

THE BIG IDEA: When we rule, we play the fool.

The Take-Off

Have you ever thought about what bravery looks like?

Does it look like Chris Kyle, kind of grisly and controversial? [Pic 1]

Or does it look like this grizzly and somehow oddly innocent? [Pic 2]

Maybe it's someone putting themselves in harm's way for someone else? [Pic 3]

Maybe it looks more like stupidity because we put ourselves in harm's way! [Pic 4]

Or maybe it's just that extremely calm confidence that you're safe no matter where you may find yourself? [Pic 5]

So, whatever it looks like, bravery probably doesn't look like me with a mouse in the room, or me attacking a snake that was blocking our door the other night, or this lady doing a weather segment in Britain. [Weather video]

As we begin to look through a book that never mentions the name of God but clearly shows the hand of God, I think we'll all be amazed at what it really means to be brave.

It doesn't mean to never be afraid.

I love this quote from Omar Bradley, who served as General of the Army in the 1950s: "Bravery is the capacity to perform even when scared half to death."

In fact, bravery can't be seen apart from the stressful situations that demand it.

And sometimes, we don't choose those situations as much as it can seem that they choose us.

So let's be clear: some of the people in this story of Esther that have been lauded as brave over the years were simply desperate people in desperate times.

That means that we can probably learn a lot from them, because many of us feel just like that.

1. We make bad kings

- a. The first person we meet in the book is King Xerxes. Depending on your version, you may see the name Ahasuerus. One is his Hebrew name, and the other - Xerxes - is his Persian name.
- b. If you've seen the movie - 300 - then you recognize this name. Yes, that movie was about this king.
- c. Let me help you paint a picture of what this king was like.
 - a. One, he's very powerful
 - i. he's kind of a big deal
 - ii. he ruled over what was basically the world at that time
 - iii. he had a couple of castles, and this one is in Susa
 - iv. he had gained such power that he was able to invite all his military leaders to a 6 month party
 - b. Two, he's very wealthy
 - i. he's got enough to throw the party of all parties
 - ii. can you imagine the bill on a 6 month open bar with military men
 - iii. as if that bill wasn't big enough, he opened the bar and the castle to EVERYONE for a full week
 - c. Three, he's kind of a jerk about it
 - i. it's one thing to be wealthy and powerful, and it's another to display it in a way that rubs people's faces in it
 - ii. Xerxes is the second one
 - iii. he makes sure that everyone in the kingdom has a chance to see his purple curtains (only the richest had purple dye due to cost)
 - iv. they drank from gold and sat on gold
 - v. picture it - the poorest of the poor sitting on gold couches and drinking from gold cups
- d. Let's sum up everything we know about Xerxes with one word: bad.
- e. He's a bad man with a ton of power and that makes for a very bad king, and what do bad kings do?
- f. They make very bad decisions.

2. Bad kings make bad decisions

- a. This shouldn't be a big surprise, but when you get a bunch of men together and throw in a bunch of alcohol, good decision aren't usually the result, right?
- b. Sober men rarely say, "Dude, check this out!"
- c. So this bad, drunk king (Esther 1:10) made his first bad decision: to show off his trophy wife to his drunk pals

- d. Hey ladies, how do you think that went over? Exactly. She said no.
- e. And before we jump all over the Queen for refusing the King (I've heard those messages), let's understand that when the Bible says that she was to wear her crown (v. 11), she was ONLY supposed to wear her crown.
- f. So she refused, and that's when he made his second bad decision: he asked his drunk friends what he should do about it (v. 14 - they had been drinking with him for at least a week, right?)
- g. The advice he got from his drunk buddies? Make an example out of her because he made you look bad (v. 16) and she set a bad example for women (v. 17)
- h. They suggested that the King issue a decree removing her from the throne and putting someone else on it, and that he do it in such a way that the decree could not be reversed.
- i. No appeals here. Only God has the track record to decree things that are irreversible, and Xerxes saw himself as a god.
- j. His fourth and final bad decision here? He actually listened to the advice. (v. 21)

3. Bad kings bow to a better King

- a. Reading the story of a bad king making bad decisions is one thing, but the real takeaway is what will require us to be brave: we are the bad king, aren't we?
- b. We don't want to think like that. We think we'd be just fine with unlimited power and unlimited wealth!
- c. But like Xerxes, we'd probably use the wealth for our good and our glory, and the power to command and demand.
- d. What do we learn from Xerxes that we've probably learned in life? What's the biggest takeaway? That when we rule, we play the fool.
- e. That's our Big Idea: when we rule, we play the fool.
 - a. we make poor decisions instead of wise ones
 - b. we waste resources instead of sharing them
 - c. we show off instead of showing humility
 - d. we demand to be served instead of choosing to serve
- f. But there was another king - one who truly had unlimited power and wealth - and we would do well to stage a coup to remove ourselves from the throne and allow King Jesus to rule on it instead
- g. Philippians 2:5-11 shows us what that King did with unlimited power and wealth - he gave it up to step down
- h. King Xerxes used power and wealth to step on; King Jesus used power and wealth to step down
- i. This morning, I'm calling us to be brave and stage a coup

The Landing

So what do we takeaway from this first week in Esther?

For some, the takeaway is that we need to repent of the damage we've done by ruling our own lives. We can relate, unfortunately, to King Xerxes.

For others, we need to know that even when others make horrible decisions that affect us horribly, there is a greater King who sees us and is working behind the scenes. We can relate to Queen Vashti.

We must be brave to repent, and we must be brave to trust.

The good news is that God can handle both of those responses.

Let's pray.