

Resistance is futile. That is the warning of the Borg. The fictional boogiemens in the Star Trek series. Resistance is futile. They were always my favorite bad guys because they were so intimidating. They're an alien species that is like a hive mind where there's no longer any individual but every single member has the same exact consciousness. Their empire is so expanded they continually assimilate new species into their collective as seemingly robot cyborgs. The most intimidating part of them is really their indifference. They don't seem to ever show emotions and are just gonna destroy you and that's it.

The full warning they give when they find you is "We are the Borg. Lower your shields and surrender your ships. We will add your biological and technological distinctiveness to our own. Your culture will adapt to service us. Resistance is futile."

Our world today can give us the same warning. It can tell us it's nice that you're Christian and follow Jesus, but you really need to adapt your values and your beliefs to our modern world. Times are changing and you need to become like us. After all the wave with history stands against you. Resistance is futile. At times, it can feel futile to try and stand up against our age and the powers that be.

We are going to look at Esther chapter 2 this morning. We are going to see that this is not new. Empires throughout history have always claimed history on their side. They have always declared that they are the future and you need to get in line. And this morning we're going to see how Esther and Mordecai will stand against this tidal wave.

## **I. The Empire requires assimilation (v. 1-8).**

The empires of the world require that you assimilate. You need to conform to the language, the food, the culture, the religion, and the values.

This is how empires keep their power, especially in the ancient world. They destroy what is unique about other nations in order to make them identify with the empire instead.

And this is the pressure the Jews, the people of God are under in Persia. The empire wants them to drop their Jewishness and become Persian. As we go through the story, I want you to keep this fact in mind.

Verse 1, **"After these things, when the anger of King Ahasuerus had abated, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her."**

After the King sobers up, he realizes what he has done.

It is like he comes out of a hangover and has to be told what laws he passed.

The implication here is that he regrets it, but he can't change the law. So he doesn't know what to do.

Thankfully, others are always around to tell the king what to do.

Verse 2, **"Then the king's young men who attended him said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king." 3 And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in Susa the citadel, under custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women. Let their cosmetics be given them. 4 And let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti."**

Sometimes this is portrayed as a beauty contest.

Which, I can understand if you want to teach this story to your children.

But that is not what this is.

Beauty pageants are a little problematic, but maybe can be okay.

What the king's men are suggesting is plain wicked and evil.

Instead of repenting for how he treated Vashti, he is going to wrong hundreds possibly thousands of women.

They order all of the young beautiful virgins to be taken.

They do not get to vote or volunteer.

They are gathered up like you would harvest crops.

They will be added to the king's harem.  
His group of women he can use however he wants.  
Night after night they will send another woman to his bed.  
Whichever one he likes the most can be the next queen.  
It is dehumanizing and evil.

And this treatment was not limited to women.  
Other historians of the time tell us the Persian empire also took 500 boys every year to be castrated and to serve as eunuchs.

Verse 4, **"This pleased the king, and he did so."**

To no one's surprise, the King likes this plan.  
So, he does exactly what they tell him to do.  
The king once again does not make his own decision.

Verse 5, **"Now there was a Jew in Susa the citadel whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjamite,"**

We learn of Mordecai's name after we know he is a Jew.  
Because the most important part is that he is one of God's chosen people.  
He is a part of the covenant community.  
And he even comes from nobility.  
Kish, the Benjamite, was the father of King Saul.  
The first king of Israel.

Verse 6, **"who had been carried away from Jerusalem among the captives carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away."**

He was part of the captives who have been carried away.  
Much like these young virgin women, the Jews were carried away.  
God allowed them to be sent into exile.  
And this exile happened in Nebuchadnezzar's day.  
God said they were to be stuck in exile for 70 years.

Now there is a problem.  
It has been more than 70 years since the exile began.  
King Cyrus commanded that the Jews could return to the promised land.  
Nehemiah returned and built the walls.  
Ezra returned to build the temple.  
That happened at least a generation ago.  
But Mordecai is still here.

We don't know why because the text does not tell us.  
But he shouldn't be here. Neither should any of the other Jews.  
Maybe they are being disobedient and refusing to return.  
Maybe they have come to love Babylon more.  
After all they were born in Babylon and know nothing of Israel.  
Maybe they don't want to go into the unknown.  
Maybe they were too poor and were unable to make the trip.

All we know for sure is that Mordecai and Esther felt the pressure to assimilate.  
It was all around them.  
It seems like they already missed their chance to escape it.

Verse 7, **"He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, the daughter of his uncle, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter."**

Notice that Esther has two names.  
Her Jewish name is Hadassah.  
Esther is her Persian name.  
Because the empire forces people to be renamed.  
It happened in the book of Daniel and it happens again here.  
Esther is named after a Persian god Ishtar.  
Mordecai is named after Marduk an old babylonian god.  
This is part of the pressure they are under.  
Their very names are stolen from them.

