

We're starting a new sermon series this morning in the book of Esther. If you haven't yet noticed, I usually try to alternate between Old Testament and New Testament books. And I try to vary the genres to make sure that we are reading and studying the entire Bible not just my favorite parts. But in some ways Esther could not be more opposite from the gospels. They are both and filled with stories, but they couldn't be more different. In the gospels, Jesus is on every single page and then every single story God is incarnate in flesh speaking and working and teaching us. In the book of Esther, God's name is not even mentioned. In fact it appears as if God is completely absent.

And it does not take place in Jerusalem or in Israel, but in the far reaches of the Persian empire. And the people aren't waiting expectantly for the Messiah as much as they are just hoping that they don't die and then maybe one day they could go home.

This is a great book. It's a book that some of you may know very well because it captures our imaginations. There are a couple things that you need to know as we begin to study this book.

One, it's a really funny book. Some have argued that the entire book is written almost like a satirical account of the Persian Empire. Because the book has so much irony and humor in it. So it's ok for us to laugh. It would often get read aloud or even acted out through Israel's history. And there's a traditions of the audience getting really involved in the story. Booing the bad guys like Haman and cheering for the heroes. We might try that later on so prepare yourselves.

Second, you need to understand that the threat of annihilation is hanging over the book. This is the story where once again someone hated the Jews, God's chosen people, and tried to destroy them. And as they are living in exile, having lost their home and much of their people, they are hanging on by a thread. The Empire will throw all of its weight into exterminating them.

Third, you need to know that, even though God is not explicitly mentioned in this book, His fingerprints are all over it. Throughout the whole book, we will see God reverse the plans of the enemy. God's providence is a prominent theme of the book. God's fingerprints are on

every page, and He is constantly working behind-the-scenes to deliver and save His people.

So the theme of our series is "Life in Reverse." We are going to see how God is continually reversing the plans and ideas of the enemy. This morning we are going to see how God reverses our desires. Specifically, we will see what the empires of the world and what Jesus have to say about our desires. Turn to Esther 1 and let's read together.

I. The Empire's feast promises to meet your every desire (v. 1-9).

When I use the word empire, I am not just talking about the Persian empire that is the focus of the book of Esther.

I really mean the empires of the world.

As we go through the book this morning, I want you to contrast the empire with the kingdom of God.

I want you to think about what the world offers compared to what Jesus offers.

Sometimes I think we can just use the phrase, "the world" so much that it can deaden us to its meaning.

So, I am not saying empire instead of the world to be provocative.

I just want us to stop and think.

Verse 1, **"Now in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, ² in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Susa, the citadel,"**

See again, the context of the book of Esther takes place in Jerusalem the heart of the Persian Empire.

The name of the king who reigns is really a transliteration for Xerxes the first. Or Xerxes the great.

And his empire extends over the whole known world at that point.

It goes all the way out to India and all the way down to Ethiopia.

He is the most powerful person in the entire world.

And he is getting ready to flex and show off his power and his might.

Verse 3, **"In the third year of his reign he gave a feast for all his officials and servants. The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces were before him, ⁴ while he showed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor and pomp of his greatness for many days, 180 days."**

He's going to throw a feast of celebration.

This is just to beginning feast. It's not even the craziest part yet.

But he wants all of the officials and the servants, the army, and all the leaders of his empire to come and gather before him.

Before his minions and the other people who think they're powerful in their world, but are just big fishes in a small pond.

He is planning to show off how rich and powerful he is.

This is just a flexing of his power.

He wants everyone in the kingdom to know how great and how amazing he is.

And he is so great and so amazing that it's gonna take him 180 days to show off all of his riches and might.

This is ridiculous.

I mean, I get exhausted by meetings that go on too long.

Specially, if it's kind of meeting that feels like you could've just emailed me or texted me we didn't have to do this.

This meeting could've been an email.

He told everybody how powerfully is and then we just move on.

But he wants to show off.

And it historically this seems to be when Xerxes was gathering up and trying to convince his vassals that they should go and conquer Greece. His father Darius tried to conquer Greece and failed and so he wants to show how he is mightier and stronger.

This time they can do it.

So he's showing off all of his power.

Verse 5, **"And when these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in Susa the citadel, both great and small, a feast lasting for seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace."**

At the end of six months, he throws another feast.

This time there's going to be a week long partying at the palace.

The next verses show us in detail how extravagant and over the top this party is.

Verse 6, **"There were white cotton curtains and violet hangings fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rods and marble pillars, and also couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and precious stones."**

Now we get a tour of some of the beauty and power of the empire.

