

When God Seems Missing

Esther 1 & 2 – February 28, 2010

Proverbs 15:3
II Corinthians 4:18

➤ **God At Work** _____
Esther 1

➤ **God At Work Through A** _____ **Decision**
Esther 2:1-4

➤ **God At Work With** _____ **In Place**
Esther 2:5-20

I Corinthians 11:32 Psalm 103:9

➤ **God At Work Through** _____ **Mordecai**
Esther 2:21-23

Mordecai's heroism would be recorded but not _____.

Galatians 6:9
I Corinthians 15:58

Applications Ephesians 1:11

- You are not _____.
- Consider yourself to be God's _____
_____.
- Don't forget God's _____.

Wrap Up

Romans 8:28-29

Understand: God prefers to work _____ the
_____.

Hebrews 11:1

My NEXT STEP for This Week:

- Identify the top three "stressors" in your life.
- Focus on God's providential hand in the midst of the "stressors."
- Reread the first two chapters of Esther.
- Prepare for the next two weeks in your Flock by reading chapter one of "*Let the Nations Be Glad*" by John Piper (check the box and we'll send you the email link).

When God Seems Missing

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Intro: One of the great challenges for Christians ... is to live by faith when God is silent or absent from our lives. There are many who consider themselves atheists ... but the biggest problem with atheism is not the atheist – it is the problem of those who claim to believe in God but live as if God is dead or missing in action. Practical atheists abound even in the church. Where does this atheism flourish? It flourishes with those in a faith dilemma - faith that has lost touch with God. Have you ever thought to yourself:

- ✓ *I don't see God.*
- ✓ *Where is He?*
- ✓ *What is He up to?*
- ✓ *Why am I here?*

These are not uncommon questions among believers.

It is not my purpose to blast and criticize Christians who are struggling to understand life. It is not my purpose to malign those who at times think God has abandoned them. It is my purpose to bring us back to an important truth – though God may seem missing in action – He is present and very much aware of what is going on in our lives ... and at work in our every circumstance.

Proverbs 15:3

The eyes of the Lord are in every place, watching the evil and the good.

And when we believe what God is saying here ... to then recognize that we need to live by faith not by sight.

II Corinthians 4:18

while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Transition: Today we begin a short series ... applying what Proverbs 15 and II Corinthians 4 declare as we examine the Book of Esther. God is at work even when He seems absent. All of this comes to light in this marvelous book.

God's salvation of the Jews by Queen Esther is commemorated in a Jewish holiday called "Purim." And it is by design that this message is being delivered today. For today, February 28th is the day of "PURIM." PURIM is the holiday celebrating what took place in the Book of Esther. Centuries ago, in the land of Persia, current day Iran, a wicked man sought to annihilate the Jews. Today ... Israelis are being threatened from the exact same region again.

The Book of Esther is extremely helpful in developing our faith and helpful in answering the question, *where is God and what is He up to?* For in a study of this book we see God at work behind the scenes in amazing ways. And what is quite strange ... we'll discover that the Book of Esther is the only book in the Bible where the name of God is never mentioned – not once! There is not one miracle and no altering of nature. The events may look as if they happen by chance – by coincidence. God's name never appears. But with the eyes of faith we find Him in every chapter. God purposely left His name out of the story so with the eyes of faith we can see Him everywhere.

“**Providence**” = Webster’s Dictionary defines it as *divine guidance or care*. A secondary definition was also provided – stating that **PROVIDENCE** is luck – leaving no one or nothing responsible for actions. Things simply happen by chance.

My friends, believers do not accept the notion that things happen by chance. God is the blessed controller of all things. **PROVIDENCE** IS God working behind the scenes to order events according to His will. There is no possible way that the events of Esther happened by chance. They are all orchestrated by a sovereign God.

This book gives us opportunity to see with the eyes of faith what God did centuries ago ... that we might also have eyes of faith to believe that He is working today. It is my hope and prayer that God by His Spirit will awaken your soul to His presence and plan for your own life.

