

The Only Hero

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[0 : 00] Father, you know how each one of us to some extent struggles with being one person in church and with our Christian friends and another person when we're away from church and away from our Christian friends.

Father, you know how much that describes some of our lives. And so, Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would use your word today in a powerful way to speak into our lives.

And that, Father, you would grip us with the beauty of the gospel and what Jesus has done. You would grip us with his unfailing love. And as we are gripped by the gospel, that you would grow courage within us to swim against the tide for the good of this city and your great glory.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. One of my regular people that I talk to is an atheist.

And about once a month or so, it works out that I happen to be at the Starbucks, or as somebody said, I should start calling it St. Arbux to make it sound more holy.

[1 : 10] And I'm there. And so, about once a month at least, he happens to be there on a Friday morning. And he'll ask me about once a month or more what I'm preaching on this Sunday.

He's an atheist, right? So, it's always very interesting. It always provokes some type of conversation. So, he asked me on Friday morning. And just so you know, I often don't know on Friday morning exactly what I'm going to say on Sunday morning because I haven't finished listening to the Bible deeply.

So, he asked me this Friday. And I said, well, I'm not actually sure. It's a very unusual text. And then I said, but I'll tell you what the story is that I'm going to preach on. So, I told him the story. And I gave him a brief summary of the story.

And when I was finished, literally, he went like this. Whoa, I didn't know stuff like that was in the Bible. And then he said, but you know, it doesn't matter what's in the Bible because no story written 2,200 years ago in a very different culture can have any relevance to anybody's life today.

So, I had a brief conversation with him about that, which maybe we'll touch on in a moment. But let's look at that story that made him go, whoa, I didn't know they had stories like that in the Bible. And so, we're looking at Esther chapter 2.

[2 : 22] Esther chapter 2. And we're going to be looking at the story in verses 1 to 18. And just as you may be turning to that, and in a moment the text will go up on the screen, the way to think of this sermon series in the book of Esther is imagine that you're watching.

We're using the book of Esther to make a series of scripts for different shows on a Netflix series.

And each episode has to be an episode that you can watch and enjoy and be challenged, etc.

But also, there's an overarching story that all of the nine episodes will work to bring home different truths. Anyway, so that's what we're doing. So, this is really episode 2.

And in episode 1, which we looked at last week, just a, you know, we won't do the skip intro thing, which lasts about a minute on most of those Netflix shows. What happened last week is we were introduced to King Euserus, which I didn't pronounce his name correctly.

I have a hard time pronouncing his name. But it's about King Euserus, who's the emperor of Persia. And one of the things that you need to know, I talked about it last week, one commentator said that you can start to understand the beginning of Jewish humor if you understand parts of the book of Esther.

[3 : 38] Because the book of Esther is talking about something which is very, very, very serious. It talks about rape, it talks about sex trafficking, and it talks about genocide. But there's still some humor in it, puns.

And so the Jewish writer of this book, he chose as the name for the king a name which in Hebrew sounds like headache.

So all the way through the story, when you're reading it, if you were a Hebrew speaker back then, it would sound as if they were calling him King Headache to make people smile. We know him as King Xerxes, who was the...

How many of you have seen the movie 300? I asked you this last week, only a small number of you. We are Sparta. Yes, that's the king that they take on in that movie, is the king that's mentioned in this story.

And the first episode takes place three years before the movie 300, so to speak. And so we see King Xerxes and all of his glory and his splendor.

[4 : 45] But when we're watching it, it's a little bit like when one of us watches a movie about the Civil War. And maybe you see Birmingham, Alabama, just after Fort Sumter has surrendered to the Confederate forces.

And everybody's jubilant and everybody's celebrating. And they're there in their finery. And you can see the riches and the splendor. And they're going to kick the North's butt. And they're going to win. And they're going to triumph.

