

Season 3, Episode 10: Esther Wrapped Up

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Sarah: Welcome to two sisters in a cup of tea. My name is Sarah and I live in the UK. And this is my sister Felicity, and she lives in the US. Hi, Felicity.

Felicity: Hi, Sarah. Hi, everyone.

Sarah: How are you?

Felicity: I'm just so excited about my biscuits that I just I mean, it's not often that you actually have to unwrap an individual biscuit, but this old school class biscuit, the Viking.

Sarah: Orange or mint?

Felicity: Mint. Mint all the way, actually.

Sarah: Yeah. I think you were always a mint variety person, weren't you? I was always orange, yeah.

Felicity: We had these a lot when we were growing up.

Sarah: I know. I was just thinking, did we get given them every day for tea? I would never give my kids that now.

Felicity: I I know know that. And it's kind of in the same category as the club or the trio, isn't it? Like special, kind of. Yeah, exactly. So it's actually really good.

Sarah: Just describe it to us for those who don't know what it is.

Felicity: It's a good point. It's chocolate covered and it's got a kind of mint cream. Not too much, though, just at the top. So as you take a bite, you get biscuits, chocolates and mint. And it's just the right size. Very good.

Sarah: Yeah.

Felicity: What about you? What's in your refreshment?

Sarah: I've gone for a cup of Yorkshire tea. I found myself this week actually drinking a lot more tea than usual. I think I'm missing the north a bit. I'm thinking, like, cups of tea might help me through that.

Felicity: What a northern you are.

Sarah: I know when I say a lot of tea, it's not really a lot of tea. And then I've got in my hand something which looks like a cookie. It's actually called a Jaffa native.

Felicity: A jaffa NATO. I've never heard of it.

Sarah: Well, neither had I. Just saw it in Little the other day. To be fair, it smells better than it tastes. It's basically a chocolate chip cookie with a little bit of orange peel in it. Disappointing. They've ridden on the name of the Jaffa cake and gone for something cool. Okay. I wouldn't buy another packet, put it that way.

Felicity: Fair enough. A good experiment. So we're in our last episode, Sarah? Can you believe me, Esther? All the way through, which, when we started, Esther, I think we both thought this is quite an undertaking because it's a narrative and it's fairly long and how's it going to work in podcast form. But I think it's just been rich and deep and wonderful, hasn't it?

Sarah: There's been so much to develop on, hasn't there, and how to sum it up, I think. So the aim of this episode is to try and sum it up, isn't it, and to kind of just reflect back on the last few weeks as we've got our heads around it. And actually, it's quite hard to sum up so much, as you say, it's so rich. But we're going to think about we've kind of been asking one

another three questions and kind of thinking along those lines. That's what we're going to do today. So we're going to think about what's been surprising for us, what's been a surprising truth, what's kind of deepened for us? Is there a truth that's kind of been deepened through the course of this season? And what's been an impacting truth? How have our words and thoughts and feelings and maybe even actions being impacted as we've gone through this? That's what we're going to do. You want to kick us off? What have you found surprising as we've gone through?

Felicity: Yes, absolutely. I think I've known for quite a long time that when you're reading the Bible, whatever book you're in, you need to really take note of what the writer is seeking to do and achieve and kind of really listen closely to what they're doing and how they're doing it. But I think one of the things that surprised me about Esther is the way in which the structure, like the mirroring, the kind of perfect kind of putting together of this narrative, is so integral to our greater understanding of this great reversal and just the perfection of what God is actually ultimately achieving. I think I just had a new appreciation of. Maybe it's that every aspect of what the narrator is doing is worth taking note of rather than just always using these kind of words. Or it's this kind of genre. But actually here I feel like through it, I think I've got a bigger picture of just god really is bringing about everything into his perfect plan and perfect reverse. And ultimately, Triumph is all the more convincing as we see it put together in this form. What about you, Sarah?

