

THE BIG IDEA: The best shark cage is an empty Lion cage.

The Take-Off

We're in week 3 of our BRAVE series, and that means we'll be in Esther 3 for most of the morning. You'll find Esther if you go to Psalms near the middle of the Bible and then go back 2 books to the left.

One of the things that I'm growing to love about this book is that there's so much material in it - so many nuances and twists to the storyline. Too much to cover in one series, for sure.

Maybe you've got a favorite movie - one that you could watch over and over again and still catch something new.

Those are the best stories, aren't they? "Signs" was one of those movies for us.

When it first came out, we watched it and liked it. But then we'd watch it again and see something we'd missed the first time, and then we'd watch it again and catch another detail.

It wasn't that we were stupid the first time, or the second. It was the brilliance of the writer, and the author of Esther is no different. The more we read this book, the more we see the brilliance of what God was doing in it.

While we could try to uncover it all, we're going to try as much as possible to stay true to the theme we've chosen.

What can we learn from Esther that relates to being BRAVE?

Week 1 we saw that we need to be brave and stage a coup - that just like Xerxes, when we are on the throne of our lives, we make bad kings and bad decisions. And last week we saw that it takes bravery to allow God to redeem those bad choices.

When all that was said and done, we found ourselves near the end of chapter 2.

Xerxes is still Xerxes - wealthy, powerful, listening to bad advice and making bad choices.

Mordecai has been introduced to the narrative and is a Jew who, given the opportunity to restore the glory of God in Jerusalem, instead chose to stay in Persia, the land of his enemies.

And we met Esther, too, and even though the choices of others put her in a position to perhaps make a horrific one night decision, she gained favor with those she met and won a beauty contest and became Queen because God is always more powerful than our choices and his plan is higher than ours.

Remember that about this book. It tells history, but doesn't add commentary about that history.

Remember that the people we're reading about went through what we're reading about without knowing how it would turn out. We have the luxury of reading it knowing the end.

From Esther's perspective, it would have been good to end the story after chapter 2.

From Mordecai's perspective, too, because he's got a connection to the throne and a good spot at the city gate.

Even Xerxes would have liked it to end here because he's still on the throne with a hot new wife and lots of coin.

But isn't that when the attacks usually happen? On the upswing? When things are so good that we relax?

With that, let's pick the story back up at the end of chapter 2 starting with verse 19.

If we could give this section of Esther a soundtrack, what would it be? Probably this. (Theme song from "Jaws")

Why do we need to be BRAVE? Because, as we'll learn this morning, there are sharks in the water.

1. One shark, two sharks, red sharks, blue shark

- a. With apologies to Dr. Seuss, there are all kinds of sharks - around 450 different types
- b. It's true in the ocean, it's true in life, and it's true here in Esther
- c. Some sharks are fairly small, some are pretty big, and all are dangerous
- d. We meet 2 fairly small ones at the end of chapter 2
 - a. Bigthana and Teresh
 - b. Doorkeepers for Xerxes, at least one version (ESV) says they were eunuchs
 - c. they had a beef with the king and decided to assassinate him
 - d. Mordecai heard about it (he was at the gate, too - part of his position)
 - e. Mordecai chose to save the life of a king who wasn't a good man
 - f. He told Esther, she told the king, the king investigated and the 2 small sharks were hung
- e. A couple observations:
 - a. This happened during the reunion show of The Bachelor: Persia (v. 19)
 - b. Esther was still living secretly as a Jew (v. 20)
 - c. We don't know why, but we know she was obedient (v. 20)
 - d. What Mordecai did was recorded in the king's book - it'll be very important later

- f. Then, we meet a bigger shark. In fact, the biggest shark in the book.
 - a. Esther 3:1 introduces us to Haman, the villain of the story
 - b. Haman has been honored; Mordecai has been forgotten
 - c. Every one was under command to bow to Haman, and Mordecai refused
 - d. It wasn't a question of worship, but honor - like saluting in the military
 - e. Mordecai knew that Haman was a descendant of Agag, and an enemy of the Jews
 - f. That's why he didn't bow
 - g. When Haman heard about it and learned that Mordecai was a Jew, he turned into Hitler before Hitler
 - h. He didn't just want to kill Mordecai, but all the Jews in Xerxes kingdom (the world as they knew it)
- g. Understand this before we continue: there are people whom you and I will never please
- h. If Mordecai had bowed, Haman would have found another reason to kill God's people because he hated them
- i. Look what this shark did:
 - a. convinced the king that certain people were against him
 - b. sweetened the deal with money (which we know Xerxes loved)
 - c. 10,000 talents of silver worth a little over 172 million
- j. The king never even investigated. He never asked who these people were and why they were a threat.
- k. He did what he's always done - what seemed best for him
- l. He even told Haman to keep the money
- m. And so, the law was written and sealed - irreversible - to slaughter the Jews on the night before Passover
- n. It was "The Purge" - death sentence had been signed, and the shark sat down with the king and drank (v. 15)
- o. Our story this week ends with a shark in power, toasting the impending death of God's people while an entire city scratched their heads wondering what was happening to their friends and neighbors and if it would also happen to them someday?

2. There's blood in the water

- a. Let me close with a couple of quick - but important - points
- b. First, we have an enemy and he is looking to devour us
- c. A number of scriptures show us that, and here are two: John 10:10; 1 Peter 5:8
- d. Jesus told us in John that we'd have trouble in this world, but that he had overcome it
- e. 1 Peter 4:12 tells us clearly to stop thinking that shark attacks aren't normal!
- f. So why are there spiritual sharks in the water?
- g. Because they are attracted to blood - and we are people who proclaim the redeeming blood of Jesus!
- h. It's time for us to stop being surprised by sharks and to start being wise about sharks.

3. Unleash the Lion

- a. So, what do we do about the sharks?
- b. Do we build better shark cages - fully insulated in a church environment far from them?
- c. Of course not. We're called to swim with sharks as we rescue those who are drowning in sin.
- d. The best thing we can do is to unleash the Lion - King Jesus - and let him protect us from the sharks
- e. The best shark cage is an empty Lion cage!
- f. Jesus demolished the biggest shark at the cross and the tomb - Colossians 2:15
- g. Jesus said that his victory is our victory - John 16:33
- h. The point here is that victory against sharks comes from being closer to Jesus.
- i. James 4:7 - submit, trust, yield to Jesus and sharks will flee

The Landing

How do we unleash the Lion so he can be our shark cage?

We put our relationship with Jesus front and center - absolute priority number 1

We honor him by spending time with him, we love him and it shows in how we live for him, and we trust him even when sharks are all around us, because we know that he is able to step in and save the day

We know that now, but Esther and Mordecai will learn that as the story continues next week.

Be brave, church! There are sharks in the water. Unleash the Lion and trust his hand to deliver you.

Let's pray.