And we watch it. We watch it. And we know they're all going to lose. They're going to lose. And so chapter one is set by this. You see all of King Xerxes, King Xerxes' splendor and glory.

But they put in this very subtle thing about the year that this happens. And we know this happens just a couple of years before he invades Greece. And he loses. And he'll come back.

And a man who's been defeated. And this second episode that we're looking at takes place after he's come back. Actually, sort of before and after he's come back.

[5 : 46] And he's been defeated. So it's a different type of King Xerxes. And let's kick up. Oh, and one other thing about it is while he's drunk for seven days, he has a conflict with one of his queens.

And as a result of that conflict, because she refuses to obey him, he banishes her forever. Now we caught up. Episode two, verse one. After these things, when the anger of King Xerxes had abated, he remembered Vashti.

That was his queen that he'd banished. And what she had done and what had been decreed against her. Then the king's young men who attended him said, Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king.

And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in Susa, the citadel, under custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who was in charge of the woman.

Let their cosmetics be given to them. And let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti. This pleased the king, and he did so. Now we have to pause here.

[6 : 53] What they've just described is horrific. This is not sending out a casting note to see what beautiful young women want to be on the show The Bachelor, which is horrific in and of itself, by the way.

But that's a different sermon topic. This is the forced taking of young women from their home throughout the entire empire.

It is the king deciding to use the bureaucracy, the police, and the military of the state to seek out beautiful young women and take them against their will, away from their family and friends, and to bring them to the capital.

And Herodotus, because this king, headache, he's done this several times. Herodotus said, a Greek historian, that 400 young women, 400 young women would be taken.

Some scholars of the ancient world think that the number that he might have taken in something like this might have approached 1,500 young women taken from their homes by force to go to the capital.

[8 : 10] It's horrific. And it's in this context that we're going to meet the person that the book is named after, Esther.

Let's continue, verse 5. Now, there was a Jew in Susa, the citadel, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, son of Shemai, son of Kish, a Benjaminite, who had been carried away from Jerusalem among the captives.

So who had been carried away from Jerusalem among the captives carried away when with Jeconai, king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had carried away.

Now, just sort of pause there. That's a lot of Jewish names. And a lot of times when we get a lot of these Jewish names, our mind, if you're like me, your mind starts to just sort of blank out a little bit. And so what's going on here is, first of all, for ancient Jewish readers, Minam Mordecai is a very, is a sort of a common Jewish name, but it's a shocking name.

Because what his name is, is worshiper of Marduk. He's a Jewish man who's named as a worshiper of Marduk, the god of the Babylonians.

[9 : 32] And the story tells us that this man who's named the worshiper of Marduk is a fourth generation Jew in exile away from the Jewish homeland.

That's the whole thing about the son of this, the son of this, the son of this. So there have now been, Mordecai is the fourth generation of those Jewish people who had been taken away by the Babylonians out of the promised land, out of the holy land, to live in a foreign empire.

Fourth generation. And the other thing which is going on in this story is this, by this, by them giving these timelines, what they also tell you is this. Those of you who read the Bible, there's this overarching story in the Bible.

There's sort of an underlying timeline which tells this overarching story. And I'm not going to go into it. You can talk to me at coffee hour. I can talk to you a little bit more about it if you'd like to know.

But if you read the book of Ezra, it's a book in that part of the Bible which we call the Old Testament before Jesus.

It's all the books before Jesus. And if you look at the first part of Ezra, the first part of Ezra describes how King Xerxes' father gave permission for the Jewish people who want to go back to the promised land.

[10 : 45] But that's King Xerxes' father. And obviously Mordecai is not one of them. He didn't want to go to the promised land. He wanted to stay in the winter capital of the empire of Persia.

And one of the things which is really interesting about the book of Esther is it doesn't comment on it. It just tells you this is what's gone on. Some of the Jews, at great cost to themselves, went back to the homeland.

