

A Vast Kingdom

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[0:00] Esther chapter 1, and tonight we'll read the first nine verses.! This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching!

from India to Kush. At that time, King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa. And in the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes and the nobles of the provinces were present. For a full 180 days, he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty.

When these days were over, the king gave a banquet lasting seven days in the enclosed garden of the king's palace for all the people from the least to the greatest who were in the citadel of Susa. The garden had hangings of white and blue linen fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings on marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother of pearl and other costly stones.

[1:23] Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other. And the royal wine was abundant in keeping with the king's liberality.

By the king's command, each guest was allowed to drink in his own way. For the king instructed all the wine stewards to serve each man what he wished.

Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes. Please turn with me in your Bibles or keep them open there already to the book of Esther in chapter 1.

Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms. If you can find your Psalms, you can find Esther just two chapters before.

We're going to embark on a study tonight. We're jumping from Nahum, before the exile of the people of Israel, all the way to after the exile, into the time of Esther.

[2:28] And recently there have been two Hollywood-level production movies that have been made regarding this time period. And one of them was about Esther. And it was released in theaters.

It was in theaters, right? Well, not in Bremen, but in South Bend. And interesting, I think, that two movies should be released so close together that deal with this particular time period. And one of them especially about the scriptures. Perhaps it's because it has to do with the Persian Empire. That's who Esther is living among, the people of Persia. And that's modern-day Iran. There's a certain level of interest in that. But movies are inadequate to portray historical truth. And they're woefully inadequate to portray biblical truth especially.

A movie about the Bible is troubling to me in some ways. God gave us the scriptures in the form that we have them for a reason. He gave them to us in His words.

[3:30] The way He tells the story is the way He wants us to understand it. He didn't give us video clips. He didn't give us movies. He gave us His word. And the ordained means that He's given for that word and the explanation of it is preaching.

The explanation and application of it. Preaching is the means that He's given. So, why would I want to subject myself to a filmmaker's interpretation of God's words when I have the exact words that He wanted me to have?

Why would I risk warping my understanding of the scriptures with a film that must and will take liberties with the text? That must and will add to and subtract from the text?

Well, I wouldn't. Now, I'm not saying you can't or even that the Bible necessarily forbids making or viewing movies about itself, about the Bible, just so that we're aware of some of the dangers associated with those things.

Personally, I'd much rather preach about it. Or listen to someone else preach about it. And you, for your part, apparently would rather listen to preaching than have us playing movies and video clips on the screen up here behind us.

[4:42] Otherwise, I don't think you'd be here. When you come to Grace Fellowship Church, you've come to expect preaching. That is what God calls us to do as a church, to preach the Word. And so, preaching by God's grace is what you'll get.

We aim to preach Esther now for his glory and for our prophet. We want to look just at these first nine verses tonight. I'm going to give you a little bit of the historical setting, just so we remember where we are in the history of Israel before diving in to see something of the vast so-called glory of the Persian Empire and why that should matter to us.

Well, the setting then. In Nahum, we were back before the exile. The Assyrians were in power. And they were going to be out of power quickly. That's what Nahum's all about.

Judgment is coming on Nineveh. And it came. And the Assyrians went off the scene. The Babylonians came on the scene. And they were a great and mighty people. And they came and they conquered Judah.

And they took off all the people or many of the people from Jerusalem into exile. And here are the great and strong Babylonians. But they didn't last very long either. Judah was in exile for maybe 70 years or so.

[5:54] And then along come the Medes and the Persians. And it's the Persian Empire where we find ourselves with the book of Esther. And so the Persians brought an end to the Babylonians.

Cyrus was king at that time. And he made a decree that the Jews could all go home. And he did that for other countries who had been taken captive. They can go back to their homeland.

And you can read about that. Ezra and Nehemiah. The Jews were allowed to go back. But not all of them did go back. Many of them stayed within the Persian Empire.

That's a little bit puzzling to us. But many of those people had known nothing but life in exile. Even the very woman that we're going to consider in the book of Esther. Her Hebrew name is Hadassah. She was a young woman. And had no doubt never seen Jerusalem. She was born in exile. And so many people, many Jews, all they had never known was life away from Jerusalem.

