

Remaining True in the Face of a Pervasive Empire (Esther 1:1-22)

- Life for the Israelites in the midst of the Persian Empire was challenging
- Like a colony of ants on a branch amidst a sea of Persian paganism & culture
- These Jews were born & remained in Persia 50 years after the exile
- God was no longer revealing himself in mighty acts as He did in Exodus
- In a pluralistic society it is difficult to keep balance when it could cost you dearly

I. Double Edged Temptation: Assimilation and Despair

- Two primary temptations the Jews faced in Esther's day we can relate to.
- Assimilation: all around the Jews were the temples, the rituals of Persian culture
- Expressions of Persian power, the soldiers, the vulnerability of all they owned
- Why strive to remain distinctive as God covenant people? Why not give in?
- Real temptation to give in & take the attitude, "if you can't beat them join them"
- There was also the temptation of despair: How could the Jews hold on to hope
- Surrounded by paganism as far as the eye could see, distinctiveness seemed futile
- Esther gives a 2 fold answer: Satire: 1st poking fun at the Empire's pettiness
- 2nd: Understand the fact that God was working things out quietly in providence

II. The Lifestyles of the Rich and Infantile

- We are introduced in the book of Esther to the great empire of Ahasuerus: 1:1-9
- Opulence & decadence of this king leave us in awe but also nauseated by it (v.8)
- No detail escapes the emperors: edict given to ensure none are under compulsion
- Such petty bureaucracy speak of no power, when such minutiae must be regulated

III. The Crumbling Empire

- Ahasuerus sends 7 of his royal eunuchs to fetch Vashti, she refuses (v. 12)
- Powerful emperor is thwarted by a woman & a royal conference is held (13-15)
- Ahasuerus' advisors were terrified that this rebellion would spread (16-18)

IV The Empire's Swift Response

- Vashti's rebellion really achieved very little, she lost everything (1: 19-20)
- The entire weight of the empire went behind sending out the edict (1:19)
- The rebellion they tried to curb, only ended up being spread far & wide though
- If it was meant to inspire respect for the husbands it in fact did the opposite
- We may be impressed by his power but we can't help laugh at his stupidity