They have massive curtains that are white and violet.

And purple is the color of royalty.

It is rare and incredibly expensive.

Usually it is just saved for the royal clothes.

But Persia is so rich and powerful they use it for their curtains.

They have massive pillars made of marble.

And couches of gold and silver.

Now those don't sound particularly comfortable.

But imagine how wealthy you would be to have couches made out of gold.

Gold that people can just put their feet up on and let the cat scratch.

Even the floor itself is extravagant.

It is a mosaic made out of pearls and precious stones.

Diamonds, jade, and emeralds are just on the floor.

Your most valuable jewelry would be what they wipe their muddy feet on.

Verse 7, **"Drinks were served in golden vessels, vessels of different kinds, and the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king."**

And the cups they drink out of are made of solid gold.

Other cups are made out of different valuables like silver or jade.
The royal wine is passed out.
Not just the cheap wine you give to guests.
This is the nicest and most expensive wine.
And everyone can have as much as they want.
The feast promises to be the best party they have ever been to.
It would put Gatsby to shame.

Now why is all of this wealth laid out for us in great detail?
Because the empire is showing off what it offers.
It is promising to meet your every desire.
If only you could be at this party, then you would be happy.
If only you assimilate and become a citizen of this kingdom, then you
could share in the glory and power.

This is just what the empires of the world and our enemy still does today.
They flaunt the power, wealth, and seeming success in an attempt to
seduce you.
To make you think that you might be better off over there instead of
following Christ.

And verse 8, **"And drinking was according to this edict: "There is no compulsion." For the king had given orders to all the staff of his palace to do as each man desired. 9 Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women in the palace that belonged to King Ahasuerus."**

He passes a law.
And the law basically says everyone can do what they want.
They are not commanded to drink.
But they can drink all that they want.
And every man gets to chase his every desire at this party.
And Vashti throws her own party for the women.

But this is the strategy of the empires of the world.
They flaunt their wealth and lay out the table.

They tell you to come and eat.
Have your fill of whatever you want.

The empires today echo this call, **"there is no compulsion."**
No one can tell you what to do.
No God can demand you behave in a certain way.
We are free to do as each person desires.
No one really knows what the ultimate truth is.
Just follow your heart and you will find freedom and fulfillment.
It is the same promise the serpent made in the garden.
Eat and "you will be like God."
But there is a problem with these promises.

II. The Empire's promises are empty (v. 10-20).

The empires of the world will make all sorts of promises about how satisfying they are.
About how meaningful of life they can promise you.
About how feeling it will be.
But all of their promises are empty.

The promises of Persian are just as deceiving.
And this is the role that Vashti plays in the story.
She is not just introduced so that we can send her off the stage and make room for Esther.
She's also here to show the cracks in Persia armor.
The last part of the story is where things begin to get funny.

Verse 10, **"On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha and Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus,"**

That is a mouthful.
Try to pronounce all of those names.

Now imagine the king trying to pronounce all those names while he has been binge drinking for 7 days.

Because that is what it means when it says, "**heart was merry.**"

It means drunk, not just happy.

So, what does the drunk king want?

Verse 11, "**to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at.**"

He seems to have been surrounded by men for a week.

And he wants his queen to come.

He wants her to parade around in her crown so that every man present can lust after her beauty.

It also seems like he wants her to come only in her crown.

The implication is that she is not to wear anything else on her body except for what is on her head.

Verse 12, "**But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. At this the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him.**"

But she says no.

She defies the rule of the king.

She refuses his command.

And none of the seven eunuchs can change her mind.

And she is wise to refuse this.

Some interpreters have tried to say that he is not commanding her to come naked.

He just wants her to come all dolled up and ready to show off her beauty to this group of drunk men.

I think he wanted her there naked.

But either way, she was right to refuse.

Women generally need to be more aware of their surroundings than men

Specifically, you gotta be careful and evaluate whether the men that are around are safe or not.

There are situations that a man might not think twice about to consider it's a good idea to be there or not.

Are you gonna walk home in the dark because it's not that far or are you gonna call someone?

Are you going to go to that neighborhood?

Will you be out that late?

Let me ask you this ladies, would you feel safe walking naked into a room of drunken men who all want to look at you?

What about if your husband was a tyrant emperor who consulted power by crushing Egypt, then Babylon, and he is preparing to conquer Greece.

He also has been drinking non-stop for seven days.

Does that sound like somewhere you want to go?

Vashti doesn't.

So she says no.