Mordecai is not one of them. He stayed in the capital. In fact, he stayed at the very heart of the capital. It would be really like saying that rather than going back to the promised land, he not only lived in Ottawa, he lived in Centertown or the Glebe.

He didn't live in Canada. Good grief. Who lives in Canada? You know, he's living in Centertown, the Glebe. He's living downtown where it's nice. That's where he chose to live. That's Mordecai.

But the book's not named after Mordecai. But now we learn about Mordecai to learn about the person that the book is named after. But learning that Mordecai is a fourth generation in exile and that he's named after the god, as a worshiper of the god of Babylon, Marduk, it's very interesting then when we meet Esther.

[11 : 56] Look at verse 7. So Mordecai was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, the daughter of his uncle, for she had neither father nor mother.

The young woman had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at. And when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter. So when the king's order and his edict were proclaimed, and when many young women were gathered in Susa, the capital, in custody of Higai, Esther also was taken into the king's palace and put in custody of Higai, who had charged the woman.

And the young woman pleased him, the young woman Esther. That young woman Esther pleased Higai and won his favor. So Higai quickly provided her with her cosmetics and her portion of food and with seven chosen young women from the king's palace and advanced her and her young woman to the best place in the harem.

Esther had not made known her people or kindred, for Mordecai had commanded her not to make it known. And every day Mordecai walked in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and what was happening to her.

Now just pause. Remember here I told you that there's somewhere between 400 to 1,500 young women who were rounded up against their will and brought here. Harem's very huge.

[13 : 20] Probably many, many rooms. Just crowded. And what we're seeing here, it's very, very interesting about her name and one other thing here in the story amongst other things.

She has two names. She has a Jewish name and she has a Persian name. And there's some debate in scholars as to what the source of her Persian name is, but I'd say the best scholarship

says that her name, she's named after Ishtar, the Persian equivalent of the goddess Venus, the god of love and war.

And so she has a Persian name named after Ishtar. She has a Jewish name. And she decides that when she gets captured, she's only going to go by her Persian name and she's not going to go by her Jewish name.

Now what this means is, many of you know the story in Daniel. And if you remember, those of you who know the story of Daniel, the very first chapter is how Daniel is captured by the Babylonians as they're taking over Israel and Jerusalem, or Judah and Jerusalem.

And Daniel and his friends, when they're brought into captivity, because they're healthy and of noble family, they decide that they're going to make, I mean one thing which they don't usually tell us about Daniel is, probably what happened to Daniel is, they took his testicles out to make him a eunuch.

[14:56] Which often doesn't get taught in Sunday school, but that's what they probably did to him. But they took out Daniel and his three friends and the other Jewish men, they take out their testicles to make them eunuchs, to train them to be officials in the bureaucracy of Babylon.

And those of us know the very first story is, some of you know what is it that Daniel and his friends do? They refuse. They say we're Jewish people. We refuse to eat your food.

We're going to follow our dietary laws. Esther's not Daniel. Esther wasn't keeping kosher. Esther wouldn't have been doing anything that would have showed that she was Jewish or one of God's people.

She wouldn't have been saying her Jewish prayers in such a way that people would know she was Jewish. She wouldn't have been keeping the Sabbath. She would have been eating the same food that was unclean.

And she was going by a Persian name, not a Jewish name. Now, by the way, a couple of things.

One of the reasons I think that Christians have to read the book of Esther, I mean, it's good to read the book of Daniel, but you know what the fact of the matter is, is that most of us are far more like Esther than we are like Daniel.

[16:18] Esther's living a compromised life. In fact, none of us even know anybody like this. But I've been told that in some churches, there's a problem.

Not ours, of course, but in some churches, there's a problem where people are very good with their Christianese and their evangelical talk and everything when they're in church, but then when they go to work or when they go home, they live a radically different life.