[6:53] And they weren't eager to give that up. Some of them. Didn't want to go to the unknown. To what they had never seen before. And so there remained a remnant of the Jews in the Persian Empire.

Esther among them. And one commentator. His name's Ian Dugood. He was one of my professors in seminary. He's written a commentary on Esther. And he points out that for those living in the Persian Empire, the Jews living there, it must have been a difficult time.

A time of tension. The temptation on the one hand to assimilate and to be just like the Persians around them. To be just like their culture. To be wicked as they were wicked. And a temptation on the other hand to begin to despair.

They hadn't seen God's hand move in the way that maybe the Israelites back in Egypt saw it. And plagues coming on this nation that was ruling over them. And somebody great and mighty like Moses to lead them out.

And so a bit of despair setting in. Is God really going to be faithful to His people? And there's parallels here for our day. Here we live in a kingdom that we're not a part of.

[8:02] We live in the kingdom of the world. But we're citizens of the kingdom of heaven. And there's temptation on the one hand to become like the world that we live in. You face that temptation. You feel that pressure. I feel it every day.

To be like the world that we live in. To assimilate. So that nobody could tell a difference between us and them. And maybe a temptation, if we're honest with ourselves, sometimes to despair.

We look around and we see all the wickedness all around us. Is God going to do anything? Is He going to deliver us? Is He going to save us? Is He really going to come back?

Is there really a heaven? And the answer is a resounding yes. And we know that. But sometimes in our weaker moments, we might despair and doubt and wonder. So it was for the Jews in the land of Persia.

Well, there's a bit of the background. But our story now begins with a mighty king. A great king, at least in his own eyes. His name is Xerxes. Some of your Bibles might have the name Ahasuerus.

[9:05] That's his Hebrew name. And so, some translations go with what he's known as to history. Xerxes, that's what I'll be calling him. And Ahasuerus is his Hebrew name. And we want to see several things.

Several kings had come and gone. Cyrus was the one that let the Jews go back. And then there was Darius. And you can read some about him and Daniel. And another king in there. And now there's Xerxes.

And he's on the throne of a great empire. And we want to see four things about these Persians. There's a vast empire.

There's a vast display. A vast banquet. And vast wealth. And kids, vast. You know what that means? It means extensive. You stand before the ocean and it's vast.

You can't see the ends of it. It stretches as far as the eye can see. And that's what we've got with Persia. We begin with a vast empire. You see it was 127 provinces.

[10:00] It went from India to Kush, the author tells us. And generally speaking, sort of roughly, that includes parts of modern day. If you know your geography, get over to the Near East.

And you see India. And then Afghanistan and Pakistan. Iran, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Israel. Not sure how much of the peninsula was Saudi Arabia that included.

And part of northeastern Egypt. It was vast. It was a huge empire. The Babylonians had a big empire. And so when the Persians conquered it, they took over it. And then they kept expanding. So 127 something provinces that this great king Xerxes rules over. And of course there's people to rule each of those provinces. And people to rule under them.

And rulers that are over the rulers. And so Xerxes has got this great big empire. And a great big bureaucracy to deal with. A whole bunch of people underneath him that he's got to handle and manage.

[10:59] And we'll see that he probably wasn't the best at that. But it's a vast empire. And that wasn't enough. They continued to expand. Again, Xerxes led his armies all the way west to Greece.

And tried to even conquer Greece. But he was turned back. That's, if you're interested, that's what the other movie that's out is about. One of the battles that took place there. And apparently it's terribly inaccurate.

So I wouldn't recommend that either. But that's what it's about. Xerxes trying to expand the empire even farther. To get even bigger. But he was defeated by the Greeks.

He didn't get to take over Greece. In fact, he quit and went back and left his army commander there and said, You keep trying. And eventually they were defeated and had to come back. And that was early in his reign.

You see, this takes place in the third year of his reign. What's recorded here in Esther. He's probably already been to Greece. Lost the battle and come back. But still he's got a vast empire underneath him.

[11:57] And so, here he is. He wants to put his wealth on display. He wants everybody to see it. He wants everybody to know just how great our kingdom is. Just how great Persia is. Just how great I, Xerxes, am.

And so, after the vast kingdom, we see there's a vast display. This man throws a six-month party. That's a long time. Six months.