Sarah: Yeah, it's just been so rich, hasn't it? And as I say, it's been wonderful to see that narrative unpacked. I think for me, it's just been really surprising how much we've got out of reading this narrative. I think, as you said earlier, when we started off, we were thinking, well, sermon series. Normally one or two one or two sections on it, or maybe four a pinch. How are we going to do ten, are we going to have enough to kind of talk about and actually, wow. I mean, it's just been so surprising to see how rich it is, and we haven't mind it for all it's worth. It felt like we've just skated over the surface. There's just been so much, and I think it's just been so surprising for me and reminding me that God uses all different types of literature to help us understand his great salvation plan and his character. And wow, it blew my mind to see the way that he's used this kind of narrative to do that. And it's been wonderful in that way.

Felicity: I think it has actually made me think I should read narratives more, like devotionally, get into narratives more, because it's tempting to think that things like James, with their kind of pithy verses and things, are just easier to get a handle on. But I think repeated reading of Esther has really kind of increased my groundwork, my kind of theological groundwork, I think. I don't know. I don't know whether that's really the right term to use.

Sarah: On that. What's been a deepening truth for you, do you think?

Felicity: I was thinking about this and thinking that as we go through Esther and we see God's people in great peril, and as we see them in peril, there's every possibility that the promises that he's made are going to just go to pot because God's people are going to be wiped out. And there's therefore no messiah can come out of it, and there's no rescue. But that doesn't happen. And the more I've read the story, the more I've thought, god really will not abandon his people. His promises really do stand firm and that his rescue will come that is absolutely rock solidly firm. And so as we see that, we see that his plan is actually unstoppable, that this is what is going to happen. And I think that reading Esther has really contributed to my understanding of that, because I'm just so persuaded that God does rescue his people. And it's just I think you're seeing it from this different angle, isn't it? Because the rescue came from a kind of slightly unexpected place. Esther's not I know the book's called Esther, so we kind of know she's a big deal. I know. But if you didn't know that, you wouldn't think the Jewish girl in this kind of slightly dubious virgin crowd is going to be the means by which God is going to rescue his people. And yet he does. And then when you think about the greater scale of that rescue, I feel like I don't think I've thought about that quite to this degree before, and it's been really helpful to consider it from a slightly different angle. And I think it then primes us to expect and look for the great reversal and to have all the more confidence that the new creation and us being in the new creation is like a dead sir, it's okay. We're going to be okay. That's kind of how about you? Where did you get to on that thinking?

Sarah: Yeah, I think all of that really yes, I agree. I think, for me, written here. You know that bit in Luke 24 that Nana was saying? You know the famous bit, that famous bit where Jesus says it's all about me? That one, I think that's just been brought home for me in a way that I wasn't expecting, but reminding ourselves that this is a book where God's name is not mentioned. But I just think that conversation, Nana, was so helpful and it really changed the way I began to see every part of this book pointing to the better thing we have in Christ. And I think that's just really deepened for me. So as I open any bit of scripture and land anywhere, actually, I can have confidence there's going to be something, there's going to be some nugget, there's going to be some character, there's going to be some theme, there's going to be something that's going to point me to what we have in Christ. And I think for me, that's been a really wonderful sharpening and deepening or something I knew, but I hadn't really kind of lived in and soaked in in this way. And I think, as you say in Esther, we've just been reading and reading and reading it, and therefore we've just been kind of absorbing it over the last ten weeks and we rooted me all the more in that conviction and that's been really helpful and really good for my heart to be there.

