

23.1.22 pm

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Date: 23 January 2022

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[ 0 : 00 ] Good evening and a warm welcome to the service this evening. Those here in the building and those who are watching online, we come together to worship God.

And we'll begin this time of worship by singing to God's praise from Psalm 46 and the last two verses of the Psalm in Gaelic. A psalm where we're called to come to God and find refuge and find strength in him.

A call that we need to hear all the time, but we hear so clearly, especially when as a congregation we seek comfort and we seek strength in our time of loss.

So let's worship God and we sing Psalm 46 verses 10 and 11 in Gaelic. Be still and know that I am God. Among the heathen I will be exalted. I on earth will be exalted high.

Our God who is the Lord of hosts is still upon our side. The God of Jacob, our refuge forever will abide. So we'll sing these two stanzas of the Psalm to God's praise in Gaelic.

[ 1 : 07 ] And after that, John McSween will come up to the lectern here and lead us in prayer in Gaelic, please. God of Jacob, our refuge in Gaelic, please. God of Jacob, our refuge in Gaelic, please.

God of Jacob, our refuge in Gaelic, please. Cause I will ■■■ good me Myocate And Whole Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[ 4 : 03 ] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. aura■ hell fond hell I-tu jj ICE saying again , no I E ICE saying again , kvin protege ,

Listen 1995 Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[ 7 : 29 ] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[ 12 : 29 ] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. I'm sorry. Thank you. Look at our poor sins.

Iran June but they rewrote their hours to do something.

Also, we should get their■■■■ to get a ancestor, and they try to see, as the second thing we saw were doing, for example, in a couple of a few hours of rain during rainss quite frequently.

And even everyEM is good. Amen. We're still online, Joyce? We are? Okay.

[ 14 : 32 ] If you could, well, you don't need to open your hymn books. Well, maybe you do actually need to open your hymn books. The next hymn is Mission Praise 327.

But we might need to just wait a moment or two before it's sorted out. Boys and girls, good to see a few of you here. Tell me, during the prayer, what happened?

I lost your hand when I was first. The lights went off. How do you know? Everything went black.

How did you know that when your eyes were closed? Because you saw Amman get up. Good, good point. Yeah. Yes. Yeah. During the prayer, we heard a click and we heard a couple of bleeps.

And the lights went off. And we heard the microphone click and go off for a second. And when the... Well, what caused that?

[ 15 : 38 ] The power went off, didn't it? Did we say that? When the power went off, what was working? Other than John McSween, who didn't miss a beat. He kept on. But what was working?

Were the lights working? No. No. No. Televisions, were they working? No. The microphones, were they working?

No. They didn't work, no. They went off for a minute. And the heating went off for a minute. So, what was working when the lights went, when the power went off?

The answer is nothing. Well, our mouths were working, but yeah. In terms of all the electrical things, everything went off.

And absolutely nothing was working anymore. And I think I read a bit from John 16 this morning, or I told you in the children's talk about John 16 this morning.

[ 16 : 39 ] But here is a verse from John chapter 15. Let me just read from the beginning.

Or I'll read from verse 5. What do you think?

Nothing. Apart from Jesus, we can do nothing. Televisions, microphones, lights, everything. They were done.

When the power was off. They could do nothing. And when we are connected to Jesus, he saves us. And he gives us his strength so that we can serve him.

But if we drift away from Jesus, if we're not connected to him, if we let other things and people get in the way of our relationship with Jesus, we can do nothing.

[ 17 : 51 ] Even in terms of our lives, every breath we have, he's the one that gives it to us. Apart from him, we can do nothing.

So, let's pray for a moment. Lord Jesus, we thank you. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are divine. We thank you that you call us to be branches, to be those who are connected to you.

And we thank you that when we believe in you, Lord Jesus, we are connected to you. You bring us into a relationship with you where we're saved from our sin.

And we're saved to be useful to you, to be fruitful. And we thank you, Lord, that this is something that we cannot do on our own.