Well, he's got a lot of people to move in and out of that capital to show him how great he is. He's got 127 provinces worth of people. You see, he opens it up to display the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and the glory of his majesty.

And probably during those 180 days, maybe somebody from this province this day comes in and the rulers of that province and the military leaders there come in. And they have a feast with the king and then they go home and another province comes in.

And 180 days of this. Look at how great I am for 180 days. It would be sort of like if George Bush threw a big party. So, we're going to have six months. And state by state, you can all come to Washington, D.C.

[13:02] And you can see how great we are. And I haven't been to Washington, D.C. And I haven't seen anything like it's described here in chapter one. But let's say there's something there worth seeing. There's things there worth seeing.

Let's say there's something there like this. This royal majesty. And so, George says, or President Bush says, come on in. And so, the governor from Indiana and maybe some mayors of some of the

bigger towns and some leaders of the government bases, they all go and they spend a day in Washington.

And they say, oh, well, George Bush, he's a pretty impressive dude. Pretty great country we belong to here. And then he throws a feast that night and then they go back. And then another state comes in.

That's what Xerxes is doing here. He's showing off. He's proud of what he's got. And he wants everybody to know about it. And so, you begin to see something of the large nature of the kingdom and the large nature of the man's ego.

And how proud he is. And then to conclude it all, after this vast display for 180 days, he throws a vast banquet. Now, this is seven straight days of feasting.

[14 : 09] He's brought people in from all over the kingdom. But he doesn't want to neglect the people at home right there in the capital of Susa. And so, he invites everybody from the least to the greatest. He'll even let the poor people come in to see what a great thing he's got in his palace.

And what a great kingdom he has. And so, for seven days, the people of Susa party. They are treated well. Men and women.

There's so many of them that in this instance, the queen has a separate party for the ladies while the king throws a party for the men. That's who was there. And while they were there, they did plenty of drinking.

The wine flowed freely. It was abundant from the hand of the king. Even after six months of entertaining guests, the wealth and generosity of Xerxes was such that you could drink all you wanted.

Six months hadn't put a dent in the resources of this man and his vast kingdom. And so, seven days now of feasting. And how much did they drink? Well, they could drink as much as they wanted or as little as they wanted.

[15 : 10] And we begin to get a little peek into Xerxes here and the way the Persian Empire runs. He even had a decree that said, you can drink whatever you want. As much or as little as you want.

These Persians, man, they start throwing decrees around. And these are unalterable decrees. You remember what happened with Daniel? Darius, the king, his advisors trick him into making a decree that's going to catch Daniel.

He can only pray to the king. Well, then they find Daniel. He's praying to God. And so Daniel's got to be thrown to the lions. And Darius doesn't like it. He likes Daniel. Doesn't want to throw him to the lions.

But he made the decree. And he can't change it in Persia. And so, to the lions it is with Daniel. And you'll see that again in Esther. This is a pretty flimsy government they've got going here.

They've got decrees about how much a man can drink. And it's actually not a decree at all because he can drink whatever he wants to drink. And so, it's a decree to say there really isn't a decree. And you can do whatever you want.

[16 : 13] The man is doing some serious micromanaging. He's got his fingers everywhere. That's how controlling he is. How controlling their kings are. That's how the thing is set up.

And so, he makes even this decree. He makes it sound like they're free, but he's still exercising his control. And so, they celebrate for seven days in the city of Susa. Wow, this is some king.

And the last thing we want to see about the Persian Empire is its vast wealth. The people that came in from the provinces those 180 days. Those people from Susa, those last seven days.

They saw some impressive stuff. This was one rich empire. This was one rich man, this Xerxes. There were hangings around the garden and the courtyard of the palace made of the finest materials.

And the royal colors, purple and white. And they were tied back to marble columns with rings of silver. And the people reclined on gold and silver couches. And it's not just gold material.

[17 : 14] The material was gold. The material was silver. Woven together to create couches that they reclined on. The man paved the floor of the palace with things that we would lock up in safety boxes.

And that other lesser kingdoms would have to use as part of the wealth of their kingdom. This man is so rich, he paves the floor with it. It's like gravel to him. You know, we're building a building out here.

