

What is your idea of a King?

III – Pictures – What sort of a ruler is Queen Elizabeth II? Robert Mugabe? Kevin Rudd? (Morris Iemma?!) George W Bush? King Henry VIII? We all have different opinions on what sort of a ruler these people are. But there's a lot more debate about the sort of ruler GOD is. And that's what we're going to talk about today as we open up the book of Esther. Let me begin by suggesting just 3 common myths people believe about God's kingship:

PPT – Myth 1: God is a **manipulative** King who plays with us like the pieces on a chess board. (Chess board)

PPT – Myth 2: God is a King who creates the world, then sits back and just lets things happen. (spinning top)

PPT – Myth 3: When **good things** happen, **God** is the King in control. When **bad things** happen, **Satan** is the King in control. (dualism)

As we look at Esther today, we could ask the question: "What sort of a King is God? The problem is, the book of Esther doesn't actually **mention** God's name. But the opening two chapters start by telling us about another King – King Xerxes. So we're going to look at him and compare him the God of the Bible.

The Kingship of the world – King Xerxes

PPT – map: King Xerxes ruled the Persian Empire – the largest kingdom the world had ever seen – from India to Northern Sudan. He ruled over 127 provinces. And in the 3rd year of his reign, around 480BC, he held a celebration that went for 180 days, 6 months(!), displaying the wealth of his empire.

Then he had a huge 7 day party for ALL the people in Susa. A lavish party - couches of gold and silver, royal wine that never ran out! A one week open bar for every person in the city of Susa! So you can imagine what it was like after 7 days of partying and drinking. On the last day, King Xerxes commands his Queen Vashti to be displayed in her royal crown before all the people at the party, because she was a very good looking woman! And because Xerxes was very drunk! But Queen Vashti refused. Why?

Well, ladies – would you refuse if your husband, who had been drinking for 7 days with all his neighbours, asked you to display your beauty in front of everyone? Yes, most likely you would refuse! Especially if, as some translations suggest, the request was actually for Vashti to appear **naked** before these drunken men, wearing ONLY her royal crown.

Either way, Queen Vashti said NO to a powerful, wealthy, controlling and drunk King. And now he's mad!

So King Xerxes throws Vashti out. Because the last thing he wants is for all the women in the kingdom thinking they can ignore their husbands!

So Xerxes needs a new wife. So in a horrible form of a beauty contest, he has all the virgin women in the area "collected" by his people and brought before him over the next 4 years, then he marries one and makes her Queen. And that's where we meet Esther. She's chosen to replace Vashti as Queen. Not a very nice competition to win as a young girl.

Xerxes is a King rules his kingdom by controlling and manipulating people like pieces on a chess board.

How is God different to King Xerxes'?

The Kingship of God

III – You probably heard this week that another category 3 hurricane was set to land in New Orleans. The government took action early and evacuated people to safety. They knew what Hurricane Katrina did 2 years ago. And they didn't want to be in the way this time! Everyone ran to get out of the way.

That's how King Xerxes rules. Like a hurricane. He rules as a dictator so people run away from him. They're too scared to do anything against him. Even though he's the ruler of the largest Empire the world has ever seen, he controls people, manipulates people and scares people, in order to maintain his power. In fact, the law was that if you went to see King Xerxes, without him inviting you, you would be killed.

God is not that sort of King! God is not a hurricane that we have to run **away** from out of fear. God is not a King who we follow because we're scared of him. God is not a King who hates us coming to see him. God is a King of love. A King who **loves** to talk to us. A King who **invites** us to come to him. A King who made all things and rules over all things, and lays down how he wants us to live, but then **invites** us to come to him and follow him. He doesn't **dictate**. He doesn't **make** us come to him. He loves us, and **invites** us to make the choice to come to him.

And when we're disobedient to God, he's not a King who throws us away. What does God do? He makes plans to rescue us. When Queen Vashti disobeyed King Xerxes, he throws her out and she can never see him again. When we disobey God, God's plan is to become human, enter our world as our saviour Jesus, and rescue us. And I believe Esther holds back from mentioning God's name to impress upon us the sort of kingship we are under without God in our lives.