It's something that we can only do as we're close to you. We pray that you'd forgive us. We know sometimes we can drift away from you. Sometimes we can let people and things get in the way of our relationship with you and we stop being useful.

[ 18 : 51 ] So, we thank you, Lord, that if we are to live lives that please you and if we are to live lives where we can bring fruit, where people will be able to see Jesus through us, we have to stay close.

So, help us, we pray, to be connected to you always and to know your presence and to know your strength every day and every hour. And we ask all this in Jesus' name.

Amen. We'll sing now to God's praise. Mission Praise 327. Immortal, invisible God, only wise. Amen.

Immortal, invisible God, only wise.

Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days.

[ 20 : 10 ] Almighty, victorious, thy great thing we praise. Unwresting, unhastening, and silent as light.

Nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might. Thy justice like mountains, thy soaring above.

Thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love. To all life thou givest, to both great and small.

In all life thou livest, the true life of all. We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree.

And wither and perish, but not changeth thee. Great Father of glory.

[ 21 : 30 ] Pure Father of light. Thy angels adore thee. All bailing their sight.

All Lord we would render. O help us to see. Tis only the splendor of my tideth thee.

Immortal, invisible God, only wise. Enlightened, access, lift all day from our eyes.

Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days. Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

If you could turn now in your Bibles, please, to Esther chapter 1. Esther chapter 1.

[ 22 : 56 ] You'll find Esther just a wee bit before the Psalms. So if you go to the Psalms and then work back the way through Job, our job.

And then we're into Esther. And we'll begin a series tonight just looking at this book.

Hopefully, probably take a chapter a night and work our way through part of it, if not all of it. And I won't do an introduction and go through history and the writer and all that kind of thing.

It's not all that clear exactly when it was written. It's not all that clear who wrote it either. There's various theories. But we know that God, the Holy Spirit, inspired this book to be written.

And we can study it and know that it's useful for teaching and for reproof and for encouragement and for rebuke, etc. So let's read this chapter of God's Word.

[ 24 : 07 ] Esther chapter 1 and at verse 1. This is what happened during the time of Xerxes. Some of your Bibles will say Ahasiaris, which is the Hebrew name for Xerxes.

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 and marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of puffer, marble, mother of pearl and other costly stones.

[ 25 : 30 ] 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.

On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him, Mehumun, Bithsta, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagatha, Zether and Carcass.

I don't think they're names. Anybody thinking about babies should take it into consideration. These characters, they were commanded to bring before him Queen Vashti wearing her royal crown in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at.

But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger. Since it was customary for the king to consult experts in matters of law and justice, he spoke with the wise men who understood the times and were closest to the king, Karshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marcena and Memucan, the seven nobles of Persia and Media, who had special access to the king and were highest in the kingdom.

[ 27 : 10 ] According to the law, what must be done to Queen Vashti, he asked. She has not obeyed the command of King Xerxes that the eunuchs have taken to her.

Then Memucan replied in the presence of the king and the nobles, Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king, but also against all the nobles and the peoples of all the provinces of King Xerxes.

For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women, and so they will despise their husbands and say, King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.

This very day, the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen's conduct will respond to all the king's nobles in the same way. There will be no end of disrespect and discord.

Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree, and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes.

[ 28 : 17 ] Also, let the king give a royal position to someone else who is better than she. Then, when the king's edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm, all the women will respect their husbands from the least to the greatest.

The king and his nobles were pleased with this advice, so the king did as Memucan proposed. He sent dispatches to all parts of the kingdom, so to each province in its own script, and to each people in its own language, proclaiming in each people's tongue that every man should be ruler over his own household.

Amen. And we'll pause the story there. We pray that God will add his blessing to his word. We're going to sing again now to God's praise.

Mission praise, 9-8-8, the words on the screen. How deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure. How deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure, that he should give his only Son, to make a wretch his treasure.

How great the pain of seeming loss, the Father turns his face away, as wounds which fire the chosen one, bring many sons to glory.

