

QUEEN VASHTI'S DIGNITY

Esther 1



SYNOPSIS

As we start a new series on the Book of Esther, we learn that the main thrust of this book is that although God is unmentioned, unseen, and silent in the story, the reality is that at every twist and turn, God is there. He is sovereign and fully in control, and it's the reason why Jews celebrate the Festival of Purim - the saving of the Jews from genocide. This book is full of satire and irony.

King Xerxes is the 4th King of the Persian empire, and the story of Esther takes place in the 3rd year of his reign. Xerxes has gathered all of the noblemen and military leaders to wine and dine though so that they would be aligned to fight Greece in about 3 years time. Greece had become a fixture of his vengeance after witnessing his father losing the battle to take Greece. So in the first chapter, we see a scene where King Xerxes is throwing a banquet, and at the peak of drunkenness, he commands Queen Vashti to come, completely naked and undignified with just her crown. Now the queen rightfully rejects him. Women of dignity would not be there as she would have been the object of lust for powerful drunk men.

Even though Queen Vashti's refusal would cost her everything, she says no - and after this, we see the advisers to the king (experts in the matters of law and justice) giving him advice. Essentially, the edict to banish Queen Vashti is a power play - if his own wife won't listen to him, why would any of the noblemen and military leaders that he's trying to wine and dine listen to him? The irony behind this edict is that no one would have heard of what Queen Esther did, but in issuing the edict, everyone hears about this incident. And the irony is that the entire empire hears of the incompetence of the Persian Empire.

Taking a step back, we see that though God is unmentioned, the reality is that this sets the stage for Queen Esther. The readers understand that God is orchestrating everything as it happens. Similarly, even in our situations and societies, when we don't sense God moving, can we still trust that God is in control?



TWO MAIN POINTS

1

THE DIGNITY OF ALL

We see in this first chapter several key details. First, the eunuchs (whose dignity has been stripped from them after they have been castrated) are named. It gives them dignity. We also see Queen Vashti's refusal that represents the dignity she holds onto. Through it, we see the dignity for all people that is highlighted. We see the contrast of the stripping of dignity from the drunken men that are in power and the dignity for all people that God affirms.

2

A SOVEREIGN GOD IN THE MIDST OF SILENCE

God is silent in this book. He's not mentioned. And yet we see that at every twist and turn, God is present, orchestrating the story that is unfolding. When it seems like our society is out of control, the book of Esther reminds us that even when a "silly law" is the resolution for conflict, can we still be people that trust that God is sovereign and in control? Psalm 2 points out that God laughs when kings and kingdoms conspire against Him. His plans will not be thwarted. Though he may seem silent in our situations, in our societies, in our nations, we choose to (in faith) believe that He is in control.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1

Have you ever been in a season where you felt like God was silent? How did you respond in that season?

2

Commentators describe God as a "God of Reversal" in the book of Esther. Have you experienced a time where things seemed to have a bleak outlook, only to see the God of reversal change your situation?

3

What does dignity for all people mean to you? How can we be people that affirm the dignity of all people? Who are people that have had their dignity stripped from them?

4

Have you seen the folly of man play out and become so frustrated with the outcome of silly laws and ordinances? Looking at our own lives, have we seen the folly of our own plans?

5

Do you find society to be out of control? Can you trust that God is still in control when society feels out of control?



BIG IDEA

In a book where God is never mentioned, we still trust that He is orchestrating the story that is unfolding. In a world that is poisoned by sin, where humanity chooses to strip the dignity of others away, we have a God who affirms the dignity of all. In a story where those who are in power seem to hold the keys to the future, we find a God who laughs at the futile plans of mortal humanity. May we find hope and peace even in the midst of turmoil, knowing that we have a God who is sovereign and in control.