Verse 13, "**Then the king said to the wise men who knew the times (for this was the king's procedure toward all who were versed in law and judgment, ¹⁴ the men next to him being Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who saw the king's face, and sat first in the kingdom): ¹⁵ "According to the law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti, because she has not performed the command of King Ahasuerus delivered by the eunuchs?"**

The king does not know what to do.

He has to ask his seven helpers to tell him.

It is funny because throughout this book, the king will never make his own decision.

Everything he does will be based on what other people say.

He appears to be no more than a puppet leader anyone can manipulate.

It is humorous to see the supposed most powerful person in the world unable to make a decision or get his wife to agree with him.

Verse 16, **"Then Memucan said in the presence of the king and the officials, "Not only against the king has Queen Vashti done wrong, but also against all the officials and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus."**

One of the king's advisors says that this is a national emergency. She has not just wronged the king, but she is wrong all of them in the room.

And not just the people in the room she has wronged everyone in the empire.

Everyone in the world has been wrong because of her refusal to show off her beauty for drunk men.

Why would he say this?

Verse 17, **"For the queen's behavior will be made known to all women, causing them to look at their husbands with contempt, since they will say, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, and she did not come.'"**

The fear is that women will begin to copy her.

Apparently, the institution of marriage is under attack.

Not from the commands, but from her refusal.

And the fears that suddenly women will think they can tell their husbands know when they ask them to do something ridiculous.

When they ask them to do something shameful.

Verse 18, **"This very day the noble women of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's behavior will say the same to all the king's officials, and there will be contempt and wrath in plenty."**

People are already talking about it King.

And before the day is over, all the women and all of our wives won't listen to us anymore.

Verse 19, **"If it please the king, let a royal order go out from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be repealed, that Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus. And let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she."**

What do we do with this?

First, I do not think that Vashti was in the wrong.

But also, this order is funny.

Vashti doesn't want to come before the king.

It's another consequence, as she never asked to come before him again.

She basically gets what she wants.

This is not really a punishment.

It's like if somebody came to their boss and said I quit.

And the boss said you can't quit you're fired.

That's what I wanted.

And her job is taken away.

Now they need to find another queen.

And their hope is they're going to find somebody even better than Vashti.

This is the stage for Esther.

She is going to become the next queen.

And she will be better than the way that they expect.

Because Esther will take a risk and come to the king when she's not invited instead of refusing to come when she is.

And Esther's active bravery won't be herself.

But I don't think that we are supposed to act as wrong or as foolish.

In fact, even though we have no reason to think that she is Jewish or follower of God, set all of this in the rest of the book in motion.

Doing the right thing is always worth it even if it doesn't seem like it.

Verse 20, "**20 So when the decree made by the king is proclaimed throughout all his kingdom, for it is vast, all women will give honor to their husbands, high and low alike.**"

So they send a decree out.

There is some irony here.

They are afraid that women might find out about what Vashti has done and start telling their husbands no.

So in order to stop that they are going to pass that tells everyone about what Vashti did and that they better not do it too.

This law is gonna be proclaimed throughout the entire kingdom, so every woman in the world will know about what happened.

Verse 21 "**This advice pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed.**"

Again the king only ever does what other people tell him to do.

He cannot make his own decisions.

He just rubber stamps things.

Verse 22, "**He sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, that every man be master in his own household and speak according to the language of his people.**"

He lets everyone know what Vashti has done so that no one will know what she has done.

He has created his own scandal.

I want you to see that this vast empire that has been flaunting its honor and glory.

But its glory is not as powerful as it seems.

It makes all these promises about it and about what offers.

But one woman's refusal threatens the entire thing.

It's just a house of cards.

Because it's not even believer filled with the Holy Spirit God.

It's just one woman I don't think so doesn't seem right.

This is the empire of the world it is just as weak.
It can parade around in front of us in all of its pomp and glory to tell you how powerful it is.
It is a paper tiger.
It can't keep the promises that it makes.
This king is wanting to control the entire world and conquer even more, but he can't get his wife to do he wants.

Persia is like the Wizard of Oz.
In the Wizard of Oz, there is emerald city.
In the city is going and everything there seems to be made out of emeralds and green.
Shops sell everything you can imagine, only in green.
All of the money, the food, and drink is green.
And it is so overwhelming that everyone must wear these special green glasses so that they are not overwhelmed by the glory of Oz.
The problem is that the glasses have green lenses.
There is no more green in Oz than any other city.
The whole city is a shame, and the great wizard is hiding behind a curtain.