God's been good to bless us with it. But, you know, if we have to put a sprinkler system in the building. And we're hoping to get a variant so we don't have to. If we have to put a sprinkler system. That's a pretty big hit in the budget for the building. And so if we do that, we might have to go without a paved parking lot. We might have to just have gravel for a while. Until we get the money. I'm not complaining. I'm just saying that's how it is. Xerxes didn't have that problem. Okay? He could pave the parking lot. And the rest of the five acres we got here.

[18:15] And whatever else. With mother of pearl and marble and stones that we don't even know what they are. Alright? This is a rich man. It's a rich kingdom.

Everybody there is drinking out of a vessel. Goblet made of gold. And no two goblets are alike. They're all unique. Now that might drive some of you ladies nuts. If your glasses don't match. You've got to have them all the same when you've got company.

Well, here's a sign of wealth. That they don't match. There's no two that are alike. Maybe that works too. I don't know if they're all different. Maybe that makes it okay for hosting.

But anyway, this man is rich. He's got everything. Everything. And he can throw it around like it's gravel. And so the first nine verses of Esther give you just a little bit of a picture.

Some insight into the Persian Empire in general. And Xerxes, this king in particular. And that's the world the Jews found themselves in. The ones that remain behind. This is the world that they live in.

[19:15] Looks a little bit like our world, doesn't it? A world that's obsessed with wealth and power. A lot like our world, I'd say. This man was living the, I don't know what sort of dream.

The dream a lot of people have. I want to have a lot of money and I want to have a lot of power. And so the Jews were surrounded with people just like we're surrounded with. And so there's some lessons for us to be learned.

What can we learn tonight from the vast empire, this vast display, this vast banquet, the vast wealth of Xerxes and the Persians?

We haven't even talked about Esther yet and we're not really going to very much tonight. But this all sets the stage, these opening verses. There's great danger in these things.

And some of these lessons tonight will anticipate things that come later in Esther. And so I'm going to assume that you know something about the story tonight. But they bear noting now. And the first thing we want to note tonight is that there is great danger in great wealth.

[20:21] There's great danger in great wealth. Xerxes was as wealthy as they come. And he wanted everybody to know it. Now there's nothing wrong with being wealthy. It's what you do with that wealth.

And the attitude you carry that wealth with that matters. There's some things that we should know and we learn them from this Xerxes and from some of what history tells us about him.

And the first thing that we see in this danger of wealth is that money doesn't buy happiness. Money does not buy contentment. And Xerxes had a lot of stuff.

He had a lot of money. More than any of you will ever see in your lifetime. Probably more than all of us combined will ever see in our lifetime. But it seems that Xerxes didn't have a lot of friends.

He didn't have a lot of contentment in his life. He wanted a bigger kingdom so he goes and tries to conquer Greece.

[21:22] And he fails there. So after that he pretty much stayed home just enjoying the wealth and power that he already had. And he became discredited in the eyes of some of his people because he failed to conquer Greece.

And so he's trying to win them back over with this great show of wealth. Look at all this. I'm still a great guy. We've still got this vast kingdom. But listen to what one historian says about him. Xerxes had become completely discredited and so turned to a life of licentious indulgence. He dallied with the most beautiful women of the court including the wives of some of his chief officials. And thereby sowed the seeds of irreparable dissension. At last his dissipation was rewarded by assassination at the hands of a palace official or a jealous husband. So Xerxes fails to conquer Greece.

He comes home and he says, well, I'll try to find satisfaction with other women. He had a beautiful Queen Vashti. He got rid of her. He had a beautiful Queen Esther. He was still messing around with other ladies because he wasn't satisfied.

[22:26] He tried to find his satisfaction in wine and wealth and all these things. And it appears from all indications in history that Xerxes came up empty. He had so much but he wanted more.

He wanted the praise of his friends. So he invites them in. Tries to buy friends. Pay them off with these vast feasts. Kept trying to fill his life but found himself empty.

And that's what you will find. You can fill your cup with money. You can have the biggest, best, and latest, and finest that money can buy of everything.

The biggest TV and the smallest, whatever the latest gadget is. And you can try to find happiness in those things. And you can try to impress people so they'll be your friends with those things.

But if that's your source of joy, if that's all you've got, then you've got nothing. No happiness. No real contentment.