[ 30 : 28 ] Behold the man upon our cross, my sin upon his shoulders, ashamed I hear my mocking voice, call out among the scoffers.

It was my sin that held him near, until it was accomplished.

His dying breath has brought me life. I know that it is finished.

I will not boast in anything, no gifts, no power, no wisdom, but I will boast in Jesus Christ.

His death and resurrection. Why should I gain from his reward?

[ 31 : 58 ] I cannot give an answer, but this I know with all my heart.

His wounds have made my ransom. If you could turn back now, please, to Esther chapter 1.

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you once more for your word, and we pray once more for the help of the Holy Spirit as we study your word.

We recognize that this is a story from long ago, and it's told about a culture that's in some ways far removed from ours.

In terms of geography, we are very distant from everything that we read. But we pray that you would speak to us through your word. Your word is relevant, and we pray that you would give us eyes to see and ears to hear all that you have to say to us this evening.

[ 33 : 24 ] Speak to us, Lord, about who you are. Speak to us, Lord, about who we are and how much we need you. And give to us that help of the Holy Spirit. Again, Lord, we pray for your strength.

Again, we pray for your comfort as we think about the days ahead of us in this week. We pray, Lord, that you would be very near to us.

And again, Lord, we leave with you and Gesalek and the family as they, and as we as a church and as a community, feel that sense of loss and that grief for Ina, who's passed now from time into eternity.

Minister, Lord, your comfort to us and the power of the Holy Spirit and give to us, Lord, we pray, once more the joy even of the truth that is proclaimed in the gospel, that we are here in this world just for a short while.

And then there is eternity, and we thank you that eternity, when we are in Christ, is a place of such joy, such perfection. A place which is far more than our finite minds can grasp, but a place that we long for in our spirits.

[ 34 : 49 ] A place where Jesus has prepared a special area for all who love him. So enable us to be those who are trusting Christ, loving Christ, and with Jesus in time, knowing that we will be with Jesus for eternity.

So speak to us, Lord, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. There's some nights, and we may be out in the car, or some days even, when we can be out in the car, heading from Harris to Stornoway.

Some of you do it every day. And there can be some days, and it's crystal clear, and the drive is beautiful, and the scenery is spectacular, and you're just transfixed with all the beauty at the roadside.

And there can be other days, and you see nothing. The cloud is low. The drizzle, like it is just now, is thick. The mist might be down, and you can see virtually nothing.

You know the Clesium is somewhere up there on the left, but you can't see it. There's no trace of it. But just because you can't see it, doesn't mean it's not there.

[ 36 : 15 ] We know it's there. Even in the days when the mist is such that we can't see five foot in front of us. This morning, when I was taking a walk down the road, I glanced in the direction of Sculpey.

I could see nothing of Sculpey. But I know it's there. I know it's present. I can see that from those who are sitting in the congregation tonight.

And the first point that we come to as we approach the Book of Esther, and it's a recurring point. In fact, really all three of the points this evening are recurring points throughout the Book of Esther.

There's three things that we learn about God repeatedly in this passage, in this book. And the first thing is we learn about the presence of God.

And the second thing we see as we step through this chapter and as we step through the book is we learn about the power of God. And the final thing we see this evening is we give some thought to the providence of God.

[ 37 : 26 ] So first of all, the presence of God. We're taught about the presence of God in this Book of Esther, in this first chapter. And yet, if we look for the name of God in chapter 1, you scan down through the verses of chapter 1 which we just read, and if you look for the name of God or the name of the Lord, you won't find it.

And if you step into chapter 2 and scan looking for the name of God, you won't find it. And chapter 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, if you forensically go through each verse, searching for the name of God in these verses, right through this book, you won't find God's name once.

We'll read repeatedly about Xerxes and Vashti. We'll read her name as we have done. Esther will come into play in chapter 2 and following.

