

Season 3, Episode 3: Esther's Rise (Chapter 2)

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Sarah: This podcast is sponsored by 10offthose.com. 10offthose.com handpick the best Christian books that point to Jesus and sell them at discounted prices. Extraordinary Hospitality by Carolyn Lacey has been such a helpful read over the last few months as we emerge from lockdowns. In it, Carolyn explores seven ways in which we can reflect God's character in the way we welcome others into our homes and into our lives and so point people, ultimately to Christ. It's been so wonderfully practical for me and it also actually just points us, time and again, the generous welcome we received from God. It's such a tonic for our hearts as we've spurred on to become more like Jesus ourselves, extending extraordinary hospitality. Why not use our Two Sisters discount at 10offthose.com in the show notes to grab yourself a coffee after this episode.

Felicity: Welcome to two sisters in a cup of tea. My name is Felicity and I live in the USA. And this is my sister Sarah. She lives in England.

Sarah: Hi, everyone.

Felicity: Hi, Sarah.

Sarah: How are you? I'm very well, thank you.

Felicity: Yeah, I've just caught a glimpse of your mug. Or is it a cup? I mean, we haven't really talked about the distinction between a mug and a cup, but kind of delicate, but not quite but quite an impressive design.

Sarah: Yes, thank you very much. It has to be said, it's more of a thimble. It's actually a child sized mug. We went, I took the kids pottery painting in the summer. They've been wanting to do this ages. Like, right before we leave a new house, we're going to go pottery painting. Turns out it was one of the most stressful experiences of the summer holidays. Like three kids and me perfectionists. Trying to paint on pottery when you can't make mistakes. Not the most fun experience, but I did paint a little mug because that was the cheapest thing in the shop. Tiny quarter of a cup of tea. But I did paint our logo on it of our little and things.

Felicity: So pleasing. It's got a special name that, hasn't it? I think it's an ampusand.

Sarah: I've got an ampusandborn mug. Yes. And I've got Revitalizing lemon and ginger in it today. And I'm actually quite surprising myself. It's actually all right.

Felicity: Wow. Branching out there. I've been thinking that I need to branch out, actually. I mean, if we are doing a podcast entitled Two Sisters and A Cup Of Tea, I'm not sure we can do season upon season with just Yorkshire tea and Earl Grey and I mean, your hot water habit, not sure that even counts, to be honest, but lemon and ginger, maybe. I'm thinking I may need to get some recommendations. I mean, listeners, if you've got any recommendations on tea that I might enjoy, we've got a posh tea shop just down the road. I should probably just go in there.

Sarah: What have you got today?

Felicity: Just a classic Earl Grey. I'm just really into Earl Gray at the moment, but in a very American fashion. I have a classic as well, the American cookie. Homemade. Interestingly. In America, you are much more likely to get a good cookie if it is homemade. They rarely buy their cookies. And the idea that in England we have these kind of big lines of shelves of biscuits, so much choice aisles. Thanks. Terminology. But they just don't really buy biscuits in the same way here. So it's just kind of like you'd make your cookies. We don't really do that anymore, I don't think. We're not quick to try and make a custard cream, are we?

Sarah: Even harder, isn't it? It involves two biscuits and some cream in the middle.

Felicity: Fair point. This is not a Jammy Dodger with Jam in there as well.

Sarah: Anyway, we're getting stuck into Esther chapter two today. But firstly, before we do, can you give us a really quick recap of what happened in the first introduction part of Esther one?

Felicity: Yes. Well, it was all set up for us. I feel like the narrator has been setting the scene in a big way, and the big way is really this big empire, the Persian Empire, under King Zerkse, who's sitting in his citadel of Sousa. And we have this picture of a wealthy, splendid, majestic place. And in the midst of it all, however, there is a king who seems to be powerful but actually is weak. And there's a domestic crisis. His queen refuses to do what he says, and rather than deal with it in a normal kind of marital fashion, he brings in lawyers, advisors, and it becomes an empire wide issue. And so vastly to the queen has been dismissed. So we're waiting to see what's going to happen next and what is going to become of King Zerkse. Is this kind of power going to play out or is it going to unravel, as we've begun to see?

