

The Cloud of Witnesses

Esther

Lesson 1: Esther – Captive Slave – Beautiful Virgin

Reading

Esther 2:1-18.

Prepare yourself to be used by God

We can either see Esther as someone who is so strong and full of faith and confidence - totally unlike most of us - or we can grasp the fact that she is just like us but put her faith in an awesome God!

Esther was a Jew. She had been captured as an infant and her family destroyed in front of her eyes. Her cousin, 'Uncle' Mordecai, had deemed it necessary to conceal their Jewish heritage in their new foreign homeland whilst still adhering to the strict traditions of their culture. She had been 'protected' from the ways of their local 'world' and had sufficient self-belief to keep herself in readiness for the future.

She had obviously become a 'stunning' young woman. Because when the time came for a replacement Queen to be found, although she was from a 'humble' family, her beauty – both outward and inward – enforced her selection to the tyrant's harem.

That was undoubtedly another tremendous 'shock' to her system. She would have expected to have followed the normal progression of life and married a Jewish husband and established a Jewish dynasty. Suddenly all those dreams were shattered and she became the potential second wife of a very dubious enemy ruler.

Even having been found in those frightening circumstances, her resolve to be the best person she could be won her the attention of her 'protectors'. As she prepared herself for the eventual meeting with the King, she did so with determined selflessness and with expectant success. She gave herself totally in order to please him. He was the absolute centre of her thoughts and plans. She was not concerned about herself – just making sure she pleased him.

What an attitude! What an example to follow! To stop being self-centred and to be totally Christ-centred!

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Lesson 1 continued: Esther – Captive Slave – Beautiful Virgin

Esther would say to us today...

Don't fall into the trap of immediate gratification. Wait for God, His timing is perfect. Keep separated out to Him, for He is worthy of everything we have and are.

Prayer

Father, I also live in a world, which is real and anti-Christ. Please help me realise that I am an eternal being and destined to live with You for Eternity. Give me the grace to keep myself unstained by the things of this world so that I may bring honour and glory to You and be ever ready to be used in Your service. Amen.

Additional readings

1 Peter 1:13-2:3; Psalm 1; Romans 12:1-8.

Questions

What are the things you do that help keep yourself Christ-centred rather than self-centred?

How can we make sure we become increasingly Heaven-focused rather than this world focused?

What are the areas of self-gratification that you need to beware of, which could detract you from being ready to serve God at a moment's notice?

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Lesson 2: Esther – Obedient Servant

Reading

Esther 4.

God wants to use YOU just where you are

I'm sure Esther thought that being Queen was generating quite enough excitement as it was and she definitely didn't need Haman determined to eradicate her people – The Jews. She may even have felt temporarily that she might be exempt, being Queen. However, Mordecai soon helped her see the truth. He also pointed out that God would rescue the Jews but that she could be a part of God's plan if she wanted to. And maybe that was why she had the 'job' she did!

How often people have come up to me over the years complaining that they didn't know what God wanted them to do! Usually they wanted to 'wait' for God to do some earth-shaking miracle through them!

Other times, people have come and asked if we could pray regarding a new job or a new house. We prayed and later they would come back excited so we could rejoice together. However, I often stopped them in their tracks by asking this simple question – Why has God given it to you?

You see we so often want God to bless us and give us an easy life. God has a much bigger plan in mind.

For example – He gives us our jobs, not only as part of His provision for us, but so we will be a witness to our colleagues; so we can pray for the boss and our fellow workers and introduce them to Jesus! The same is true of our neighbours. Never forget, we may be the only Christians they meet. We may be the only 'Jesus' they see!

There is another issue, which confronted Esther – and that was – what in your life is worth dying for? So many of us live mediocre lives because we have never found something worth dying for! In fact, you will never live your life to the full until you do! We were created for risk and eternity, yet we prefer safety and insignificance.

Those who have made an impact with their lives realised that there are issues greater than their comfort and have given themselves for a higher purpose. Remember Jim Elliot, one of the five martyrs to the Auca Indians of Ecuador, said those immortal words - *He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*

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Lesson 2 continued: Esther – Obedient Servant

Esther would say to us today...

Look for God to do extraordinary things wherever you are serving Him, at home and at work.

Prayer

Father, please help me never forget that You know all about me. You have given me the home where I live and the job I have at work. Help me be Your representative wherever I go, particularly at home and at work. Please give me the courage to use the opportunities You give me - to show my friends, family and work colleagues that I love You and serve You and because of that, love them and that I am there to serve them too. May this year be a year of breakthroughs - where I see many of my colleagues come to know and follow You. Amen.

Additional readings

Philippians 2:5-15; 2 Kings 5:1-16; Matthew 9:9-13.

Questions

Who are the 3 people at your work that God wants you to pray for and witness to this year?

Who are the 3 neighbours God wants you to get to know this year?

Who are the 3 people you could ask to a Church Service or an *Alpha* Course this year?

