

When God Seems Far Away

The book of Esther Chapter 1 & 2

Today we are beginning our series on the Old Testament Book of Esther. Now you may be wondering, as you heard this being read out: What does this have to do with us today? What does this reading have to do with you and me?

But as we look at this book over the next few weeks, I hope that you will see that it speaks to you and me in ways that we need to hear in our modern world.

There is an English saying that says: "I wish it were the good old days" When people refer to the good old days, they refer to the past.

How things were when we were growing up as children.

We recall that life seemed a lot simpler then than it is now.

Maybe it's when people think about life before children.

The early years of marriage.

When people refer to the "good old days", they think about a time that was different. A time when the world seemed better.

But now our lives now seem harder; our communities are struggling; the world seems to be changing around us. We long for a time when things were simpler and where things are not so stressful.

When it comes to belief in God, well this too can be difficult in these times. We could perhaps see God in the past, now in the midst of all we face it can be hard to see him.

This was how life was for the Jewish people who lived during the time of Esther.

遙遠的上帝？

以斯帖記 第 1 章和第 2 章

今天，我們開始以斯帖記的舊約系列。你可能想知道，以斯帖記和我們今天有什麼關係？這段經文跟你和我有什麼關係？當我們在接下來的幾個星期去仔細研讀這本書時，我希望你們能看到它對我們現今世代的人其實極有關係，我渴望上帝透過這本書也向你和我說話。

有一句英語諺語這樣說：“我們總是懷念舊日的時光”，每當人提到舊日的時光時，他們指的是過去日子的美好。

在我們年幼的時候，情況是如何的呢？

我記得年幼時的生活，比現在簡單得多了。

也許這是為何這樣多人懷念孩童時光的原因。

對一些人來說，也許我們也會懷念早年的婚姻生活。

當人們提到「過去美好的時光」時，他們會想到一個不同的時代。一個比現在這個世界更美好的時代。

但現在我們的生活似乎更以前更難了；在我們社區中的朋友正在掙扎；我們周圍的世界也在不斷的發生變化。我們渴望回到那個更簡單的時代，也希望周遭發生的事情沒有現在那麼緊張。

在當今時代，要談到信仰，其實也十分困難。好像我們過去可以更易的看到上帝的足跡，但現今在我們面對的困難中，好像我們很難看到上帝的工作。

這就是在以斯帖當時時代的猶太人的生活。

Generations of the Jewish people had been living in a foreign land under a foreign government. They were living life as a minority group in a culture that had very different religious beliefs.

They were used to having to fit into the culture that surrounded them, but they could no longer see or trust God's presence at work in the world.

God seemed to them to be far away.

The Book of Esther is an interesting book because its main character is God, but not once is he mentioned. It is the only book in the Bible where God is not mentioned. And yet it is a book that shows God working with his people in the midst of chaos.

King Xerxes, the Persian King, was angry because the Queen showed him disrespect and dishonoured him publically. Because of his pride and the arrogance of his political advisors, it started a series of events that brought danger to the Jewish people.

There was a faithful man called Mordecai and his young cousin, who was called Esther, who was under his care, who found themselves at the centre of all the chaos that was happening.

But where is God in all of this?

If God is faithful to his people, why has he let this chaos happen, where his people could be placed in danger?

And why had he not protected Mortdecai and Esther When really bad things in the world happen, we do wonder about this.

If God is real, then why does he let things happen? Why has God allowed the evil that is happening

猶太人經歷一代又一代的人活在外邦政府的統治，他們生活在被外邦人統治成為亡國奴。他們作為一個少數的民族，活在一個不同的宗教信仰的文化中。

他們被迫去適應那個包圍著他們的文化，但他們卻再也看不到或相信上帝在他們的世界中仍然工作並與他們同在。

在他們看來，上帝是一位遙遠的上帝。

以斯帖記的特別之處在於它的主角雖然是神，但整本書中，並沒有一次提及上帝。這是聖經中唯一一本沒有提到"上帝"名字的書。但這本書卻仍處處顯示神在混亂的世代中與他的子民同工。