Sarah: Okay, well, let me read chapter two for us. We're reading from the NIV. I don't know where we mentioned that last in last week's episodes. That's the translation that we are working from NIB. Later, when King Berkshire's fury had subsided, he remembered fashioned and what she had done and what he had agreed about her. Then the King's personal attendance proposed. Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the King. Let the King appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful young women into the harem at the citadel of Caesar. Let them be placed under the care of Hege, the King's Eunuch, who is in charge of the women, and let beauty treatments be given to them. Then let the young woman who pleads with the King be Queen instead of Ashley. This advice appealed to the King, and he followed it. Now, there was in the Citadela Caesar a du of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai, son of Jere, the son of Shimmeri, the son of Kish, who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebihaneza, King of Babylon. Among those taken captive with Jehovah Kim, King of Judah, mordecai had a cousin named had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died. When the king's order in edict had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to the citadel of Caesar and put under the care of Hege. Esther was also taken to the king's palace and entrusted to hagai in charge of the harem. She pleaded in and won his favor immediately. He provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven female attendants selected from the king's palace, and moved her and her attendants into the best place in the Hawaii. Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. Every day he walked to and fro near the courtyard of Buhari to find out how Easter was and what was happening to her. Before a young woman's turn came to go into King Xerxes, she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments prescribed for the women, six months with oil of mer and six with perfumes and cosmetics. And this is how she would go to the king. Anything she wanted was given to her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. In the evening she would go there, and in the morning return to another part of harem to the care of Shazkas, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the concubines. She would not return to the king unless he was pleased with her and summoned her by name. When the term came to Esther, the young woman Mordecai had adopted, daughter of his uncle Abhail, to go to the king. She asked for nothing other than what he had. The king's eunuch with, who was in charge of the Harry, suggested, and Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her. She was taken to King Berkshire's in the royal residence in the 10th month, the month of Tibet in the 7th year of his reign. Now the king was attracted to Esther more than any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Ashley. And the king gave a great banquet, esther's banquet for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality. When the virgins were assembled a second time, mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. But Esther had kept secret family background and nationality, just as Mordecai had told her to do so, for she'd continue to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up. During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, victana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Zurkses. But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai. And when the report was investigated and found to be true,

the two officials were impaled on polls. All this was recorded in the book of the Annals in the presence of the king.

Felicity: Thank you, Sarah. Quite a tractor, isn't it? I think every time I read it or listen to it, I'm struck more by just what an ugly scene this is, ironically, because beauty is mentioned again and again and again. But actually this is the ugly underbelly of the empire, isn't it, I think? And this what is happening to Esther, how Zerkse is going about finding his new queen. This just smacks of exploitation and just really sinister aspects to what's going on here.

Sarah: I think it's very easy to skip over that, isn't it? And as you say, it's so much about beauty competition, essentially, isn't it? But actually unearthed what's going underneath that. And women from around the world, around the provinces, are being snatched from their homes, essentially have been trafficked into the palace in order to perform for the king.

Felicity: Yes. And that the king would then choose to place his favor on this person or that person. And it seems that Esther has no control at all as to whether she just has to go, doesn't she? As you say, that she seems to be snapped.

Sarah: She has to go. And I think it's the language that she was taken, they were brought into there's a continual refrain of they were taken. This isn't her just walking up to the palace and saying, Pick me. Yeah, it's not that. And Mordeca is obviously very concerned. He's going back and forth concerned. Whereas at verse eleven, he walked to and from near the courtyard of the hurry to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her. He doesn't know what's going on in that palace. He's so dependent on people telling her. So he's there every day trying to work out whether she's okay. It's a terrifying situation. She's not his daughter. She was interested in his care because she's already had this tragic upbringing of both parents dying, and they're in a kingdom where they are a minority and they fear for their lives and they fear for saying who they really are. And then she's taken into this world, as you say, this sinister place, and he doesn't know what's going on.

