship with our Creator. But wait! Not just our political leaders. How about you and me? How do we treat the people we work with? Do we seek what is best for them or for us? How do we live with our spouse? Do we seek what is best for them, and speak to them in a way that promotes peace? With our children? With one another in the church?
- Paul spelled it out more plainly: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Phil. 2:3-4) Paul knows that we each naturally look out for our own interests. So he urges us to be intentional about using that same care in looking out for the interests of others. He uses the same argument in Ephesians 5 when talking about how a husband should love his wife like he loves his own body. "He who loves his wife loves himself." Then he says, "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church." (Eph. 5:28-29) Humility is not an expression of the face. It is an intentional act of the will.

- I don't usually quote John Maxwell, but I love what he said in an interview with Eric Metaxas recently. John Maxwell said his father taught him as a young man to do three things in order to live intentionally and to make a difference with his life. 1- Intentionally value people. 2- Believe in people. 3- Unconditionally love people. Why is this the case? He said, "Because people are rarely valued. People rarely have people who believe in them. And people don't feel the unconditional love that they crave." Mordecai was intentional about doing that for his people, and I would say that he was simply modeling the life of Jesus before Jesus ever came to earth and lived that way Himself.
- If we walk away from this Esther study with nothing else, let's have a clear understanding of these two things, then. First, God is sovereign and we can completely trust Him with our lives and everything that we are and care about. Second, in that surrendered posture, He calls and equips us to love other people and to seek their well-being. Let's be intentional about that.