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Lesson 3: Esther – Victorious Hostess

Reading

Esther 5:1-8; 7:1-10.

Co-operate with God and miracles happen

Esther had every 'right' to go straight to the King and demand Haman's head for the decree he had bought in order to annihilate her people - the Jews. However, we find Esther the perfect hostess and gracious Queen. She showed what self-control is all about.

In one sense, the problem was not hers - it was Haman's and the King's! They had contrived the disaster. However, the rescue would require tact and wisdom. Esther obtained both. How? By waiting on God! She fasted and prayed. Notice she didn't fast for Haman's death – she fasted so she would obtain wisdom on how to save her people. We so often rush in to 'kill' the opposition rather than remembering the issue is to save the people!

As the old saying goes – when surrounded by hungry crocodiles it's hard to remember that we are here to drain the swamp!

Esther waited. She Fasted. She enlisted the support and 'buy-in' of the rest of the Jews before she approached the King. She knew she could die if he didn't want to see her! But she laid her life on the line. She then devised a plan to win over her husband, and yet at the same time, expose the wicked Haman.

Would it work? She hoped so, but as we read, there was a lot that could go wrong. Haman was already preparing to dispose of Mordecai. But he had omitted God from his plans!

Esther submitted herself to God and left the rest to Him. God had a few plans of His own and so Haman found himself promoting Mordecai rather than 'lifting him up' on the gallows he had made for him! Then at the second banquet, after Esther had asked for her life, He helped Haman fling himself at her. Not a good move in front of an irate husband and King!

She had begged for her life – Haman lost his! Then she had to write the law to redress the edict destroying the Jews – and it was so!

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Lesson 3 continued: Esther – Victorious Hostess

Esther would say to us today...

When your back is up against the wall, don't forget to look up, because Your Salvation is right there with you.

Prayer

Father, please help me remember that my deadlines are not necessarily Your deadlines! But more importantly, help me to remember that You have NEVER MISSED any of Your deadlines yet. Help me to look above the circumstances and see You reigning in majesty. Help me hold on to the truth that the circumstances of life NEVER change the promises of God – Your Promises to me. Help me to hold out for victory - just like Esther. Amen.

Additional readings

Luke 1:26-38; Exodus 14:10-31; Joshua 3:7-17; Psalm 37:3-7.

Questions

What stops us trusting God in emergencies?

How can we see 'through' the circumstances and accept the promises of God?

Why is it so hard to wait for God?

How can we learn to trust God in every situation?

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Lesson 4: Esther – Formidable Queen / Purim

Reading

Esther 9.

Never forget the times God came through for you

The second edict was passed and the courier troops raced throughout the land ensuring that even in the farthest towns, the message was heard – the Jews could defend themselves! What a mighty rescue – what a miraculous escape! No wonder they celebrated their freedom and escape. No doubt it reminded them of an earlier escape from Egypt. Both ‘escapes’ had the Hallmark and Hand of God upon them. They had the Feast of Passover to remind them of the rescue from Egypt – so Esther established the Feast of Purim to celebrate this rescue from their enemies.

When Abraham and Jacob met with God, they set up altars as places of remembrance. It was important to them and gave them a ‘map reference’ in their journey of life.

We all need them! I have many! I can think of many places in the world where I have had a ‘special’ or ‘significant’ encounter with God. One was in Ilfracombe in England. I realised for the first time in my life that God was interested in every aspect of my life and wanted an intimate relationship with me. One was in Carshalton, South London, where I found out that God still has the power to heal today! Many were in Christchurch, NZ where I found out Radio Rhema was a God-given and anointed ministry. One was in Tonga where I realised I had to give up working with Radio Rhema and start being a Pastor at Greenlane Christian Centre, Auckland.

Yes, we all need them and we all need to remember specifically that we have been ‘born again’ of the Spirit of God. That is why God established the Lord’s Supper – Communion. So we would remember that Jesus died for us – in our place and celebrate our rescue from sin and its penalty – the Wrath of God.

Let’s never take it for granted but use it as a time of reflection, thankfulness and celebration.

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Lesson 4 continued: Esther – Formidable Queen / Purim

Esther would say to us today...

Cultivate a gratitude attitude and above all else create memories that will out-live you!

Prayer

Father, may I never forget Your awesome Plan of Salvation! Thank You Lord Jesus for coming to this earth and for dying for the sin of the world. Thank You for dying in my place so I might be forgiven and have peace with God. Thank You Holy Spirit for coming into my life to be with me forever. Help me give You more and more authority in my life so I become more and more like Jesus to God's glory. Amen.

Additional readings

Joshua 23:14-16 & 24:14-24; Exodus 13:1-16; Luke 7:36-50.

Questions

Where are your 'spiritual' altars of remembrance?

Why is it so easy to become complacent and ungrateful?

How do we keep ourselves living with a gratitude attitude?

What have you done, or been involved with that will outlive you?