

THE BIG IDEA: Our choices will never limit God's options.

The Take-Off

Last week in the first part of our series in the book of Esther called "Brave" we met a bad king named Xerxes who made some bad decisions.

We also realized that more times than not, WE have the tendency to climb up on the thrones of our lives - our own personal "Game of Thrones" - and when we do, we make bad kings, too.

So many of us have made bad decisions that hurt others or have had bad decisions made that hurt us, and all of it comes from the wrong king being on the throne, so last week I challenged all of us to be brave and stage a coup to get ourselves off the throne and get Jesus - a much better king! - on the throne.

Bad kings bow to a better king. That's good news, and a great takeaway from Esther chapter 1.

This morning, as we turn to chapter 2, we're going to find Xerxes dealing with the aftermath of those bad decisions. In fact, we're going to be talking a lot about bad choices this morning, and by the end of our journey, I think you'll find yourself filled with awe at a God who is so sovereign and powerful that he is able to accomplish his plan even when we make bad choices.

Listen to the hope in this morning's Big Idea: our choices will never limit God's options.

Why is that such good news? Because you and I both know that we have made - and will make again - bad choices.

Bad choices are everywhere! (show pics)

So, let's talk through Esther chapter 2 and see what we can learn about bad choices:

1. The regret of bad choices

- a. Look at the first word of Esther 2:1 - "Later" - somewhere between 3-4 years after he mistreated Vashti
- b. Between that moment and now, he has lost his queen and has come home from his worst defeat at the hands of the Greeks
- c. This is a man who is living with the regret of the bad choices he made in chapter 1
- d. Isn't this how regret works? It happens "later" when our emotions have died down and we suddenly remember what we've done and who we've done it to
- e. Some of you are there. It's the morning after and you're starting to feel the terror of "what did I do?"
- f. Wouldn't it be great if that feeling was enough to keep us from making more bad choices?
- g. Of course, it isn't. That's why you and I drive away slowly from the police car that pulled us over but are speeding again within 5 minutes (as long as we don't see the cop!).
- h. This "failure to learn" is because of the second thing we know about bad choices...

2. The reality of bad choices

- a. The struggle, as we say, is real, yes?
- b. We make bad choices again and again - and often in the light of what it could cost us!
- c. Scared Straight didn't empty our jails. Mock car crashes don't stop prom night tragedies.
- d. They help, sure, but people still make bad choices.
- e. Look at verse 2 and you'll see it in the life of King Xerxes.
- f. Remember what got him in trouble the last time? Listening to bad advisors give bad advice. Here we go again.
- g. Basically, these guys tell the king, "Since your last trophy queen didn't work out, let's find you another one, only younger and even prettier."
- h. Xerxes is still using women and in it for only what he can get out of it. Still making bad choices.
- i. Have you been there? You keep going down the same path, not really sorry for it, but determined to be smarter about it? I'll smoke less, drink less. This time I'll delete my browsing history.
- j. 2 Corinthians 7:10 - which kind of sorry are you? Xerxes had the sorrow that would lead to more death.
- k. Let's continue, and see some more bad choices, because it wasn't just mean old Xerxes making them.
- l. In verse 5, we meet our next main character in the story: a Jew named Mordecai.
 - a. he's in the family line of King Saul, and King Saul had an enemy named Agag
 - b. that's important because later in the book we'll meet a man who was a descendant of Agag who will hate Mordecai - think Hatfields and McCoys type family feud
 - c. he went to Susa by force because the Jews were exiled there, but he stayed in Susa by choice because Cyrus had set the Jews free and told them to return and rebuild the city

- m. It's tempting to read the Bible and see good people and bad people, but the beauty of the Bible is that it shows bad people and a good God
- n. The book of Esther is a great example
- o. So because of a bad choice, Mordecai is in Persia, and his cousin-turned-daughter is there to be picked for the filming of The Bachelor in Persia
- p. And finally, we meet the woman for whom the book is named
 - a. Esther is taken along with other women for a one night audition with Xerxes
 - b. These women would be prepared for one entire year for one night - no pressure, right?
 - c. More than likely, they weren't given a choice, and for whatever reason, Mordecai told Esther not to reveal her true identity
- q. Finally, Esther's night comes and she pleases the king and wins his favor and ultimately, he gives her the crown and she is made Queen (Esther 2:17)
- r. The king throws another big banquet - Esther's banquet - and calls it a holiday and gives gifts.
- s. People are happy. The end.
- t. Only it wasn't, and we'll get into that next week. But for today, let's learn the most powerful truth about bad choices...

3. The redemption of bad choices

- a. People make unwise decisions. Not bad people or dumb people or people who won't got to church. People.
- b. God doesn't shy away from that in the Bible, and that's encouraging.
- c. Xerxes made a repeat bad choice. Mordecai made a bad choice to be comfortable away from God's presence in Susa. His bad choice cost Esther a year of her life in a harem.
- d. While we don't know for sure, Esther may have had to make a bad choice on one night of her life because of the other bad choices that led up to it.
- e. But the God that isn't named in Esther is always active behind the scenes, and he is a God who is all about the redemption of bad choices!
- f. God's plan is never at the mercy of ours!
- g. Our mistakes will never paint God into a corner, and that's the takeaway this week.

The Landing

Our choices - no matter how bad they may be - will never limit God's options.

What we'll find from this point on in the story of Esther is that even though there were Jews in Susa that should have been in Jerusalem, the God of those Jews was moving in spite of bad choices to set the table to redeem.

That is good news, because all of us need to know that while we may regret bad choices, the reality of bad choices means that we need a God powerful enough to redeem them for us.

His redemption allows us to grow from our past.

It means that while our past may explain us, it will never define us.

That makes all the difference for people like you and me.