第一章記載波斯國王亞哈隨魯王很生氣，因為王后對他不尊重，並公開地羞辱他。由於他的驕傲和政治顧問的傲慢，一系列事件發生了，並給猶太人帶來了極大的危險。

在那個時代，有一個忠心的人叫末底改，他撫養著自己叔叔的女兒以斯帖成長，而他的經歷是發現自己原來正處於混亂事情的中心之中。

然而，在这一切混亂之中，上帝在哪裡呢？

如果上帝是信實的，為何他讓這些混亂，困難及危險發生在他的子民當中？

他為什麼不保護末底改及以斯帖呢？當這個世界發生不幸及令人難過的災難時，我們都會發出如此的疑問。如果上帝是真實的，他為什麼要讓災難，困難發生呢？

between Russia and the Ukraine right now, despite all the prayers of those Christians praying for God's mercy?

Why is he not intervening?

Why does God allow something like COVID to spread throughout the world and cause so much harm and destruction even when we pray for his protection? These are just a couple of examples. I am sure you could think of many more in your life.

Where is God in all this?

When things happen, we can think that God has given up, that he is distant, that he does not care. That God is not going to intervene. This is our natural human response.

In our reading today, the man named Mortdecai trusted against all odds and against all he could see and experience that God was faithful to his promises. Even in the midst of bad and evil, he conducted himself in a way that allowed him to be a person of influence. a person whom the king could eventually trust.

He held onto his faith and his belief in God, despite what was going on around him.

His cousin Esther, who is young, vulnerable, and scared. She found herself taken from the safe life that she had with Mortdecai and thrown into the heart of the king's palace.

An unknown small Jewish girl who found herself in an unfamiliar environment. At a time when the pride of the King and the arrogance and hatefulness of his advisors towards the Jewish people were about to cause great suffering,

為什麼上帝允許邪惡的事情在俄羅斯和烏克蘭之間發生呢？要知道基督徒都為著這些地方祈求上帝的憐憫，不是嗎？

上帝為什麼好像視而不見？

為什麼上帝允許像 COVID 這樣的災難傳播到世界各地？我們都祈求他的保護，但這病毒仍造成如此多的傷亡和破壞？

這些只是我們很容易就找到的幾個例子。我相信你仍可以在你的生活中想到更多更多。

在这一切的事情當中，神啊，你在哪裡？

當這些不幸的事情發生之時，我們會感得上帝已經放棄了我們，他是遙遠的，他好像並不在乎。因為上帝並沒有介入在我們的困難當中。這是我們人類的自然反應。今天的經文中的那位末底改，他在極大的難關中仍然不顧一切的倚靠上帝，儘管週遭的事情總是不如理想，他仍相信上帝是那位會持守應許的主。

即使在邪惡及困難的環境之中，他仍運用上帝給他的恩典去成為一個有影響力的人，並得到國王的信任。

儘管周圍發生的事情都未如理想，他仍然堅持自己的信仰及對上帝的信靠。

另一方面，以斯帖年輕，脆弱，也為她的未知未來感到害怕。她發現自己將要被從原本安穩的生活中，被安排帶走到國帝宮殿裡。

一個寂寂無名的猶太小女孩，將要進入一個陌生的環境中。而在她的生命中，迎接她的，卻是一個自大的國王及另一個對猶太人的懷著仇恨態度的臣僕，這一切都將在她生命中造成巨大的痛苦。

Between these two, Mortdecai and Esther, God would work in a way that would bring peace to his people, but at the time, these two did not know it. So in thinking about this there are three things that I believe we can learn from today's reading.

Firstly, when we look at what is going on in the world around us, we can be tempted to think that God is not there.

We can overestimate the power that the world thinks it has.

When bad things are happening around us, we tend to think that the ones doing the bad things are the ones in control. But the truth is that God is the one who is at work in us and in the world. He has it all in his hands. He is silently working in, among, and sometimes through events that happen, for the sake of his goals and his people.

We need to remind ourselves to not overestimate the power of the world but to trust that God is faithful to his promises to us.

Secondly, we are tempted to underestimate what God can do.