Felicity: I think that's so true, isn't it? That episode with Nana was really, really excellent on that kind of just almost the license being given to see Jesus and everything. And I know, we know that I've probably taught people, like, the whole Bible points of Jesus, like, just do that, but actually the way that she laid it out and helped us to see how to do that, I think that was just really rich, wasn't it? Actually, that's part of I think what has really impacted me the most is that as I've been seeing Jesus more clearly in this narrative, I think it's made me just love who he is all the more particularly. I just don't know when I last thought about Him as the perfect mediator. That kind of the all sufficient media. Like, he is all we need. Anyone else who intercedes for me, even if I ask for prayer from someone, or if as you look through Bible history of various people who shadow this mediator, but he is the one, that's it. That's all we need. We need Jesus standing for us and interceding for us and ultimately on the cross, saving us, rescuing us, obviously. But I feel like that angle and also the Better King angle that we get through Mordecai and just kind of seeing that he really is the best. I know that's kind of an obvious thing to say, but I feel like it's impacted my longing for Jesus, my kind of heartfelt appreciation, rather than sometimes I think I can slip into a bit of a kind of just spouting out the gospel because I know that's the gospel and you just kind of can explain it and say it. But actually that kind of heart impact that then makes me want to encourage others in their love for Jesus and speak of Jesus this wonderful savior to those who don't know Him. So I think that's been quite a big impact for me. What?

Sarah: Yeah, I think I'd say similarly, I actually found myself quite surprised thinking through the fact that I really want to hold out this word of life to others, having read this, and I didn't think that was going to be an implication of the book, if that makes sense. But actually, as you were saying a bit before, that kind of like deep confidence of being on the winning side of Jesus and just the whole of salvation history is kind of met in Him and will contemplate in Him, and we're on his side. Like, we're his children and we can have complete confidence in what's going to happen in the future in a wonderful reassuring way. We're safe, we're saving his everlasting arms. And actually that's just given me really real confidence to want to hold out the word of life to others, to be praying to that end. And that's just been really good for my heart to be in that place. I think also for me, it's been just seeing how necessary this book of Scripture is to a greater understanding of God's character, his providence, his sovereignty, his plans, just all these things that have deepened as we read it. And I think I've just been thinking through the fact that it's so easy to neglect certain parts of Scripture because it feels too hard or too alien or I'm just not sure how I'm going to read this, or maybe it's not directly applicable and applicable?

Felicity: How do you start with applicable? I think you got it.

Sarah: Don't try and overthink it. But I've been tempted to do that. I've gone through Esther, and one of my frustrations with it has been like, I've not got a verse. I've got a favorite verse from it. I've come to the end of, like, I don't have a favorite verse.

Felicity: You should commit some of this to memory, but actually it's not that kind of foot.

Sarah: But that doesn't mean that you shouldn't wrestle with it and actually really soak it in. I think that has been the challenge of my heart, is, am I really willing to do that with parts of

Scripture that feel hard, basically, and don't feel as easy to pick up one of Paul's letters, for example?

Felicity: Yes, I think that's so true. And even just coming back to that thing of how this points are to Jesus, it's never been my first port of call. Let's go to Esther. In order to look at Jesus, but having spent the length of time in him, actually, if you don't look at Esther, you're missing out on an aspect of who Jesus is, which must be true for all of Scripture, isn't it? I find it quite exciting because then it makes you think, well, let's dig down deep into all these different aspects. It can be challenging and it can be hard, but I feel like this conversing about it and talking about it together has meant that we have got a bit further in our understanding than me on my own, for sure.

Sarah: I just think I can't describe the value of chatting it over again, whether it's in the Bible for the group or just like, with someone else in a cup of tea. Like, the value of doing this has just been extraordinary in a book that I didn't really understand going into going into it. It's been so good, isn't it? It's been so rich. There's been so much. And as I say, I feel like, yeah, we've only just scratched the surface. There's so much more we could talk about. We want to talk about a couple of other things before we finish up this episode, don't we? So, Christy, why don't you pray for us and then we'll chat about what's next?

