**ESTHER**

**Esther- Introduction**

Sunday, January 2, 2022

**WE Slide 1 Happy New Year!! 2022 is here whether you’re ready for it or not. Do you have big plans for 2022?** Exercise/eat right, new job, new relationship, maybe taking a relationship to a new level of commitment, plans for a new house, new car, special trip or maybe it’s the year you retire and are finally done with the rat-race. **New year…new opportunities to accomplish all the things you’ve got planned.** **Or is it? Is 2022 or any year for that matter an opportunity for you to accomplish what you have planned?** Or is it an opportunity for God to accomplish HIS ETERNAL PLAN through you? There’s a big difference!

**YOU MIGHT BE THINKING… God’s ETERNAL PLAN through ME??!! Yep! That’s exactly what I’m saying!** Imagine the change of perspective that truth would make in your current circumstances/situations if you knew God is using them to accomplish His ETERNAL PLAN. **We’re starting a series through the OT book of Esther.** This morning I want to take the time to set the stage for the coming weeks and what God wants us to take away from what He did in/through Esther and her cousin Mordecai. **I want to give you some things to think about as you read Esther this week and then next week we’re going to dive into it.**

**THIS BOOK’S REALLY GOT ME THINKING! Who’s REALLY in control of your life? Slide 2** We do all this planning, working, scheduling, worrying, but in the end who controls what happens? **They rarely turn out how we plan them.**

1. **WHO’S REALLY IN CONTROL OF YOUR LIFE?**
2. **BIRTH- the fact that you were born! Coincidence, chance happening based on DNA, God ordained?** Meaning determined by God. Why were you born into your family? Why born in the US? Why born in the 1900’s or 2000’s and not earlier/later? If God chose to have you born why? Does He have a plan?
3. **JOB- Was it your resume that impressed?** Or was it your boss’ choice despite your resume? Why didn’t you get the job for which you were more qualified?Why was your interest in this career and not another? Or why didn’t you get a job within your career interest?
4. **MARRIAGE- Did you find your spouse or did they find you?** Was it your good looks/award-winning personality that won them over? Why did you meet your spouse when/where you met them? What if they were never born?
5. **CURRENT SITUATION- Why is your life the way it is?** The hard question is, If you’re in it because of someone else’s choices why do you have to live with the consequences of other people’s choices?

**THESE ARE QUESTIONS Mordecai and Esther could have been asking.** The details and backstory of Esther are mind blowing which we’ll see as we go through the story, but here’s a quick summary. **Slide 3**

1. **BACKGROUND OF ESTHER**
2. **Both born into Jewish families but in a foreign land-** they were in Persia because of God’s discipline of Israel for their rejection of Him. **Check out this map. Slide 4**
3. They were experiencing the consequences of promises God made to Israel 1000 years earlier.
4. God said to Moses/people- do life My way for My purposes/bless; do life your way/your purposes/disciplined by being defeated by their enemies and scattered throughout the world
5. God predicted Israel would reject Him and He would have to discipline them, it happened.
6. **Through no fault of their own M/E** were living in Persia because of Israel’s choice to reject God, not theirs, and His promise to discipline Israel this way.
7. They could have returned 50-60 years earlier, all Jews were given permission to return to Israel, but their parents chose to remain in Susa. **Why?**

**Here’s another thing they didn’t choose for themselves but had to live with… Slide 5 bad family genes…**

1. **Both born into the line of a failed Jewish king who 100’s of years earlier disobeyed God by not killing off the entire nation of the Amalekites as God had directed him to do.**
2. Mordecai’s a descendent of failed King Saul, Israel/Haman, who you’ll read about, is a descendent of King Agag, Amalekites who Saul allowed to live.
3. Mordecai is unwilling to bow to an Amalekite, Haman who like his ancestors hates Jews, hatches a plan to finally kill off the entire nation.
4. Now Saul’s disobedience and Mordecai’s stubbornness, would spell the end of the entire nation of Israel- **Why couldn’t he just bow to Haman like everyone else?**

**Then there’s Esther…**

1. **Esther was an orphan who had to be raised by her older cousin Mordecai.**
2. What a tragic experience for a young girl to go through- the loss of both parents.
3. To make matters worse she’s entered into a beauty contest with the winner becoming the queen of a non-Jewish king who led the nation that oppressed her people. **Esther didn’t sign up for this!**

**So why did God have the author write about the life and times of Esther and Mordecai? Slide 6**

1. **THE PURPOSE OF ESTHER- Specifically for the Jewish People.**
2. **To explain why Israel celebrates the Festival of Purim**
3. Festival celebrating God’s deliverance of Israel from Haman’s plan to have them all killed.
4. Pur/Purim- means stone used in casting lots; Haman used them to decide on date of annihilation.
5. During the celebration the book of Esther is read- cheer Mordecai/boo Haman.

**Secondly…**

1. **To encourage the hearts of Jews, especially those living outside of Israel, that God is still faithful to His promise of protecting and providing for His people wherever they live.**

**Here are some lessons we’ll be learning as we work our way through Esther. Slide 7** We’ll use these as our TAKEAWAYS for today. **2 main points- no matter what our circumstances are, because of our choices or others.**

1. **LESSONS WE’LL LEARN FROM ESTHER**
2. **God Always Does What He Says He’ll Do-** M/E were experiencing in their day a promise He made to Israel **1000 years** earlier. **We live focused on today; God operates from promises made 1000’s of years ago.**
3. He said He’d provide and protect Israel and He did through the daily decisions of M/E.
4. God’s made that same promise through Jesus Christ to we who are Christians,
5. **Slide 8** Matthew 6:25-33/Romans 8:28- provide for our needs (**physical, emotional, spiritual**) and make everything (**good/bad**) work out for good to those who seek first His kingdom/righteousness, love Him, and called according to His purposes- to become like Jesus.
6. **Slide 9** Philippians 1:6 He will complete the good work of spiritual maturity in our lives.

**Whatever your circumstances God has promised to meet your needs if you do life His way for His purposes and through them grow you to spiritual maturity.** LOOK AT THIS NEXT TRUTH, IT’S HUGE! **Slide 10**

1. **God Uses Our Earthly Circumstances/Decisions to Achieve His Eternal Plans.**
2. God’s eternal plan for Israel was to keep it existing so Jesus Christ could be born and save mankind- a promise He made 1000’s of years earlier to Abraham.
3. He used M/E to ensure Israel’s existence so Jesus could come 400+ after their lives were over.
4. God didn’t use MIRACLES in delivering Israel.
5. He simply worked through M/E’s daily decisions within their daily circumstances to bring about that deliverance.
6. God’s eternal plan for you and me is to draw people to Christ through our lives.
7. Whatever is your current situation, whether it was your decision or someone else’s, you are where you are.
8. Too often we crab/complain and get angry with God for not changing our situation when He’s saying, “I’ve got you right where I need you to draw the people in your life to Me for salvation.”
9. Rather than focusing on what you don’t like about your circumstance focus on make the right decisions within your circumstances and watch God work in/through you.

**MY PRAYER IS THAT WE GRAB HOLD OF THESE LESSONS AS WE SEE THEM PLAYED OUT IN ESTHER. As we leave this morning make the commitment to read through Esther once a day for the duration of the series and ask God to change your perspective on your life circumstances.** Let’s stand and pray.

**PODCAST- Who’s controlling your life? Esther 1, Matthew 6:33, Romans 8:28, Philippians 1:6**