[23 : 26] You might say you're content. Okay, I've got all this stuff. I'm set. I'm good to go. But when you're honest with yourself, if that's what you're living for, then there is no contentment. And so if you don't have great wealth tonight, don't sweat it.

No big deal. It can't buy you happiness. It can't buy you contentment. And if you do, don't make it your hope. Don't set your hope on money and the things that it buys.

Only knowing God can bring you peace and satisfaction in the contentment that comes with it.

Bishop Hall says this, talking about this passage in Esther.

He says, nothing can fill the heart of man but he that made it. Nothing can fill the heart of man but he that made it. Now we have a way of saying that in our day.

Say we've got a, there's a God-shaped hole in our heart and only God can fill it. That's right. I like Bishop Hall a little bit better. Nothing can fill the heart of man but he that made it.

[24 : 25] You can try to fill your heart up with all sorts of stuff. Starting with money and then working out from there. But if you fill it with anything except the God who made it, you're going to be empty.

You're going to be sad. You're going to be discontent. Money cannot buy happiness or contentment. It also can't buy you wisdom. You'll see this more clearly in the weeks to come. Here's a great and powerful kingdom, but Xerxes wasn't such a wise ruler.

I mean he's got decrees about how much you can drink and not drink. And after this, we'll see some irony in Esther. The author points some things out very subtly in subtle ways.

And right here in the first chapter, you get this glorious picture of the Persian Empire. This grand empire. And then right after that, you see that Xerxes' own house is in disarray. Even his relationship with his wife is fractured and broken.

So how can he be king over a country if he can't rule his own house well? He wasn't wise. His problems start to show up in chapter 1. Later, we see that he doesn't have the wisdom to see through Haman's pride and his selfishness and his personal ambition.

[25 : 34] Money doesn't guarantee wisdom or success. It didn't for Xerxes. It won't for you either. Wisdom is a gift from God. It's not something you can buy. And money, we see, puffs up.

It makes the bearer of the money think that he's really something special. And we're going to talk about pride as its own separate lesson. But money is feeding this. Xerxes is pretty pleased with himself. And money can do that to you.

And make you proud. He would have done well to look back to the wisdom of Solomon. Proverbs 15 and verse 16. Better a little with the fear of the Lord than great wealth with turmoil.

He had great wealth. But man, it was a mess. It was turmoil. And we'll see it next week even. The kingdom was at odds with itself. Even in his own house.

He had great wealth. But he had turmoil. Better, says Solomon, is just a little. Just a dish of vegetables where love is. Where the fear of the Lord is.

[26 : 32] Much better, you all. I hope you're not envious of the wealthy. I hope it doesn't make you turn green with envy. When you see how much other people have.

Especially you young people. This world feeds materialism. And you get it fed to you at school. And in advertising. And everything that you see. Everything feeds materialism. This need for stuff.

And if you're going to have to have stuff, you need money. It's this love of money. It's the root of all sorts of evil. It feeds discontent. It feeds covetousness in your heart. It can lead to things like stealing. It'll land you in a world of hurt.

And the world is just dumping that on you all. Stuff. You've got to have stuff. But Solomon says, Better is a little bit, if you've got the fear of the Lord.

Than great wealth and turmoil with it. The world's saying, You need this. You need this. I don't need that. I have Jesus. And I don't need anything else. So if you've got Jesus tonight, Rest content.

[27:31] Thank Him. Say, Lord, if you call me to live in a mud hut the rest of my life, And all I had was Jesus, We should be content with that. Wealth cannot buy you contentment.

It can't buy you happiness. If you've got Jesus, be thankful for Him. And if you don't, run to Him tonight. Say, God, I've been running after the wrong thing. I've been living my life for stuff.

For money. And for what all the world has to offer. I'm missing the point. God, be merciful to me, the sinner. And if you've got the fear of the Lord, Then you've got everything you need.

Better a little with the fear of the Lord, Than great wealth with turmoil. But secondly, there's great danger and great power. There's great danger with great wealth.

There's great danger with great power as well. So, the size of one's empire doesn't indicate the level of God's blessing. The Persians had a vast empire, but they didn't have God's blessing.

[28:32] They were simply instruments in the hand of God. And they too would come crashing down off the scene of history, Just like the Assyrians before them. Just like the Babylonians. There was only one nation of God in those days, And it was Israel.