Mordecai, Mordecai, Haman, who's the body. These are names that we'll become familiar with, but not once in all of the Book of Esther is God's name mentioned.

Lane, one of the commentators, says, nowhere is God mentioned or even hinted at in any of the 10 chapters of the book.

[ 38 : 59 ] There's no mention of prayer, of sacrifice, no indication of praise or the quotation of Scripture. And this is something that is highly peculiar in the Book of Esther.

God, God, his name is just absent. God seems to be invisible, unseen, and yet he's there.

Spurgeon, in one of his sermons, says, although the name of God does not occur in the Book of Esther, the Lord himself is there most conspicuously in every incident which it relates.

And that's the first thing we can note and that's the first point we can take for our encouragement. God is present even when we can't see him.

God is present even when we can't see him. His presence is with us even when we can't hear his name.

[ 40 : 12 ] There are countries in the world, and there always have been, where the name of God is not allowed to be mentioned. This is a peculiar privilege that we have where we're able to join together in the name of Jesus and worship.

But there are many countries where that's not permitted. Prayer meetings against the law. Worship services cannot happen above ground.

Christians cannot gain access to the country largely. And so we ask the question, is God absent from places like that? And the answer is, no. God is present.

His name might not be heard, his people might not be easily seen, but God is there. with them. And God is with us.

We sang that in Psalm 46. And we hold on to that. God is with us. Now, this country, Scotland, is a country that was once known as the land of the book, but the book largely is closed.

[ 41 : 38 ] the Bible is being removed consistently from so many public places. The name of God is almost never heard in any reverent sense.

Even in times of pandemic, we listened to our own leaders in our own country. We wondered, would they come to a place where they would name the name of God in this extreme circumstance and not once did we hear our first minister say, say anything?

God's name was absent. places of worship, if you look at the current trends, are being closed down rapidly.

Laws are being passed that make it very difficult for us to worship Jesus in a biblical way, which is the only way. And we might ask the question, where is God?

Is God absent from this land? And the answer is no, he's not absent. Even though we cannot see him in the way that we once did, and even though we don't hear his name in the way that we once did in this country, God is still present.

[ 43 : 09 ] If we take it down another level and think even about our own, our personal lives, there are times in our lives that are difficult and we struggle and we pray and we feel sometimes like our prayers are not being answered and there are times when, like the psalmist, we wonder it's God with us.

And the answer that comes so powerfully through in this book of Esther is yes. Even when we can't see him. Even when we don't hear his name.

Even when everything around us seems to be so counter to his will. God's presence is with us.

He is the God who is everywhere. And that's not just in the book of Esther. That's throughout all of Scripture. I think about Isaiah 43.

God speaks to Isaiah and he says to his people, when you pass through the waters, when you go through trouble, I will be with you. And when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.

[ 44 : 39 ] When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned. The flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. So do not be afraid.

I am with you. The presence of God is with us.

Psalm 139. The psalmist says, where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there, your hand will guide me.

Your right hand will hold me fast. So we can take the encouragement of this. As we approach the book of Esther, and as we step through the book of Esther, we have these, we have this book that impresses upon us through the narrative that weaves through ten chapters.

[ 45 : 58 ] We have this recurring truth that God is always with us. He's always working as we'll see in a moment. God is with us.

God's presence is with us even when we can't see him. even when we can't feel him. And if we want to see the workings of that, you know, sometimes you can get an answer in maths and you might have the right answer but the teacher will say, let me see your workings.

So I understand that you know this. If you and I want to see the workings of the truth that God is always with us, the place that we go to see that being worked out is Calvary.

Because remember as Jesus died on the cross, he cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

On the cross, as we sang in that last hymn, God the Father turned his face away from the Son. on the cross, Jesus felt the extremity of what it's like to be alone.

[ 47 : 23 ] And it was our sin that did that. It was my sin and yours that separated God the Son from his Father and he did it for us.

He suffered the isolation, the separation that our sin imposed on our behalf so that if we are trusting in him, we can be assured of the constancy of the presence of God with us.

