WEEK 5 OF 5

All's Well That Ends Well: Esther 6-10

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SUNDAY: WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

The king asked, "What great honor was bestowed on Mordecai because of this?" The king's attendants who served him responded, "Not a thing was done for him" (Esther 6:3).

The construction of the Book of Esther receives praise from the best of literary minds. For lovers of English literature, this book is a great place to start when seeking introduction to the Bible. The author uses humor, repetition, irony, and contrast masterfully.

Some literature teachers use Esther as an example of a "Cinderella story." Because the name of God appears nowhere in the book, Esther is often welcomed in nonreligious contexts where a more obviously theological story would be excluded. As our world grows ever more secular, the book itself is perhaps "for such a time as this."

At the start of our study of Esther, we considered the need to read the entire story before drawing application from the biblical text. Well, now we've read and studied the whole story. So what has God said through this ancient work that we can apply to our lives in the twenty-first century? Let's start with some observations:

- Number of times God is mentioned in Esther: 0
- Number of times prayer is mentioned in Esther: 0
- Number of times the temple or Jerusalem are mentioned in Esther: 0
- Number of times God's purposes are thwarted in Esther: 0

How do we interpret this?

The first thing we learn from Esther is that God is in control, even though He's invisible.

A king forgets to honor someone who has saved his life. That is, until the perfect time—God's time—the moment when it is most necessary for the overlooked man to find favor. And ultimately a young woman and her cousin, unobservant religiously, are used to keep an entire nation from annihilation. The story of God's sovereignty unfolds without ever mentioning God's name.

We've seen sovereignty emphasized elsewhere in scripture. Think of the Book of Job. In it we read how the righteous Job lost children, home, business, health—everything but a wife who urged him to curse God. And God never told Job why. He just gave him a quiz that included such questions as, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth (38:4)?" and "Have you ever in your life commanded the morning?" (38:12). The only appropriate answer is silence, trembling, and awe.

I had been contemplating such thoughts this week when my sister called to tell me about her friend, Angie. Angie had wanted to be married in her twenties, but she'd waited for the right guy. So eighteen months ago, at age forty, she had finally said "I do." My sister and her daughters had flown fifteen hundred miles to celebrate with Angie. But then there was this call. There had been a car accident. Coming back from taking his mom to lunch—headed to a school to read to a class full of kids—Angie's husband was killed. A county sheriff, a good guy, gone.

Often, despite all we know of God, things happen that don't seem to make sense—things that make it look like the world is spinning out of control. Things that break our hearts. We all have such stories, don't we? The tsunami, the earthquake, the hurricane, the war, the sickness. Our planet groans as if writhing in childbirth as it longs for the day when the Prince on a white horse will arrive and make all

things new. But this is not that day. So for now, like Jesus at Lazarus' tomb knowing a happy ending is right around the corner, we still weep.

We learn from the Book of Esther that it may look like all is lost. It may seem as though God is absent. Yet the known facts are not all the facts. The story isn't over yet.

So we wait and trust.

The second thing we learn from Esther is that God keeps His promises to His people.

Way back in the events recorded in Genesis, God promised Abram that He would make of Abram a great nation. Later He promised David an eternal throne. And God kept His promises. He did so even when His people blended so well with the culture that no one would have guessed they were His.

One day the focus of God's big program will revert to Israel. Yet for a time the Church, the Body of Christ, is at the center. Believers in Jesus Christ have been "grafted into the tree" as it were, so we are included in an illustrious group of those who can call God "Father." As such, we are the recipients of spiritual blessings galore.

God promised something to the nation of Israel that He also promises to us: His presence. He told Abraham, "I will be with you" as Abraham set out to find the new land (Gen. 26:3). God said the same to Jacob (31:3) and to Joseph (48:21) and to Moses (Ex. 3:12) and to Joshua (Deut. 31:23; Josh. 1:5). Add Gideon and Solomon. Indeed, He promised His presence to the entire nation (Isa. 43:2). And we have that same promise: "I will never leave you, nor will I ever forsake you" (Heb. 13:5).

Does God keep His promises? Yes.

Will He abandon us? No.

Even if we're imperfect? Even if we're imperfect.

The Book of Esther tells us God keeps His promise through any means possible regardless of what anyone else is doing. And He has promised never to leave.

We are never alone.

Monday: The Big Picture

1. Ask God to give you insight through His Spirit. Then read Esther chapters six through ten.

108 Coffee Cup Bible Studies