They are now named after foreign idols and gods.  
For us today this might not seem like a huge deal.  
But in the ancient world, your name is your identity.  
The renaming is the empire staking a claim on who you are.

It tells us a little more about Hadassah.  
She is beautiful, which is normally nice but now is dangerous.  
And she is an orphan.  
Mordecai is her uncle, but he cares for her and treats her like his daughter.

Verse 8, **"So when the king's order and his edict were proclaimed, and when many young women were gathered in Susa the citadel in custody of Hegai, Esther also was taken into the king's palace and put in custody of Hegai, who had charge of the women."**

Esther's beauty put her in danger.  
Now she has been gathered up.  
She is taken to the palace and being prepared to join the harem.  
Life in the empire is always difficult.  
But the pressure to assimilate is going to be soul crushing.  
What is Esther going to do when it seems like she has no choice?

This pressure Mordecai and Esther face is the same pressure we face from the world.

Because we are not primarily citizens of the United States of America.  
We are citizens of the kingdom of heaven.  
The cultural values and norms in our country are not the norms of God's kingdom.

And every day it subconsciously and continually tries to make us more American.

Which being American is fine. It may even be great.  
But we should not be more American than we are Christian.  
We should not be more worldly than we are heavenly.  
And the pressure to assimilate surrounds us so fiercely that we often do not recognize it.

We can't even tell that we are being assimilated.

Because if we are not careful, we will start to adopt our cultural values and think of them as Christian ones.

Our patriotism, our individualism, our desire to achieve and be the biggest and best.

These are fine ideas, but they are American ones, not Christian.

It can be easy to see how the empire of the world wants us to adopt its values and ideas on sexuality, gender, or morality.

But we need to be willing to examine ourselves and see how we have already been assimilated.

## **II. We are tempted to compromise (v. 9-18).**

Because the pressure is so overwhelming, we are tempted to give in.

We are tempted to compromise and give ground.

Maybe we will just do a little of what the empire asks.

This is the temptation Esther is going to face.

She has been taken by the king.

She is given over to the eunuch.

And she is supposed going to be prepared for the king's bed.

What will she do?

Verse 9, **"And the young woman pleased him and won his favor. And he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and her portion of food, and with seven chosen young women from the king's palace, and advanced her and her young women to the best place in the harem."**

Esther appears to go along with everything.

She does exactly what the eunuch asks for.

She seems to play the game and gets to climb the ladder.

She gets to be in the best place in the harem.

Which, being in the harem is not great for anyone.

I want to be sensitive and fair towards Esther.  
Because I don't know for sure that she was actively compromising her faith.  
After all, she is basically a sex trafficking victim.  
At least that is what we would call someone taken against their will to be used by someone else sexually.  
And I am a victim of sexual abuse.  
I was sexually abused as a child.  
I did not sin sexually, I was sinned against.

I don't want to blame her for something outside of her control.  
She is in an impossible and seemingly irresistible situation.  
But, I think the text does seem to imply that she makes compromises.  
It would have been hard not to.  
And we can understand if she would have.  
Most of us probably would have.  
We compromise all the time in way easier circumstances.

Now why do I think the text implies this?  
Well, look first at **"the young woman pleased him and won his favor."**  
Then verse 15, **"Esther was winning favor."**  
Verse 17, **"She won grace and favor"** in the king's sight.

We have been going through Joseph's story in Genesis.  
He was also a slave in a foreign land with different gods.  
In Potiphar's house as a slave Joseph, **"found favor in his sight."** Gen 39:4  
In the prison, **"God gave him favor"** Gen 39:21  
Daniel as a foreigner in the same city, **"God gave him favor."**

Favor is almost always passive.  
It is something bestowed.  
It is something given by God.  
But Esther is described as actively working towards this favor.  
It seems like it is something she accomplishes in her own strength.

We also see that she eats the empire's food.

This is certainly a compromise.

Because the Mosaic law has clear requirements about what can and cannot be eaten.

It would be impossible for her to eat the food she is given and obey God.

This is exactly why Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to eat the king's food.

And they ask that they be allowed to keep God's law instead.

And they can see if they don't improve better than anyone else.

But Esther does not do any of this.

Verse 10, **"Esther had not made known her people or kindred, for Mordecai had commanded her not to make it known."**

This is more than just Esther not telling people that she is a Jew.

Because keeping the Mosaic law.

Obedying God's commands is not just a private thing.

It is public and different than the ways of the empire.

The only way she could keep her people secret, is if she did not obey everything God commanded.

This is the primary reason I think she does compromise.

She keeps her faith hidden.

But the world and empire pressure us into this.