The first thing we learn here as we approach the book of Esther is we learn about the presence of God, the abiding, constant presence of God.

And again, I can't help but thinking of Ina in the hospital ward. Saying repeatedly in hospital, even though she was struggling physically, even though she was going through Isaiah 43 territory, she knew the peace of God, she knew the joy of God because she knew the presence of God with her.

And that's what's promised to all who are in Christ. So the first point is the presence of God. And the second point we come to as we really step into the text now is we learn about the power of God.

[ 48 : 58 ] And it's a strange kind of method through which we learn about the power of God. It really comes through by way of contrast. And as the book begins, if you just scan down the verses with me, we're introduced in the opening verses to a king.

We're told his name. We're repeatedly told his name. He wants us to know his name. He's desperate that we'll know his name and remember his name. His name in Hebrew was Ahasuerus.

And in the Greek language, the easier pronunciation, thankfully, is the name Xerxes. And this is the king that we're introduced to.

And he is desperate for the world to know that he is powerful. He wants everybody to know that he is the most powerful man in the world.

world. And in terms of global politics back there and then, he was the most powerful ruler of his day. None of his contemporaries came close to him.

[ 50 : 07 ] And so we read in verse 1 about Xerxes. He ruled over 127 provinces, stretching from India to Kush, which is present-day Sudan, I think.

It says in verse 2, King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa. So if you take out a map and if you look at that area of land, or if you step back into the history books and look at the kind of power that he had at that time, it was immense.

And he is not humble in any way. He's desperate to show off all the power that he possesses. And he does that by putting on this massive banquet.

These days, we want people to know how great we are. We take the social media. They didn't have that back then. So he has to put on this massive conference, this banquet thing. And so we read about that in verse 3 and following.

It says, 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, the nobles of the provinces were present.

[ 51 : 22 ] And for a full 180 days, what's that, six months, he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty.



And when these days were over, the king gave a banquet lasting seven days. So he has this six-month festival almost, conference-type event, and then at the end of it, he has this seven-day celebration.

That is just absolute decadence, extravagance in the extreme. And it's in the enclosed garden of the king's palace, verse 5, and it's for all the people from the least to the greatest who were in the citadel of Susa.

the garden. The garden had hangings of white and blue linen, fastened with cords of white linen, and purple material to silver rings and marble pillars.

There were couches of gold and silver and a mosaic pavement of puffer, marble, mother of pearl, and other costly stones. Julian will be getting ideas for the forthcoming wedding.

[ 52 : 27 ] But what we're being told here is that this is just absolute luxury. And you could dig into the details of it.

But what we're being taught here is that the best of the best of the best, that's what was going on here. Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other.

The royal wine was abundant. This was not cheap wine, this was the best wine, 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.

So it was a free bar, and people could drink as much or as little as they wanted, as much as is likely to be the scenario. So what we see is, this is just a, this is a huge event.

Sixth month conference, political celebration. And all the rich and famous were wined and dined in this event.

[ 53 : 40 ] Politicians and military leaders were pulled in and won over at this event. And we asked the question, why did he throw this party and part of the reason he threw this party was to gather more support.

He wants his empire to be even bigger. He wants to attack Greece. And so he wants to get a larger artillery, a bigger army to be able to proceed on that basis.

He wants to become even more powerful. That's part of the reason. He's trying to garrison support. But the main reason, I think, that Xerxes wanted to throw this amazing event was so that people would look at him.

And people would be impressed by him. And people would want to worship him and praise him.

archaeologists have discovered various pieces from Persia at the time of Xerxes. And one of the sections of masonry that was discovered has this enshrined on it by Xerxes' command, obviously.

[ 55 : 02 ] I am Xerxes, the great king, the only king, the king of all countries which speak all kinds of languages, the king of this entire big far-reaching earth.

So Xerxes is hungry for the praise and the worship of the people in his kingdom. Xerxes, he thinks or he's at least trying to get people to think that he is all powerful.