Xerxes' Kingship is about dominating, God's is about sacrificing. Xerxes rules over the top of people. God comes as Jesus and serves under people in love.

III – abuse statistics: Authority and power. Things that are abused a lot in our society. Last year, there were 60,000 confirmed cases of child abuse in Australia. That's Over 1000 a week.

Esther begins by opening up the question "What **should** authority look like?" Let me suggest 3 big issues with King Xerxes that Esther brings up, and I think it's especially relevant for those of us in positions of authority:

1. **Authority is not about maintaining control.** Humans are not given authority EVER to control people. Even God doesn't control people like pieces on a chess board – he gives them free choice. Proverbs 29:11 says – "a wise man keeps **himself** under control."
2. **Authority is not about having the final say on everything.** GOD is the only one with the final say. A husband who thinks he "rules" the house because he demands the final say on everything, does not understand what the Bible says about the sacrificial nature of authority. Demanding the final say only makes you a dictator and often a fool. Proverbs 12:15 says "a wise man listens to advice." A wise man doesn't dictate. A wise man listens.
3. **Authority is not about people being afraid of you.** "The fear of the **Lord** is the beginning of wisdom", we're told in Proverbs 9:10. That word "fear" means awe and reverence and respect for **God**. It's not about being afraid of God and wanting to run away from him. And human authority is not about making people afraid of you. If your children are afraid of you, if your spouse is afraid of you, if your students or employees are afraid to approach you, that's because you exercise authority that manipulates and scares people into obedience. That is not a *godly* way to act. God's authority is such that we **love** to approach him. It's an authority that **invites** us to see him.

If your spouse manipulates you, if your parents beat you, if your boss treats you like dirt, if your teacher thinks you're hopeless – if you find yourself, like Esther, under the authority of someone who controls and manipulates you, then the book of Esther has this to say to you:

No matter what situation you find yourself in, God will never be absent from you. That's what we will see in Esther. God's name is not even mentioned, but he is never absent.

PPT – Volvo – III – But Esther also says this: While God is a loving and sacrificial King, who's always there, he's not a Volvo! Let me explain! What do you think of when you see a Volvo? **Safety**. When I was growing up, Volvos were well known for two things: They were ugly, and they were safe. If you're going to be in a car accident, you and your family were safer in an ugly Volvo.

God is not a Volvo. He's not the "safe option" for life on earth. How often do we think: "Life as a Christian may be boring, but at least it's safe!"

God does ***not*** play it safe! He is there for us. He always rescues us. He promises us heaven forever. But he does NOT promise us a SAFE LIFE here on earth! God leads Gideon into battle with 300 men against 10,000. God leads a boy called David to fight a giant called Goliath. Jesus ate with tax collectors, had his feet washed by a prostitute and called the religious men of the day "the synagogue of Satan"! he was asking for trouble!

God doesn't play it safe. He calls families to sell their homes and move to Kathmandu as missionaries. He calls 60 year olds to places like Sudan and Jordan to teach people about Jesus. He calls Christians all over the world to stand up for their faith and be persecuted, even if it means watching their own children be killed. Life is not SAFE with God while we live on this earth.

Following God ***puts you at risk*** in this world. But always with the guarantee of a future in heaven.

If you have to quit your job because your boss is making you do unethical things, it will be HARD, but God will not leave you. If you have to separate from a violent spouse, it will be HARD, but God will not leave you. No matter how HARD your life is, God will not leave you and God will not throw you aside. And God **will bring justice** on those who stand against his people. We're going to find that out when we get to the end of Esther.

Looking at this passage I was reminded of what former PM Malcolm Fraser once said: "Life wasn't meant to be easy." But it was George Bernard Shaw who originally wrote these words in a play in 1921 – he wrote:

"Life was not meant to be easy, my child, but take courage: it can be delightful!" (Back to Methuselah)

Let me suggest Esther says this to us:

"Life was not meant to be easy, my child, but take courage: it will be delightful!"