Felicity: I think that is and it's quite a long time. It's a lengthy process, this whole kind of all these beauty treatments and all of this. So a long time of not knowing whether she's going to be right, because presumably, if she was not chosen, then she'd be kind of dispatched off, but not much of a future, I assume, once you've been in the king's kind of Harim in this kind of way. But thankfully verse 17. Well, thankfully we say thankfully from a big picture point of view, don't we? Because we kind of are beginning to see who Esther is in terms of her stock, her ancestry, where she's coming from.

Sarah: Where do you see that then? Because the narrative is very specific to point that out today.

Felicity: Yeah, check out verse five. We get a really specific mention of so now there was a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin named Mordecai, son of Jair, the son of Shimmy, the son of Kish, who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by an epidemic king of Babylon. So Mordecai and therefore Esther are of descent of the tribe of Benjamin, very much of God's people, and more specifically than that, the son of Kish. So he is of the same descent as King Saul. So that's really specific, isn't it?

Sarah: Yes. So Kingsaw was the most famous son of Kish. And we're going to see in the next chapter that there's a generation strong rivalry between another people group, another king specifically. So this is really specific. The narrator is really pointing out here he's like underlining at every point.

Felicity: Yeah.

Sarah: This is really important that you get just who Esther and Mordeca are and where they come from. I think what's really interesting that again, they're then located within a number of other kings. So it's within King Nebuchadnezzar and then King Jaharikin and also thinking about Saul as well. And I think that's just really interesting because as we see this kingdom set up of King Zerkse, I think the narrator is also pointing us to the fact that actually it's just another kingdom. And as we see the whole way through the Bible, kingdoms rise and fall and that's from when time began and yet there's another king whose kingdom will never fall.

Felicity: Yeah, that's such a good point.

Sarah: And we're just going to start to see the rumblings of that, I think.

Felicity: Yeah, this empire is just one in the midst of all these kingdoms that have come and gone before. And so having highlighted that Esther is of this ancestry, suddenly as readers, knowing that we're reading this in the biblical context, we have opened the Bible to read it. And so therefore, when we hear mention of the tribe of Benjamin and we're thinking God's people and suddenly I think we're just more primed to see God at work because God champions his people. That is a theme throughout the Bible. That is what drives the whole rescue mission, the Messiah plan, all those kind of things. So when then we get in verse 17, this wonderful sentence, so he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Ashley. That is just such a sort of statement of action. This is where Esther is now. She's gone from being the kind of marginalized exile taken off into the Persian Empire. She's nothing. And now she is queen. I'm not sure quite how much power that really means, considering we've just seen vastly dismissed.

Sarah: It's significant, isn't it? There's significance there. He's pointing it out. The north is pointing it out. But then what's really interesting is straight after that, we get a little glimpse into a scene which is actually really important for us to book. And I think the narrator is equally wanting to point out this is really important and what you're seeing here is not a coincidence of what's happening. So I'm talking about the bit with Mordecai uncovering this conspiracy to murder the king. He overheard this plot, he tells Esther, Esther gives credit to Mordecai when she tells the king, and it's all written down. And that becomes crucially important as the story goes on. And I think the narrator tunes our eyes and tunes our ears into the fact that there aren't coincidences in God's providence. This isn't just a mistake or a fancy that he managed over here. Very specific timing that this person overheard these people. And yeah, it was written down.

Felicity: Yeah, absolutely. Just for a sneak preview into the next chapter, just when you're reading on, and do read on, do make sure you're reading the story outside of listening. Have a look at what happens next at the start of chapter three. It's not quite what we would expect, given that Mordecai has just foiled a plot against the king, which is quite amazing, considering this king has taken his beloved Esther and doesn't seem to be very kind in that way. So let's think Sarah driving this to the heart. This is quick, isn't it? We're going to have to get to the number of it quite quickly. So what sort of things have struck you as you've been dwelling in this chapter?