➤ **God At Work SILENTLY**

The story takes place near the very end of the Old Testament period. Time after time God has warned Israel about her rebellion and idolatry. God has made it perfectly clear that He would not tolerate their sin. Just as predicted – God has sent Israel’s neighboring nations to destroy their cities – slaughtering most of the people but taking some captive for their sin. The story takes place in modern day Iran. The Jews are in captivity for their sin. Persia is God’s agent to punish Israel. Jews were threatened with annihilation back then ... and are being threatened with annihilation from the very same region today. The Book of Esther is the story of how God saved the Jewish people. And it is a story filled with applications for us today.

Esther 1:3-4

In the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his princes and attendants, the army officers of Persia and Media, the nobles and the princes of his provinces being in his presence.

1:4 And he displayed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his great majesty for many days, 180 days.

The wealth of this king is so immense it took him 180 days – half a year – to show off. At the end of the 180 days we read ...

Esther 1:5, 7

When these days were completed, the king gave a banquet lasting seven days for all the people who were present at the citadel in Susa, from the greatest to the least, in the court of the garden of the king’s palace.

1:7 Drinks were served in golden vessels of various kinds, and the royal wine was plentiful according to the king’s bounty.

Our story begins after a 7 day drinking party. King Ahasuerus is a tyrant – an absolute dictator. His ego is huge. He’s proud beyond measure. There is not even a hint of anything worthy of praise in this first chapter. Ahasuerus is having a wild party for the men ... and the queen is entertaining the wives. But let’s not forget ... *the eyes of the Lord are in every place, watching the evil and the good* ... and there isn’t anything good on the radar. Having too much to drink ... the king makes a bad decision.

Esther 1:11-12

to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown in order to display her beauty to the people and the princes, for she was beautiful.

1:12 But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. Then the king became very angry and his wrath burned within him.

The problem

The king's ego and too much wine ... a request of immodesty wanting his wife to show off her body, perhaps even a wife to wear her crown and only her crown ... before a bunch of drunk rulers. The only decent thing that comes to light in this request is the queen's refusal. But with her refusal the king is humiliated. He tries to save face by seeking counsel from a bunch of inebriated men.

Esther 1:16b-18

In the presence of the king and the princes, Memucan said, "Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king but also all the princes and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.

1:17 "For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women causing them to look with contempt on their husbands by saying, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in to his presence, but she did not come.'

1:18 "This day the ladies of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's conduct will speak in the same way to all the king's princes, and there will be plenty of contempt and anger.

Male chauvinism in the limelight ...

The men fear that Queen Vashti's defiance will make their wives defiant. It is quite apparent that these men are having problems at home ... and they want to keep their wives under their thumbs. They want to put some fear in their wives.

The suggested solution ...**Esther 1:19**

"If it pleases the king, let a royal edict be issued by him and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media so that it cannot be repealed, that Vashti may no longer come into the presence of King Ahasuerus, and let the king give her royal position to another who is more worthy than she.

Another motive comes to the surface ...**Esther 1:20**

"When the king's edict which he will make is heard throughout all his kingdom, great as it is, ***then all women will give honor to their husbands, great and small.***"

And the king agreed ...**Esther 1:22**

So he sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province ... that every man should be the master in his own house ...

Transition: The king was quite happy with the plan when under the influence ... but sobriety would return. And with sobriety comes regret ...

➤ God At Work Through A FOOLISH Decision

Esther 2:1

After these things when the anger of King Ahasuerus had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her.

The king is saying, *WHAT HAVE I DONE!?! HOW COULD I DO THIS TO MY WIFE THE QUEEN!?!? WHAT A FOOL I HAVE BEEN!*

But the Law of the Medes and Persians would not allow him to overturn his own decision. What was done was done. There was no turning back. Vashti was banished. Vashti is history.