We are told by the world we can think whatever we want, just do it quietly.

Don't tell anyone and keep it to yourself.

There is no such thing as a private faith.

Every single person lives every day what they believe.

It is not just something you can hide in your heart.

Our belief and our faith escapes and must color all that we do.

We live what we believe.

And that is true whether you are a Christian or an atheist.

Everything we do flows out of what we believe about the world.



Verse 11, **"And every day Mordecai walked in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and what was happening to her."**

Understandably, Mordecai is concerned about her.  
So every day he comes to try and get an update.

Let's take a look at what this is all for.

Verse 12, **"Now when the turn came for each young woman to go in to King Ahasuerus, after being twelve months under the regulations for the women, since this was the regular period of their beautifying, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women—"**

Twelves months of preparation to make sure they are pretty enough.  
Twelve months of spa treatments and care so they can be the maximum beauty for the king's desires.  
All of those 12 months for one night.  
This is pretty dehumanizing.

Verse 13, **"when the young woman went in to the king in this way, she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the harem to the king's palace."**

Then when it is her turn, she goes to the king.  
Apparently, the women get to go take with them whatever it is they want.  
Whatever it is that they think we please the king and try to earn his favor.

Verse 14, **"In the evening she would go in, and in the morning she would return to the second harem in custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, who was in charge of the concubines. She would not go in to the king again, unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name."**

Again, they are sent to sleep with the king.  
And afterwards they are no longer a part of the harem with virgins,  
Now they go to join the concubines.  
And they stay there forever, unless the king decides he wants them again.  
This is dehumanizing and wicked.

Verse 15, **"When the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his own daughter, to go in to the king, she asked for nothing except what Hegai the king's eunuch, who had charge of the women, advised. Now Esther was winning favor in the eyes of all who saw her."**

Now it is Esther's turn.

What is she gonna say what is she gonna do.?

Is she gonna resist?

Is she going to refuse to participate?

It doesn't appear to be so.

She listens to what the chief says.

She takes exactly what he advises her to do.

Again, it appears that she is actively winning favor from everyone who sees her.

Verse 16, **"And when Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign,"**

Esther's turn finally comes.

And the king has been engaging in this farce for months.

It has been four years since Vashti was banished.

So it could be four years that the king has been doing this every night.

Verse 17, **the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti."**

The king loves her and is amazed by her.

She wins his favor, and she gets to become the queen instead of just another forgotten concubine.

Verse 18, **"Then the king gave a great feast for all his officials and servants; it was Esther's feast. He also granted a remission of taxes to the provinces and gave gifts with royal generosity."**

To celebrate another feast.

This time he lets up on some taxes and gives gifts and Esther's honor. Now I can't say with 100% confidence that Esther does the wrong thing. But we know beyond a shadow of a doubt she was tempted to give in. She was tempted to compromise and to assimilate. To leave her Jewishness behind and become Persian.

But here is what I want you to remember.

### **III. Our sin doesn't (nullify) God's (grace) (v. 19-23).**

The pressure and temptation to sin often feels overwhelming.

We cannot see a way out.

It can feel like we have no choice but to sin.

But our hope is in the gospel and in God's grace.

Our compromise, assimilation, or failure does not mean that God has no use for us.

It does not cast us out from the people of God into darkness.

God's grace covers a multitude of sins.

One of the things I love about the Bible is that it tells us the truth.

It gives an honest representation of people.

It does not pretend like the heroes and the good guys are always good.

That shows us the unvarnished and sometimes really ugly truth.

The only person who's perfect in the Scriptures is Jesus.

And so we can be tempted sometimes when we read stories to defend the people that we want to be like.

We can be tempted to read the story of David and try to excuse his sexual sin is not that bad.

Or we can be tempted to read Esther story and try to say she she always did the right thing. She never sinned at all anywhere in this book.

But the gospel from our need to do that.

Our faith is built on grace.

Esther and Mordecai did not need to be sinless in order for God to use them.

They did not have to stay perfectly pure and clean from the world's assimilation.

We could sit and we could argue and go back-and-forth and try to read through the text and figure out how Esther did or didn't compromise.

But at the end of the day, that isn't the most important part of the story.

What's important to the story is that God showed up anyway.

What's important to the story is that even if she had walked away from God at this point and fully impressed with the world wanted and what the empire forced her to do.

God was not with her.

We see this too, in the story of Mordecai.

Verse 19, **"Now when the virgins were gathered together the second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate."**

Mordechai still continues to go and see what's happening.

So the camera is turning from what Esther has been doing back to what Mordecai is doing kind of at the same time.

Verse 20, **"Esther had not made known her kindred or her people, as Mordecai had commanded her, for Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him."**

Esther is not letting anyone know that she is Jewish and a part of the covenant community of God.

She is obeying Mordecai.

