

Esther: Finding God In Your Story

Esther

The story of Esther describes a desperate situation which God powerfully changes and yet He never speaks, does no dramatic miracles, and in fact is never even named. It's a great encouragement to us that He is always working and we can work with Him.

Here at King's, we believe that God speaks today – timelessly through His Word and also through His Holy Spirit. But all of us have times when we feel like we can't hear Him, that He isn't speaking directly to us.

We believe the miracles recorded in the Bible are real, but God doesn't always seem to act with the power we're longing for. We believe that God is Lord over everything – but we don't see everything happening as it should. Where is God in our story?

Where is God in Esther's story?

Esther was born in an empire that had conquered her ancestors' land, and the culture she lived in was proud and full of evil. We don't know what happened to her parents, but they aren't around – she instead has a guardian, Mordecai. Being a Jew was potentially life-threatening, so Mordecai encouraged her to hide her identity and use a non-Jewish name. One day, she is taken from her home to be part of the king's talent contest as he looks for a new queen; after enduring that she becomes Queen, only for one of the king's senior advisors, Haman, to then plot to get revenge on Mordecai and all his people by persuading the king to legislate for the murder of all the Jews in his empire.

Throughout the book, God never speaks, does no dramatic miracles, and in fact is never even named. Where is He?

God is Lord over all things

From first to last, the Bible tells us that God is Lord over all things, that He is in control of everything.

- "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God" (Hebrews 11:3).
- Jesus "upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3).
- "O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. ... These all look to you, to give them their food in due season. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust." (Psalm 104:24-29)
- "The lot is cast into the lap [a dice is rolled, a random chance], but its every decision is from the LORD." (Proverbs 16:33)

- “[Your Father] makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” (Matthew 5:45)
- “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.” (Matthew 10:29)

All this and more in Scripture should give God’s people great confidence that He cares about them, and that He’s deeply and powerfully involved in their lives. So, what do you do with all this wonderful biblical truth when you’re in a situation like Esther was?

Looking at the whole story of Esther carefully shows us the hidden and non-spectacular ways God is at work in it. We could summarise it with Romans 8:28 which tells us that “for those who love God all things work together for good.”

God’s sovereignty, human responsibility

- Esther wins the king’s beauty contest, which is both deeply unpleasant but also the way by which God’s people will have access to the King to avert the genocide that is soon threatened – in a similar way to Joseph being sold into slavery and jailed, and thus in the right place to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams, which leads to all his people being saved from famine. When Haman’s plot to kill the Jews is revealed, Esther (at risk of her own life) takes on the responsibility of approaching the king to stop the plot. Whether Esther was full of faith when she went to the king, or petrified, or both, she did it.
- Mordecai overhears a plot to kill the king, and tells the king about it. Again, he’s in the right place at the right time, and the record of his action later means the king seeks to reward Mordecai, just at the time that Haman is seeking to kill him. Mordecai then ends up as prime minister!

These examples from Esther’s story show us we don’t always need direct guidance, especially when the right decision is obvious.

It also shows us the importance of keeping God involved, as Esther asks that all God’s people fast and pray for her before she goes to the king. The people were real with God about the seriousness of the situation and how distant He seemed. Our prayers must be real, we can’t fool God.

God at work in all things

This story doesn’t tell us things are always going to work out how we want them to in this life. But it does show us that God is able to work in even the worst of circumstances, as He did ultimately at the cross.

“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

God is invisible in person to our eyes at present, almost all the time.

But if we will look with faith, we can see His presence.

If we keep trusting Him, staying faithful and obedient even when everything seems hopeless.

If we keep asking Him to intervene and thanking Him for every evidence of His goodness – whether there is a natural explanation for it or not.

Then one day we will see Him, and see how He has worked all things for good.

Questions for Small Groups

- Do you have an example from your own life or God in a powerful but non-spectacular/miraculous way?
- What do you think we can learn from the fact that the book of Proverbs is one of the most practical and seemingly-pragmatic books in the Bible and yet it repeatedly makes statements about God's sovereignty (such as Proverbs 16:1, 9, 33; 21:1)?
- How can we distinguish between coincidence and the secret works of God that Esther tells us about?
- Esther's story has many parallels with Joseph's before it, including the narrative recording evil things happening which God uses for good (see Genesis 50:20, as well as Romans 8:28). What might it look like for us to trust God in this kind of situation? (See also 1 Corinthians 7:21 where Paul says slaves should get their freedom if they can but being a slave doesn't prohibit them from serving God.)
- Esther 6:13 highlights the impossibility of opposing God's plans for His people (see also Acts 5:38-39, Matthew 16:18). How can we use statements like these to give us confidence whilst living and praying in a world where we often feel intimidated and defeated (Hebrews 2:8b)?
- Why is obeying God's Word important if we want to see God at work in our lives? Where are you find this hardest at the moment?
- The Jews instituted a new feast to remember and celebrate this great deliverance. How can we remind ourselves of our Jesus's great rescue of us?
- Pray for each other, focusing on asking God for faith, grace and deliverance for the circumstances you are in.