What we observe

God's providence occasionally includes supernatural acts and miracles. But God's providence also includes His sovereign arrangement and placement of people in strategic places. Ordinary details and circumstances of life are weaved together to fulfill His plans. Again I remind you ... you will not find any miracle or the suspending of a natural law. But it doesn't take much to see that God is at work behind the scenes working all things after the counsel of His will.

Esther 2:2-4

Then the king's attendants, who served him, said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king.

2:3 "Let the king appoint overseers in all the provinces of his kingdom that they may gather every beautiful young virgin to the citadel of Susa, to the harem, into the custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let their cosmetics be given them.

2:4 "Then let the young lady who pleases the king be queen in place of Vashti." And the matter pleased the king, and he did accordingly.

Transition: To help the king deal with his regret and remorse for banning Queen Vashti ... an all MISS PERSIA PAGEANT would follow ...

➤ God At Work With AGENTS In Place

God's two key people have been strategically placed.

Esther 2:5-7

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

2:6 who had been **taken into exile from Jerusalem with the captives** who had been exiled with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had exiled.

2:7 He was **bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, his uncle's daughter**, for **she had no father or mother**. Now the young lady was beautiful of form and face, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.

Mordecai and Esther: God's servants in the right place at the right time.

Background

The Jews have been taken captive ...

They are hated by most people ...

But they are suffering for their rebellion against God.

BUT GOD HASN'T FORGOTTEN THEM!

Application

When believers lapse into compromise ... pain and misery will follow. God wants His children to know that He still hates sin. Pain, misery, guilt and shame in the life of the believer is God's chastening to get His children back to a place of blessing. The same lesson we learned in the Book of Ruth is the lesson to be learned in the Book of Esther. God will not ignore our compromise. But once He has our attention – once He's taken us to His woodshed ... He will restore our souls and return our joy.

I Corinthians 11:32

But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world.

Psalm 103:9

He will not always strive with us; Nor will He keep His anger forever.

Enter our two heroes

Mordecai and Esther.

- ✓ Mordecai is a godly Jew.
- ✓ He has taken Esther, his young niece, and has become her father.
- ✓ In his thinking – Esther is his daughter.

Because of the hatred of many towards Jews ... Mordecai made a decision for Esther

Esther 2:10

Esther did not make known her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make them known.

Esther is a secret saint.

A parallel to God's work ... the spy strategy. I enjoy spy stories – always have. Just this week Joel Rosenberg reported the story of Muslim who became a Christian. Not only did he become a follower of Jesus Christ, but also a spy against Hamas for Israel's secret service agency. As a spy for Israel he saved the lives of scores of Israelis from suicide bombings and other terror attacks, and helped Israel capture scores of Islamic terrorists. But what is even more remarkable ... this Muslim converted to Christianity ... is the oldest son of the leader of Hamas. No one was in a more strategic place as a spy as this man. Who would ever suspect the son of the military leader of Hamas?

God is in the business of placing His people in strategic places much like spies are placed. One spy might be placed in a location and left there for years, deep under cover to take action at a strategic time – to make a move that will change the course of history. God put two of His agents in Susa the capital – Esther and Mordecai. A friend of mine said that God is the

divine “spy-master”, placing His agents to be at the right place at the right time. Placing them where they will be needed – hidden to all but God Himself.

Esther is about to become God’s secret agent in the king’s palace. All the gorgeous girls had time in the palace so the king could make his choice. When the young gals were offered whatever they requested – and asked for this and that ... that was not received favorably. So the eunuch who was in charge of Esther ... warned her of this for he thought the world of her.

Esther 2:15

Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai who had taken her as his daughter, came to go in to the king, she did not request anything except what Hegai, the king’s eunuch who was in charge of the women, advised. And Esther found favor in the eyes of all who saw her.

Question

Was it wrong for Esther as a Jew to be in this beauty pageant?

The reality is – she only had a few options

- First – she could **refuse** to be part of the beauty pageant **and be executed**
- Second – she could be **participate** in the beauty pageant ... **and hope to lose** ...
- Third – she could consider herself a slave ... with no rights ... and accept whatever God allows

BUT DON’T MISS THIS!