The world promises are still just as empty.
It will promise you that you should chase and fulfill your every sexual desire.
Even if it's a sexual desire that the church or the Bible or people would tell you is wrong.
They will say do not listen to oppression, be free.
As long as you aren't hurting anybody act out and chase it.
But you can chase every sexual fantasy or sexual desire you have, and at the end of it, you are still gonna be broken and have a hole in your heart.
It won't satisfy you.

Chase riches and money.
Get all the zeros in your bank account you imagine.

Treat yourself with all the vacations and things you dreamed of.
But you will always want more.

Most kids these days desire fame.

They want people to know them and to be popular on social media or their chosen arena.

Fame and is so fleeting and I make you happy for a moment, but it won't fix you.

Most people still won't know who you are.

And you will always want more.

There is nothing that the empires of this world with that this world can offer you that will satisfy.

III. The Kingdom's feast is the only one that satisfies.

Jesus is the only one who can bring satisfaction.

And the feast that He offers us in the kingdom of God is true feast

John 6:35 **"Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."**

Jesus says that He is the bread of life.

And Jesus says that He is the fount of living Waters and Jon four to the woman from Samaria.

Jesus is the only one who can give us what we need.

Jesus is the only one who is actually able to keep all of His promises.

And Jesus has never failed to keep any of them.

The world promises unending satisfaction, but it never lasts.

It's promises are like a treat that you eat because it looks delicious and it taste good but afterwards your stomach hurts. You regret it and you swear you're never gonna eat that again.

That's not how it is with Jesus.

Since the beginning of time.

From the first moment that Jesus said, let there be light. He has kept every single promise that He has made.

He has always kept His word.

He has always known exactly what He said that He would do.

He has never failed.

Even when we are faithless.

Even when we fail our side of the bargain and rebel against Him yet still

He is faithful. He cannot deny who he is.

Our faithful God promises and offers us true satisfaction.

He promises us with our souls and our bodies need and crave.

He promises what we were made for.

Any offers it to us freely.

But we are so like Adam and Eve.

We stand in paradise, surrounded by the blessings that God offers us and instead we want to try what he says we shouldn't have.

Whether you've been walking with Jesus for your entire life or you're still trying to search him out, we all know deep down that what the world offers does not satisfying

Jesus is the only thing who can satisfy

And it is fitting the end of time when Jesus comes we will have our own feast.

Revelation 19 tells us that after Jesus bring Justice and set the world right there will be a wedding or the bride of Christ will marry Jesus.

And we will have a huge feast.

"Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."

And this feast will be grander and greater than ever could've imagined.

The Empire's feast will look like a little kids tea party with mudpies compared to which Jesus will bring.

Isaiah 25 prophesies and tell us a little bit of what will be served at this feast.

"On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines."

Everyone is invited this feast not just the men.

They're not just the people from one nation or run race, but from every tribe and every tongue.

Every drink that you have ever had that you loved.

From the best glass of wine to the most most drink of water.

They all pale in comparison from what the fount of living water will give you.

Because those who come to Jesus will never thirst again.

And the best meal that you have ever had.

From the most extravagant fine dining to the most satisfying, comfort food yes but a foretaste and a shadow of the feast that awaits us in the kingdom of God.

It will be the best of meats and the finest wine.

The most amazing thing isn't what we are eating and drinking, but really what we're going to be celebrating.

⁷ On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; ⁸ he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.

Because Jesus will swallow up and eat death forever and wipe away all the tears from our eyes.

And He will take away all of our sins in the shame, and that is hung over our world once and for all.

He will destroy shame and condemnation.

He will end sickness, suffering, disease, and death.
He will remove everything that is a part of us that we hate.
The brokenness of sin will no longer touch us.
We will be restored to what we were made to be.
What a party that will be.

9 In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

On that day, we will toast and rejoice.
We will loudly and gladly sing.
Because everything God promised to do was true.
Our trust and our faith was not wasted.
All we every desired was found in Christ.

How do you get?
How do you get on the list?
Jesus already sent you out an invitation. He's just waiting for you to RSVP.
He's just waiting for you to say yes.
Jesus suffered and died on the cross in our place to secure our place at the table.
If you repent of your sins.
If you turn away from the empires of the world and come to Jesus,
Then you will always be allowed in.
You just have to come in faith and humility and ask.

Where have we been this morning?
The empire promises to satisfy our every desire.
But it's promises are empty.
Only the Kingdom of God's feast with Jesus can satisfy.
Only Jesus can give us what we need.
So stop sitting at the world's table.
Come to Jesus and find rest for your weary soul.