We think that God is not present and involved in the world. Mortdecai did not know what was going to happen, but because he trusted God, he was open to seeing the possibilities of God at work.

We can easily resign ourselves to thinking that God is not going to act because we don't see him at work in these things.

We need to remind ourselves that God's presence is always in the world, and that he can and does work in ways we cannot see or understand.

在末底改和以斯帖之間，我們將會看到上帝仍在人的生命中賜與安慰與引導，但在這兩人面對困難的時候，他們並不知道那個結果。

因此，在思考這個問題時，我相信我們可以從中學到三件事。

首先，當我們看到周圍世界正在發生的事情時，我們可能會被引誘去懷疑，上帝已經離開我們了。

我們都 高估我們周圍境況的力量。

當壞事發生時，我們會認為那些做壞事的人就是掌控一切的人。但實情是，上帝仍是那位住在我們中間，並掌管萬有的主。上帝容許事情發生，有時是因為他正在背景中工作，甚至因為祂為著他的子民的原故，默默的工作。

我們需要提醒自己，不要相信外在環境的力量，而要相信上帝對的良善與信實。

其次，我們會被引誘去 低估神的能力。我們認為上帝不在場，也不參與在我們的生命中。 末底改不知道將會發生什麼事情，但他信靠上帝，所以他以開放的心，看到上帝在當中介入的可能性。

我們很容易便會認為上帝不會採取任何行動，全因為我們沒有看到他在工作 。

我們需要提醒自己，上帝的同在一直都在，並且他許多時候以我們無法看到或理解的方式去工作。

Finally, we can underestimate what God is doing in us. God was working through Mortdecai and Esther, even when they did not know that he was working through them.

Even in a lowly, weak, humble person, like Esther, God can and does work.

God is present and working in the world around us and in your life, even when God seems far away.

We don't trust what we see, but rather, we trust his Word to us. So Jesus says in Matthew 28:20, "And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age. "

God is with you and me at all times, no matter what the circumstances. This is the hope that we hold on to.

One of the interesting things about the Bible is that the books are not in order of time. They are gathered together into different sections. For example, the history books are together, the books of the prophets are together, and so on. It is like a library of books. Esther is the last written book of the Old Testament. Why is this so significant?

Because it would be about four hundred years after the end of this book before we hear God speak again at the beginning of the New Testament.

God was silent, yet he was at work through his people, preparing things in advance for what was to come and we know that what was to come was Christ Jesus

This is my encouragement for you today: that God is in fact at work, even when we cannot see or hear him. So hold on to this and trust his Word of promise to

最後，我們不要 低估神在我們生命當中 所做的事情。

神透過末底改和以斯帖的生命去祝福以色列民，即使他們當時並不察覺上帝正在其中。

即使在一個卑微、軟弱、謙卑的人中，就好像以斯帖一樣，上帝也能而且確實在工作。

神在我們周圍的世界和我們的生命中工作，就是在我們以為上帝看起來很遙遠的時候，仍是如此。

我們不應只信靠我們看到的事情，相反，我們應信靠上帝的話語，耶穌在馬太福音 28: 20 說：

你們要確信 "我常與你同在，直到時代的終結。

無論在什麼情況下，上帝始終與你和我同在。這是我們堅持的盼望 。

關於聖經的一個有趣的事情是，當中的書信不是按時間順序排列的。它們被分成不同的部分。例如，歷史書在一起，先知的書卷在一起，等等。它就像一個圖書館。以斯帖記是舊約聖經的最後一卷書。為什麼這如此重要？

因為在這本書的年代，要到四百年之後，才是新約開始的時間。

神的語言有時候是沉默的，然而他卻透過他的子民去工作，為將要發生的事情提前預備，而我們知道那將要到來的就是基督耶穌。

這就是我今天對你們的鼓勵：神正在工作，即使我們看不見或聽不見他。但我們卻要持守這一點，相信他透過基督耶穌

you through Christ Jesus, and you might be amazed at what you see and hear.

對你的應許及祂的話語，然後，你會慢慢發現令你感到驚訝的生命經歷。