He's trying to get people to believe that he is the one who has ultimate control. But as the next section goes on to show, he wasn't as powerful as he wanted people to believe.

Because it seems that there's a couple of things he can't control. He can't control his temper, for one, and he can't control his wife, to his great embarrassment, and to the panic of the civil servants.

And so that's where we're heading in the next section as the story is told. But what's the author doing here? What is God the Holy Spirit doing as he moves the pen of the writer?

[ 56 : 32 ] But what he's doing is he's showing us that ultimate power is not with Xerxes. Even though Xerxes' name is splashed over every page, every chapter in this book, 28 times in the 10 chapters, Xerxes, Xerxes, Xerxes, Xerxes, his name is everywhere.

But even though his name is up in lights, his power is not much.

And what we are going to see as the book progresses is that ultimate power rests with the God whose name is not mentioned once.

the author in this book is taking us behind the stage to show us that God is powerful, all-powerful.

And again we can turn to Isaiah and have that message pressed in further. Think about Isaiah 40 and at verse 18.

[ 57 : 48 ] You don't need to go there just now, but the Lord speaks through Isaiah and says, To whom then will you compare God? What image will you compare him to?

As for an idol, a craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold, and fashions silver chains for it. A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot.

He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple. Do you not know? Have you not heard?

Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth and its people are like grasshoppers.

He stretches out the heavens like a canopy and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

[ 58 : 59 ] The power of God. Xerxes may have been king for a short season but he was nothing compared to the ultimate king to King Jesus.

And Alistair Begg, he makes some observations about the difference between Xerxes and Jesus. So let me just give you a few of his observations.

He makes the point Xerxes has dominion over 127 provinces. That was impressive. But Jesus, if we think about Psalm 2 verse 8, has the nations of the world as his inheritance.

The ends of the earth are his dominion. There's no comparison. Xerxes has a throne and the military leaders and the princes and the nobles of the provinces of Persia and Media, they come to see him.

But when you think about Xerxes throne and compare that to the throne on which Jesus sits, it's nothing. Revelation 21.

[ 60 : 21 ] he who was seated on the throne said, I am making everything new. Then he said, write this down.

These words are trustworthy and true. He said to me, it is done. I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end.

God. It's the words of Jesus. The eternal God. The all powerful God.

Think about the banquet. Xerxes puts on a banquet that's high budget stuff. It's impressive in this world terms.

It's 180 days long. The finest of food. But Jesus banquet. The marriage supper of the lamb.

[ 61 : 26 ] You can read about it in Revelation 19. Our time's gone, but that's a banquet that will go on forever. And in that banquet, contrary to what we see in this banquet, there's nothing sinful.

And nothing sad. No drunkenness. No tempers. No exploitation.

No suffering. But perfect joy. And perfect pleasure and endless peace.

peace. It's the banquet that King Jesus puts on. We see the power of God.

God. There's great encouragement, there's great comfort in these truths as we meditate upon them.

[ 62 : 32 ] And that's what we should do as we come through this book. What we have to see, what there is such a thrill in seeing is that King Jesus is far greater and far more powerful than any other king.

any other ruler, any other minister of politics, of royalty, whatever, at any time.

King Jesus and only King Jesus is worthy of our praise and our worship. And so the question is are we bowing before him?

Are we giving him the glory and the praise that he is due? So there's the presence of God, there's the power of God, and finally, very briefly, you can scan the second half of the chapter and we see the providence of God.

Boys and girls, providence is just a big word for what God does, what he allows to come into our lives, how he works. And so we see the providence of God.

[ 63 : 46 ] And if you scan from verse 10 onwards, we see how the story goes. Xerxes, he comes to day seven of the banquet, he's had far too much wine, it's gone to his head.

And he decides that now that he's at the end of displaying the vast wealth of his kingdom, he now decides in his drunken state, this is a good time to bring out his wife.