Verse 21, **"In those days, as Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus."**

During those days, there is a plot to kill the king.

That's not particularly unusual because that happens a lot.

Make a lot of enemies and a lot of other people wish that they were the king instead.

And in fact, later, we know from history that Xerxes will be killed by one of his servants.

So it's unusual not that there is a plot going on but what is unusual is what happens in 22

Verse 22, **"And this came to the knowledge of Mordecai, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told the king in the name of Mordecai."**

Mordecai discovers this plot.

Mordecai passively happens to find out that this is taking place

Which is to say that God providentially make sure that Mordecai finds out about this.

And Esther just so happens to be in a perfect place to inform the king about it.

Verse 23, **"When the affair was investigated and found to be so, the men were both hanged on the gallows. And it was recorded in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king."**

The matter executed, and it's written down in a book and put away.

Nothing happens right now to Mordecai.

He is not rewarded or thanked or acknowledged in anyway.

At least not yet.

Because this is all setting the stage and setting the table for how God is going to deliver and save his people.

Mordecai and Esther are not acting according to their own plan.

They have not come up with an idea for how they are going to save their people from annihilation.

Because it does not depend on them.

Sometimes we are tempted to think we need to save ourselves.

We think that God needs our help.

We see the culture and think we need some elaborate plan to deliver God's people from the empires of darkness.

Maybe if just the right people are elected that will fix it.  
But God does not need us to get it right for Him to save us.

Esther and Mordecai don't even know that there is an existential threat yet.  
But God knows.  
And God is already working to bring about their salvation before they  
know to ask.  
Before they're even ready to pray, already answering the prayer.

This is God's grace.  
This is the mercy that he shows us.  
God is not sitting letting Esther and Mordecai work this out on their own.  
He isn't sitting back OK you guys figure it out. Good luck.

Sometimes I do that with my own kids when they're fighting, they wanna  
do it by themselves.  
OK, go ahead and let them struggle until they get to the point of ready to  
ask for help.  
I will come help.

God is much better, father than I am.  
God does not sit back with his arms crossed, waiting for us to ask.  
There are times God are the works before.

We see this most explicitly in the gospel.  
Before God said, let there be light.  
He already knew what was gonna go wrong in the world.  
He already knew how sin was going to enter in his creation.  
He knew how we would rebel against him in his rules.  
He knew how we would fail and ourselves headed towards death.  
And before we were created, God us and loved us and worked together a  
plan to save us.  
Because he knew that we were so smart and figure it out.  
Because it is love to deliver us

And because of His love for Esther He is going to seek to deliver them.  
Not because of righteousness on their part  
Not because they deserve it.  
Not because they have earned it.  
As if they make one wrong mistake or one too many compromises then  
God would leave them to their fate.  
God saved them anyway.  
And Jesus saves us anyway.  
This is the hope of the gospel.  
That God's grace covers a multitude of sins.  
That we cannot outside His grace.  
We cannot outrun His love.  
We cannot mess up His plans for our good.

Our hope of the gospel is not just for our salvation after we die.  
The gospel gives us hope here today.  
The world tries to assimilate us.  
It wants to turn us into good citizens of the empire.  
But at the same time, God is assimilating us into good citizens of heaven.  
We call this process of assimilation, sanctification.  
Where we are slowly being transformed into the likeness of Christ.  
We are becoming more like Jesus.  
We are becoming more holy.

It happens through the spiritual disciplines.  
Through prayer and fasting.  
Through regular reading of God's word.  
Through giving to the church and those in need.  
It happens through coming to corporate worship and communion.  
Every time we do those things we are being sanctified even if it doesn't  
feel it.  
And a lot of the time it happens subconsciously.  
We don't even notice.

Ultimately, this happens through happens slowly and through Jesus.  
God is the one who does it to us.  
It does not depend only on our efforts or our work.  
The Holy Spirit who lives and dwells in every believer does this work.

Sometimes when we talk about sanctification we can talk about it like it is something we do to ourselves.

Like it is a checklist we need to see if we have been changed enough today.

But sanctification is a promise.

If you are a believer, it is something God is doing in your life.

And your failures can't stop it.

Your sin cannot wipe it out.

Now you can slow it down by compromising or becoming like the world.

Or you can speed it up by obeying and following Jesus.

But our hope is not found in ourselves.

It is found in God's grace.

And our sin can't wipe out God's grace.

#### CONCLUSION:

The Empire requires (assimilation) (v. 1-8).

We are tempted to (compromise) (v. 9-18).

Our sin doesn't (nullify) God's (grace) (v. 19-23).

As we leave these doors we will return to the empire.

And the pressure to assimilate will come.

Resistance is only futile if you try it without Jesus.

With Jesus we have hope that even when we fail, His mercies are new every morning.