And they might have been scattered to the four winds. Some in Persia, some over here. A few have gone back to Jerusalem. But, better to be part of the people of God, Than to be part of this great and vast empire without the blessing of God.

They were fools like those before them. They believed that they were the ones with power. We're strong, and so we're safe. Right? Well, maybe you better take some notes from Assyria and from Babylon.

And so you will find out. You may be in a position with some power. Maybe among your friends.

You carry a certain weight. Certain authority. Maybe it's at work, at home, at school.

Just because you have a position of power and authority, Doesn't mean you're receiving God's blessing. And that everything is okay. You see, the only safe place for you to be, Is in the powerful hands of God.

[29:41] The Persians were against God, And so they were doomed to destruction. And if you're against God, No matter how strong you may think you are, If you are against God, Then you too are doomed to destruction.

You cannot stand against a great and powerful God. You know, if you had asked somebody back then, Who would you rather have as your ally? Persia? Oh, vast empire. Strong army.

Or, the Israelites. A scattered handful of people here and there, With hardly a land to call their own. Just a wee little piece of land, And that really belongs to Persia too.

Anybody would have picked Persia for their ally. And so the wisdom is not in aligning yourself with the greatest, With the strongest, But rather, with God, Who is greater than all.

And stronger than all. There is where your hope lies. You might think it's wise to align yourself with powerful people around you, And to have the most power yourself, But the only safe place to be is with the all powerful God, In His hands.

[30:47] With great power comes this danger of self-sufficiency, And security. I'm strong enough, And so I'll be okay. I've made it this far for myself, And so I'll be fine.

But if God is not your hope and trust, Then you are to be pitied for your foolish self-confidence, Just like the people of Persia. I want to make just a note about the nation that we live in.

The United States of America. We are a privileged and blessed people to live in this country. And it is a great country. And it is a powerful country.

But if your hope is in the fact that you're a citizen of the United States of America, Then your hope is sadly misplaced. There's only ever been one nation, One geopolitical group on the earth, That could claim to be the people of God.

And that was Israel. Prior to the coming of Christ. Only one theocracy. Direct rule by God. And since the coming of Christ, There has not been a theocracy on earth, Nor will there be one.

[31:53] And that means the United States is not the people of God. There might be a lot of Christians that live here, But you can't say that it's a Christian nation, In the sense that it's the nation that God has chosen to bless, Because we are His people.

Not so. That's not how it works. So don't be lulled into a sense of comfort and security, Because you live in this country. God is not on the side of the United States, Or any other country.

You be thankful for the privileges that come with living here. I don't mean to demean the great privilege that is ours in this country. But don't put your trust in it. Your only safety, Your only security, Your only certainty, Comes from knowing God.

You can have that no matter what country you live in. So we need not fear when other countries rise to power. We need not fear when it seems as though the United States might be slipping, In the world's standings.

When it seems as though another country might be powerful enough to defeat the United States of America. Not a problem for us. Because we have the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is our Lord, Our King, Our Master.

[33:10] No country can save you. Only God can. And so we don't need to fear When the culture around us rises up, And we look and we see how strong it is.

And we see how strong the influences are. And there's great power in the media, And all these things that seek to influence us. But if our hope is in the Lord, If we are in the hands of the Almighty God, Then we need not fear these things.

Fight against them, Yes. Make a stand as a country, Yes. But don't put your hope and trust in it. Our only hope and trust is in God, Who made the heavens and the earth.

If He is your strength, You need not fear. And so we see with the Persians, That power too puffs up, Just like money does. It gives that sense of security, That leads to pride.

And so Xerxes' head is getting bigger and bigger. Persian Empire, Prouder and prouder. And so the third thing that we see, Is that there is great danger in pride. Xerxes was proud of his kingdom.

[34:15] That's why he threw this party for 180 days, Where he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom, And the splendor and the glory of his majesty. Do you remember another king, That made the same mistake?

Pastor John talked about him last Sunday afternoon, When he reported on the general assembly in Arbca, Or for Arbca out in Arizona. When we were there, Pastor Ted Christman from Owensboro, Warned us about the danger of pride, And the place he took us was to King Hezekiah, Who made the same mistake that Xerxes made.