She's the most beautiful woman in the whole place. And so he sends this command, he says, bring her out so all the guys will see how beautiful my wife is.

And it's all about him, it's all about his ego, it's all about his power. And so the command goes off to summon Vashti to come out.

And we want to cheer in verse 12 because Vashti gets the message. He says, I'm not coming. Tell him I'm not coming.

[ 64 : 54 ] She won't budge, which is the right thing to do. But Xerxes is furious, he's humiliated.

And all the civil servants then start to panic. Because they think, well, if Vashti can say no to King Xerxes, my wife can say no to me and we can't have that.

So they call on the lawyers and the lawyers draw up some new laws, verse 20, to force wives to respect their husbands, as if that was possible.

And Queen Vashti is removed from the position of Queen. And it's a messy situation, it's an ugly set of events, it's a sad story.

But the amazing thing is in the midst of all this, God is working. God's providence is rolling on. sin.

[ 66 : 08 ] And you might say, does that mean that God is guilty here? Does that mean that God is the author of all this sin? And the answer to that is no. We are responsible when we sin and when we act in a way that's harmful, just as they were in this situation.

But the truth is, it's the same truth that Joseph learned in his life. what may be intended for harm by sinful men, God can use for good in his mysterious providence.

And again, if we want to see the supreme example of that, we go back to the cross once more. What happened there? Well, we read the narrative and we see that sinful men determined that they would not trust Jesus, they would not bow before Jesus, but that they would crucify him.

And they would be held responsible for their sin. Peter says that in the sermon on Pentecost is Acts 4. You crucify Jesus, he says.

It's your sin. It's your guilt. But we know that in the midst of that most evil scene, Jesus is going purposefully to the cross to be our savior.

[ 67 : 45 ] It's mysterious, but God is working. It's beyond our comprehension, God is working. And so chapter 1 ends.

As Vashti steps back and God moves Esther into a position where she will be used to save God's people.

And she didn't know that. And God's people didn't know that they needed saving at this point because they weren't yet in danger. But God knew that.

And God is putting his people into place so that he can work out his purpose. The providence of God was at work and that too should be a comfort to us if we are God's people.

that God is weaving his purposes into the providences that we go through in this life.

[ 68 : 54 ] Even the difficult ones. Angus Alec reminded me of a poem this week and my time is long gone so let me just finish with it.

It speaks to us about the providence of God. It's called The Weaver. My life is but a weaving between my God and me. I cannot choose the colors he weaveth steadily.

Oft times he weaveth sorrow and I in foolish pride forget he sees the upper and I the underside. Not till the loom is silent and the shuttles cease to fly will God unroll the canvas and reveal the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful in the weaver's skillful hand as the threads of gold and silver in the pattern he has planned. He knows, he loves, he cares.

Nothing this truth can dim. He gives the very best to those who leave the choice to him. the presence of God.

[ 70 : 10 ] He's with us even when we can't see him. The power of God is with us even when we can't feel him.

The providence of God. He's always working even and sometimes especially when we just cannot see.

what it is he's doing. So let's trust him. And let's sing to finish.

An expression of that trust. My faith looks up to thee. thee, love, to ee. thing, My faith looks up to thee, Thou love of Calvary, Savior divine.

Now hear me while I pray, Take all my guilt away, O let me from this day be holy thine.

[ 71 : 49 ] May thy rich grace impart, Strength to my fainting heart, My seal inspire.

As thou hast died for me, O may my love to thee, Pure, warm, and shameless me, A living fight.

While life's dark ways I tread, And griefs around me spread, Be thou my guide.

Let darkness turn to day, Wives sorrows, tears away, Nor let the air must stray, From thee aside.

When ends life's transient dream, When death's cold sun stream, Shall o'er me roam, Less saviour than in love, Fear and distrust remove, O may we save above, A ransomed snow.

[ 73 : 34 ] And I may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God the Father, And the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit, Be with us all, Now and evermore.

Amen.