Felicity: Yes, I'd love to. Heavenly Father, we praise you so much for the book of Esther. Thank you for the clarity with which you show us your character, show us your sovereignty, show us what you're doing in the world. And that through all of this that we see Jesus all the more clearly. And we pray that you'd open the eyes of our heart that we might know him better. As we dig into Esther, as we mull over what we've been reading, please, would you help us to delight in you, in your word, in the Lord Jesus? And we pray that as we go from here, that these ester truths would be anchored deep in our hearts. These would be those who are impacted not just in our knowledge, but in our hearts, in our understanding, and in the way we live life as a result. Amen.

Sarah: Amen.

Felicity: So, Sarah, tell us the exciting news.

Sarah: There's two pieces of exciting news. The first is that we will be back.

Felicity: Let's do it. Let's do another season.

Sarah: We're going to be back in January and we're really looking forward to that, but we're going to have a good break before then. The second piece of exciting news, that in January, at the beginning of January, we celebrate our first birthday. Not like literally, as in the podcast First Birthday. And in honor of our podcast First Birthday, we are launching a monthly newsletter as a way to just connect with everyone who's on the other end listening. I think what we found is that this has been a wonderful journey so far. We've really, really loved doing it. Have we been one of the biggest highlights of the year? But the kind of funny thing about doing a podcast is that you just kind of throw it out there and you don't know who's on the other end. And it's been a wonderful connect to connect with people over social media and through emails and messages and everything. But, yeah, our aim is we'd like to launch a newsletter to just keep people connected and to connect with you, our listeners, deeper and in more meaningful ways, would you say?

Felicity: I think that's right. We're not going to be doing anything different to what we're doing now, but we are going to seek to just build a little bit on what we're doing now. So in the newsletter, there'll be a little bit of a sort of devotional thought from Sarah or myself, and then we'll have some resources, won't we? And we're going to just a couple of extra little things. So being connected, and therefore the ministry aspect of this, we're actually able to just connect with one another. So it's not just a kind of abstract kind of thing. So that's part of our thinking, isn't it? And in this first newsletter, there's quite a big bonus.

Sarah: Sarah so not necessarily in the first newsletter, but if you sign up to be on our mailing list for this newsletter, you will receive a bonus birthday episode where we're actually going to video ourselves and see our faces and we'll talk about what we've enjoyed this year and what's coming up in your head and that kind of thing. So that's your little perk for signing up to me.

Felicity: We would love you to sign up. And how do we do it, Sarah?

Sarah: Great question. There is a link in the show notes, so click the link. We really hope it will be a valuable thing. We don't want it to become just something else. Clustering your inbox that we respect your inbox and we want it to serve you, our listeners. Ministry is about serving people to the glory of God, isn't it? And we hope that it does that. It does that. Well, the other couple of things, just to mention, as 50 said before, we've got this bookstore, we've got this bookstore with one of those do. Check it out. All the books we recommended this evening are on that, and it's just a really helpful place to point people to and to grab his bargain books.

Felicity: And we would love it, as ever, if you were able to write, review, tell a friend about us. The season not really about us, it's more about Esther, isn't it? So why not pass this on to someone else who might just benefit from being in God's word together? But please do write reviews for us. We love the encouragement, but also it just means that the word gets out more and more. So wherever you listen to your podcasts, please do that, and we will look forward to seeing you in the new year.

Sarah: Yes, we just want to say thank you so much, don't we? Like, it's been a massive journey for us this year. This has been such a reading thing for us, and we're so thankful for everyone's encouragement that people have enjoyed listening along and we really look forward to carrying on in the new year.

Felicity: Yes.

Sarah: So, on that note, I'm going on a diet till then because I think it'll be eating too many biscuits.

Felicity: I know. Well, I'm actually doing a quick visit to the UK, aren't I? So I don't know, I should probably save the biscuits that I bring back until January. So fast. Until then, yeah. All right. Thanks for listening, everybody. We'll see you next time.

Sarah: Yeah, see you.

Felicity: Bye. Bye bye. Thanks for listening. This podcast is sponsored by Tenfold.com You.