Listen to 2 Kings 20, In verse 13, Hezekiah has been blessed of the Lord, Richly blessed. He's one of the kings of Judah. And God has poured out His blessing on him, And the Babylonians send some envoys to Hezekiah, And this is what he does.

Hezekiah received the messengers, And showed, That's the same word that's in verse 4 here, Displayed. Hezekiah displayed, He showed them all that was in his storehouses, The silver, The gold, The spices, And the fine oil, His armory, And everything found among his treasures.

There was nothing in his palace, Or in all his kingdom, That Hezekiah did not show them. Oh, Hezekiah was succumbed to the sin of pride. Look at this great well. Look at my great kingdom.

[35:31] And what happens? Later in 2 Kings 20, Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, Hear the word of the Lord. The time will surely come, When everything in your palace, And all that your fathers have stored up until this day, Everything you just showed, Those messengers, It will be carried off to Babylon.

Nothing will be left, Says the Lord. And so Hezekiah brings down judgment on himself, Because of his pride. And judgment is going to come on Xerxes, Because of his pride.

And on the Persians. What do you do when God has greatly blessed you? Invite everyone in to see how great you are. Look at all this stuff. Look at how great I am. Look at my accomplishments.

Look at how well I did last week in that game. Look at how well I've done. Or do you give the glory and praise to God?

Again, the wisdom of Solomon is appropriate. In Proverbs 16, Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall. So it was with Hezekiah. So it was with Xerxes.

[36:33] So it will be with you. And your pride. When God blesses you, Acknowledge Him. Give the praise to Him. And give the glory to Him. You would be nothing, Except for His blessing and strength in your life.

And so if God has blessed you with wealth, Or with power. Good. Praise Him for it. Don't take the credit to yourself. Don't come. Have everybody come and see how great you are. Don't let it become an occasion to boast, Or to take credit for yourself.

Your end will be like that of Hezekiah, Or that of Xerxes. It doesn't matter if you're a preacher, Or an athlete, Or a faithful employee, Or a student that's gotten great grades, Or a homemaker.

The glory isn't due to your name. It's due to the Lord. And so if He has blessed you, Give Him the thanks and the praise. And if somebody comes and praises you, And blesses you, You give that glory to God.

We ought to be like a wall, A sheet of plywood that's at a 45 degree angle. If you take a tennis ball, And there's a sheet of plywood at a 45 degree angle. You throw a tennis ball at it, What's going to happen?

[37 : 37] It hits that plywood, And which direction does it go? It goes up. Eventually comes back down, But all illustrations break down. But we ought to be like that sheet of plywood. Praise comes to us, It should hit us and go straight up.

Be deflected right to the Lord. We ought to be like, Whenever you get praise, You think about a sheet of plywood at a 45 degree angle. And you say, It should just hit me and go right up. Well, praise the Lord for it.

It's only because God gave me strength. Thank God for it. Because pride is a sin that will eat you alive. You'll be consumed all of a sudden with yourself.

Instead of with God and with His glory. And so may it be an occasion when you are praised for God to get the glory. And so there's danger in great wealth.

There's danger in power. There's danger in pride. And then there's danger in too much wine. It's right here on the surface. And so it can hardly avoid it.

[38 : 35] There's danger in too much wine. I don't have a lot to say here. You'll see the danger of it next week. While Xerxes and his buddies, his advisors, Try to write decrees when they're under the influence of alcohol. It's not pretty.

There's great danger in too much wine. Listen again to Solomon. Proverbs 20 and verse 1. Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler. Whoever is led astray by them or intoxicated by them is not wise. Or a word for the king. Listen up, Xerxes. Proverbs 31.4. For it is not for kings, O Lemuel, Not for kings to drink wine, Nor for rulers to crave beer, Lest they drink and forget what the law decrees, And deprive all the oppressed of their rights.

Or drink and try to write decrees, And deprive the oppressed of their rights. There's danger in too much alcohol. The abuse, the excessive use of alcohol is never acceptable, right, or wise.

It might look like a lot of fun. You young people, listen up. It might look like people are fun when they're under the influence of too much alcohol. I assure you, they are not having fun.

[39 : 45] It is never wise, nor safe, nor right, To lose the control of your faculties, of your mind, of your ability to think, With too much alcohol.

