

THE BIG IDEA: If you want to change the course of culture, get to the source of culture.

The Take-Off

Before we really dive in to the 8th chapter of Esther, a brief recap:

There is a king named Xerxes who is on an ego trip and wants others to bow to that ego

His queen said no, which resulted in the king removing the queen and looking for a replacement by auditioning virgins

He liked a girl named Esther more than any other, and she was made queen

Esther was a Jew who had a cousin who raised her like a daughter and told her to stay quiet about her heritage

That cousin stopped an assassination attempt on King Ego, but was never recognized for it

That same cousin refused to bow to the king's right hand man which led to that man, Haman, convincing the king to sign off on a 24 hour killing spree against the Jews because the man who wouldn't bow was a Jew

The queen realized she'd better say something, and so she outs herself as a Jew at the same private dinner where she outs Haman as a jerk

Haman is killed

The king needs a drink

Ok, that last part isn't in there, but it's pretty likely because there's a lot of drinking by the king in the book

And now, in the first 2 verses of Esther 8, we see the kind of reversal that God loves to pull off - everything that was meant to be against Esther and Mordecai ends up being for them.

These 2 verses remind us of others: Proverbs 26:27 as a warning and Genesis 50:20 and Romans 8:28 as promises

But as good as these 2 verses are, when Esther and Mordecai woke up the next day, they were still on death row

Today, we examine how Esther and Mordecai handled that situation and what we can learn from them, and the first thing we see is that they were in a position to change things

1. God wants us to get upstream

- a. What we find in Esther 8 is that the original law passed by King Xerxes to kill Jews couldn't be undone
- b. But there was the possibility of issuing a new law to counteract the first one
 - a. we see this in verse 5 - "let an order be written overruling"
 - b. verse 8 shows us that it was written and sealed and verses 9-14 talk about how thoroughly and quickly the new law was dispatched
- c. What I want us to see is found in verse 7, because that's where we see who wrote it
 - a. Not the king or his officers
 - b. Esther and Mordecai were told to write the law "as seems best to you"
 - c. In other words, they were positioned to influence the culture
- d. Of course, we've seen all the way through this book that a sovereign God is working through good and bad choices by men to achieve his plan
- e. God put Esther and Mordecai in this position, and so I think it's safe to say that God wants us to get upstream
- f. Let me try to explain this concept, because when I say get upstream, some of us think of salmon and that just feels like a lot of work for the chance to be eaten (SHOW DEMOTIVATOR IMAGE)
- g. Yes, it takes work and patience to get upstream, but if we want to change the course of culture, we've got to get to the source of culture.
- h. One of the images that is locked in my brain from India was an old shop keeper sweeping the stoop in front of his shop. It was a beautiful picture of a commitment to excellence, and also a picture of futility, because India is a very dirty place.
 - i. The fact that he wanted his shop to be clean made him different, but it didn't make a difference.
 - j. God doesn't want us just to be different than culture; he wants us to make a difference in culture.
 - k. "Your kingdom come ON EARTH as it is IN HEAVEN" - Jesus prayed for us to bring his kingdom here, not just wait to go to his kingdom there
 - l. Now, I admit that this can seem like a difficult concept to wrap our brains around, and so I'm going to take you back to a time when movies weren't the visual experience that they are today so that you can see this idea of getting upstream clearly locked in before we move on
 - m. Here is 4 minutes of Star Wars gold driving home why we need to be brave enough to get upstream [SHOW CLIP]
 - n. See, if you want to take out the Empire, you've got to get to the source, don't you? Destroy the Death Star.

2. How do we get upstream?

- a. Right about now you're thinking, "Great, so I need to get upstream. How do I do that? I'm from Stanly County!"
- b. Let me give you 3 quick examples of men in scripture that got upstream, and how they did it:
 - a. Joseph went upstream through CHARACTER
 - i. Genesis 40:2-6 / in charge of Potipher's affairs
 - ii. Genesis 40:20-23 / in charge of the prison
 - iii. Genesis 41:37-40 / in charge of the palace
 - iv. ultimately, 2nd in command of a nation
 - b. Paul went upstream with CONTENTMENT
 - i. Acts 20:22 / goal was Jerusalem, as far upstream religiously as you could get
 - ii. Acts 25:11-12 / goal was Rome, as far upstream politically as you could get
 - iii. his journey upstream put him in all kinds of situations (2 Corinthians 11:23-28)
 - iv. Philippians 4:11-13 / contentment kept him along the way
 - v. ultimately, fruitful ministry in the hub of culture
 - c. Jesus went upstream at the CROSS
 - i. Genesis 3:15 / mission was to crush the head, not play with a snake
 - ii. Luke 22:42 / the cross wasn't the easy way
 - iii. Philippians 2:8-9 / the cross was the only way
 - iv. ultimately, exalted to the highest place (v. 9)
- c. This isn't about politics and making sure "our people" are in office
- d. This is about allowing God to position us in order to further his kingdom
- e. None of these examples - character, contentment and a cross - are compatible with pushing our way to the top
- f. But all of them make us pliable in God's hands to be placed where he needs us the most in order to get his kingdom as far upstream as possible

The Landing

It's easy to be different, it's much harder to make a difference, and when it comes to culture, the church is more like the beginning of Esther 8 - we win battles but are still losing the war.

But what God wants is for us to be like the end of Esther 8 - because we've gone as far upstream as we possibly could in order to serve the most people possible, "the city celebrated" and the number of Jews grew because of the awe the people had of how God was moving through them.

Until we get to the source of culture, we'll never change the course of culture.

We'll be like the mad in India - sweeping hard to make our area clean, but missing the fact that there is dirt all around us that we could have a hand in cleaning, too.

But it all starts with a willingness to sacrifice our moments for God's movement.

Some of those fighter pilots died so that Luke could get to the heart of the Death Star, but they knew that the only hope of lasting change was getting as far upstream as they could before taking the final shot.

Some of us here will go on to change culture in areas like music, politicks, education, the arts.

It all starts by living where you are with character, contentment and taking up your cross so you'll be prepared for whatever God wants to do through you in the places he positions you.

When we get upstream to the source of culture, God will use us to change the course of culture, and that's a good thing, because Proverbs 29:2 tell us that "when the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked are in power, they groan."

We want to end this morning laying hands on and praying for those of us here who are willing to be positioned in positions upstream in strategic areas of culture, so if you'll come to the front, we'll end the morning praying for you.