Esther’s beauty is God-given! Her great looks were not accidental.

And here’s what I DON’T see ... I don’t see her pursuing a relationship with a godless king. Her place was to submit or die. So I’m not quite on the same page with those who view Esther as compromising her Judaism. As a Jew in captivity – she’s technically a slave. Slaves have no rights.

Evidence of God’s providence

- ✓ Esther’s presence in Susa
- ✓ Esther’s beauty
- ✓ Esther’s selection into the harem
- ✓ Esther’s favor before the eunuch in charge of the harem

Watch this ...

Esther’s presence in Susa and her beauty would have been of no value in saving the lives of Jews had it not been for God’s work behind the scenes from the foolishness and an inebriated king. And a key event ... a key cog in the wheel of providence is in place.

Esther 2:16-17

So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus to his royal palace in the tenth month which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

2:17 The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found favor and kindness with him more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

The secrecy continues ...

Esther 2:20

Esther had not yet made known her kindred or her people, even as Mordecai had commanded her; for Esther did what Mordecai told her as she had done when under his care.

Transition: Meanwhile ... back at the palace gate ... we observe

➤ **God At Work Through LOYAL Mordecai**

Esther 2:21-23

In those days, while Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's officials from those who guarded the door, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.

2:22 But the plot became known to Mordecai and he told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name.

2:23 Now when the plot was investigated and found to be so, they were both hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the Book of the Chronicles in the king's presence.

Think about it for a moment

If President Obama was told that someone had just saved his life by exposing an assassination attempt ... the event wouldn't merely be written down in a journal. News of such an act would be front page headlines. Invitations on TV shows would follow. And undoubtedly a visit to the White House would follow. But notice something strange in our story ...

Esther 2:23

"... and it was written in the Book of the Chronicles in the king's presence.

Mordecai's heroism would be recorded but not **REWARDED**

Application

My friends, this is often going to be the case for believers. You may do good things for others. But what you do may go unnoticed. But don't forget! God is watching.

Proverbs 15:3

The eyes of the Lord are in every place, watching the evil and the good.

Galatians 6:9

Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.

But don't miss this ...

Most of our rewards come when we are in glory ... not here on earth.

I Corinthians 15:58

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

In the first two chapters we see God putting his agents in place – Mordecai and Esther. It almost reads like a spy novel. Esther is under-cover as a Jew. Mordecai stays in close contact with her

and serves as her eyes. Mordecai will activate her when the time is ripe. God is giving instructions as the spy-master. But it is important for us to recognize: In order for these agents to be effective for God they must be godly people. Both Esther and Mordecai are people of character.

Esther's character

Esther 2:20

“... Esther did what Mordecai told her as she had done when under his care.

Mordecai's character

Esther 2:11

Every day Mordecai walked back and forth in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and how she fared.

Applications

Ephesians 1:11

“... {God} ... works all things after the counsel of His will

My friends, if we live as people of character and holiness ... we are God's secret agents – placed strategically by our sovereign God exactly where we can be used by Him.

- You are not **ALONE**

If you find yourself believing that God has abandoned you ... remember ... *the eyes of the Lord are in every place, watching the evil and the good.*

- Consider yourself to be God's **SPECIAL AGENT**

As I look out over this audience I see God's special agents. I see people that God has strategically placed. You may be a student – you are a strategic person for God. You may work for a company ... may work in an office ... you live in a neighborhood ... a family. All of these places are strategic places for God to do His work through you. In order to be effective agents – pursue godliness and holiness. Be people of character loyal to the values of our Great God and king.

- Don't forget God's **PROVIDENCE**

Things do not happen in your life by chance

Wrap Up

Romans 8:28-29

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

8:29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

Understand: God prefers to work **BEHIND** the **SCENES**

He does this so we will walk by faith not by sight

And our duty is to **TRUST** Him wholeheartedly!

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.