And we see the danger of it here, As the wine flows freely from the hand of the king. There's great danger in too much wine.

And then finally tonight, Where is God in Esther? Or even in these first nine verses. You probably already know this little piece of trivia.

Esther is the only book of the Bible that doesn't mention God. His name is not named in this book. But if you can't see Him here, you're blind.

You know from studying Nahum that it was God that brought down the Assyrians. It was God that brought down the Babylonians. And it will be that with Persia as well.

[40 : 46] It's God that brings them low. It's God that puts kings in their place. And so it will be with Xerxes. It's God that puts kings in their position of authority.

Xerxes had no right to be proud of his power. God put him there. It's by His hand that He ruled. And God is at work right here in these verses. He's preparing for the removal of the current queen to allow the rising of Esther to a place of prominence and influence and great usefulness.

God is on the throne and He is in control even when crazy Persians are partying and drinking too much. God is at work. God is at work. We've seen great danger tonight, but there's great good whenever God sees fit to intervene on behalf of His people.

Not just the Jews, but us as well. All of this sets the stage for Esther to rise to a position of influence. And there, she's instrumental in sparing the Jews from being systematically and totally destroyed, wiped off the face of the earth.

And you know what that allows to happen? You know, if the Jews had been wiped out, there would be no way of salvation because the Messiah wouldn't have come.

[41 : 58] And so right here around this drunken table of Persians, God is paving the way for His Son to come into the world. By preserving His people, making the way for Esther.

They're going to get drunk and they're going to invite Vashti in. She's not going to come. That's going to make the king mad. So he's going to get rid of her and he's going to want a new wife. And Esther is that wife. And she's then in the position to intervene on behalf of the Jewish people when

Haman gets his crazy idea that he wants to kill them all.

God stops all of that right here. Right here we see His hand at work. He saves the Jews and so He saves the line of His Son being brought into the world. Not just so there could be temporal hope for Esther and the Jews in her day that they would be saved right then, but an eternal hope for them and an eternal hope for us.

Not just the temporary preservation of the Jewish people, but the eternal preservation of all of God's people. Is at stake right here in the first nine verses of Esther.

And that's a good thing. Because you know what? I'm prone to have a lust for things. For money. I'm prone to have a lust for power.

[43:11] I'm prone to pride. I'm prone to greed. I'm prone to all these things that we've just been warned against right here in these first nine verses.

And if God hadn't brought His Son into the world, then there'd be no hope for me. I'd be wallowing in these sins with no hope of forgiveness. And so would each of you. But God has seen fit to bring His Son into the world.

To preserve the line of Christ so that we might have forgiveness of sins. So that having been forgiven, we might be empowered by Jesus living in us by His Spirit to walk in newness of life. God is faithful to His people. And so we give Him thanks and praise for it. And so tonight we go from here with a grateful heart that God is on the throne bringing all things to pass as He desires. And doing it for His own glory and for our good. Do you believe that? Then go and live like you believe it. Resting in His strength.

[44:15] Not your own. Him being your confidence. Not your wealth. Not your things. Humbled before Him. Not proud. May God help us to live our lives in the light of His great faithfulness to us.

Let's join our hearts together as we pray. Our Father, we thank You that You have given us Your Word in which You record for us history, stories, and even this story of Esther and this Persian Empire that we see so vividly portrayed.

We thank You that even in these stories there is great wisdom for us to learn. We pray that You would help us to learn it well. We pray that You would give us grace to beware of the dangers of money and of power and of pride.

We pray that You would give us grace to guard our hearts against these sins that can so easily consume us. And we pray instead that we would be consumed with Jesus and what He has done for us.

We pray that we would live our life in His strength as He dwells in us by His Spirit. We thank You that You have given us the great gift of Your Son and so the great gift of salvation.

[45:22] May we delight in these things. May we be content in the fear of the Lord and what You have provided for us. Give us grace to not be turned aside by this world that we live in, but to set our face toward the glorious heaven that is our home, the place to which we are headed.

Encourage our hearts with thoughts of heaven. And we thank You that You will be with us each step of the way, watching over, keeping us, showing Yourself faithful. Give us grace to live a life of faithfulness and return to You, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.