Sarah: I think the way that the storyteller reached Esther in the big story, in the big Bible story here, has felt significant because actually what we're doing as readers is we're rooting ourselves in that Bible story as well. And I think it just encourages me that actually, in this province, in this place, far away from the Promised Land, he's showing us that God's at work, and he's specifically giving references to that. And I think as we think of our own world and our own situation, where I think it can just feel like God is so absent sometimes, and yet I think this just helps me to remember that, no, we're rooted in the same big picture here. We're rooted in the same story, the same timeline. Jesus hasn't come back yet. We're still in.

Felicity: Okay, yeah. As we then begin to see God's hand at work here. So we're reassured that this timeline, this history, God plan, is still the one that's happening. Yeah, I think that's really helpful because the danger is that we want to kind of isolate this whole incident, don't we? Begin to think, oh, well, Esther, what's she doing, what's going on, seems to be quite compromised, all that kind of stuff, but actually taking a step back and seeing it in the big Bible picture, then we're reassured God is at work, he is championing his people, and we're kind of waiting to see what's going to happen for Esther on that front. But we're reassured that that is still what he's doing now.

Sarah: I don't think that lessens the fear and the kind of rumblings of what is going on here, that this is happening to God's people and this is happening to Esther. She's been taken into this sinister environment. It's obviously horrific what's going on. And I think there's these rumblings of, why is this allowed to happen? That's as much as kind of a valid question that we've got in our hearts, isn't it? And I think that we will get a picture on, but that's there as well for me, and I think there's.

Felicity: No easy answer on that. And I think we should expect an easy answer. The reality is that this is the world that we're seeing before us, aren't we? The Persian Empire, in many ways, just is very like a Godless world. And so the dark underbelly of it. Maybe this is

supposed to then help us as we look around as well and just see the world for what it really is. And these kind of things do still happen and are still happening. Yeah, I think I was struck by that in the well, let me see the world with clarity, with God's eyes. And he's not shying away. The narrator is not shying away from the dark side. He's not hiding it because actually, then God himself, as he steps in, then that's where the hope lies. It's almost like it pushes our hope elsewhere. This is not a place to put your hope in this kingdom.

Sarah: No. And it exposes it exposes the world's kingdom, doesn't it? And even more, you want a king and a kingdom who does not act in this kind of way. And again, as we've seen, his power is nothing. He's just following advises in every way and yeah, it's awful, isn't it? Felicity, would you like to pray for us that time is running away with us already? Would you like to pray as though absolutely.

Felicity: Heavenly Father, we pray to you so much that you are the same God. Now, as we read of vines, Esther, we prayed you that you are at work championing your people, delivering your people, and that, as we see here, just the hints of what you're beginning to do in Esther story. We love that we are in the same story the same time. We are worshiping the same God. And as we look around at the world and see similar dark, sinister things, we praise you, that you are the God of light, the God of rescue, the God of greater things than this. And we pray that this would really be dwelling in our hearts that we might love you more as we read this. Amen. Wow.

Sarah: It's quite quick in a way that we want to see, but I guess that's going to be the story with us. Hopefully the picture builds week by week and we'll see where we get to.

Felicity: Yeah. And do be chatting about it with other people. Do be reading ahead. Do be reading the whole story. I think it's only going to work if we're all doing more than just the 20 minutes every week, isn't it?

Sarah: Yeah. Check out the show notes for the questions. Yeah.

Felicity: And the discount code for the books.

Sarah: And we look forward to seeing you next week.

Felicity: Yeah. All right. Bye bye.

Sarah: Bye. Thanks for listening. This podcast is being sponsored by ten of those.com. Check them out for great Christian books that point to Jesus.