We don't know anybody at all who's like that, of course. It's a completely foreign problem to us. But many of us struggle with that, don't we? I mean, I'm being facetious. Many of us struggle with being one thing when we're with other Christians and very another thing when we show up at work or we play hockey, we play basketball, when we go home with our wives and kids, a radically, quite a significantly different person.

And, you know, in many ways, most of us have probably not been Daniels all of our lives. Many of us have been more like Esther. By the way, the book of Esther is going to show in a couple of episodes her conversion moment, so to speak, which is key to the book.

And next episode, we're going to talk about Mordecai's conversion moment, by the way. But right now, what they're showing is that both of them, Mordecai and Esther, have lived compromised lives, identifying with their pagan culture rather than being the people of God.

[17:40] And that Esther in particular, who, by the way, this situation she's in, we're going to talk a bit more about it in a moment, it's a horrific situation. She was forced away from her home.

And one of the things which is so wonderful about this text, by the way, one of the things which is so spectacularly wonderful about this text is that it just reports it.

Like, many people read it and say, well, why doesn't the Bible condemn this? It's sex trafficking, right? Like, why doesn't the Bible condemn this? Like, why doesn't the Bible describe how, you know, Esther, like, why doesn't Esther go on a hunger strike and rather die than do what's being demanded of her?

Like, why doesn't, like, why doesn't she, like, all these things and, you know, but the fact of the matter is, is, you know, what do we know? The little we know about things like sex trafficking is that for all we know, many of these young women who got put into this situation, their parents were happy.

I mean, isn't that how lots of sex trafficking happens? The parents contact the authorities. Would you consider taking her daughter? And in some of the families, it might very well be that the daughter hated the parents so much they wanted to do this.

[18 : 57] Because, you know, the fact of the matter is, is that reality is very messy, isn't it? It's very messy. And one of the things which is so powerful about this story, its enduring power, is that if we were to try to improve it by making a little comment about how all the women were crying or all of the parents were crying or all, you know, or Esther did this, you know what it would do?

It would turn it into a greeting card that would trivialize the story. It would turn it into a greeting card that would trivialize the complexity of what was going on.

But even though what's going on is complex, it's horrific. She is, with no exit other than death, under the power of the most powerful empire in the West, and all the way up to India.

So what happens to her? Well, let's look at verse 12. Now, when the turn came for each young woman to go into King Ahuserus, King Headache, after being 12 months under the regulations for the woman, since this was the regular period of their beautifying, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women, when the young...

Now, just pause here. I'm going to read it again. But what's being described here is completely and utterly abhorrent and evil. The king of Persia has used the army and the bureaucracy to find somewhere between 400 to 1,500 young women.

[20 : 45] He's brought them against their will to come into his capital to be under his care. And he's lavished... Well, he's lavished. He's lavished a year of preparation so he can have one sexual encounter with them.

One sexual encounter with them. And that's what's about to happen to Esther. And really, when these young women are captured, it's like a sentence of death to them.

Because they will spend one night with the king, as we're going to see in a moment, and then they don't go back to the harem of women who are being prepared to spend one night, one sexual encounter with the king.

They go into another harem. And it might be that they spend the rest of their lives never even ever going to see the king again. Ever. It means they have been denied the possibility of marriage, of children, of a normal life.

It is horrific. It is unspeakably evil. And there's another thing I want to say before we go anywhere further for this.

[22 : 08] And this is a very, very, very, very important lesson for us. We look at it and we see that this is horrific and it's a broken world and a broken system.

But if you lived in Persia, Persia was the best country in the world. And what was going on is what all reasonable people believe and think.

Like, everybody knows that it's all right for kings to do things like that. And not only is that something that just everybody knows, but the intelligentsia, the artists, would say, well, of course, what do you expect?

He's the king. Of course, this is how the world works. You see, this is the thing for us in our day. Now, Canadians, we're not very proud.

We wouldn't say that we're the best country in the world. We would maybe acknowledge that Norway or Sweden were a bit better than us. Maybe Switzerland. We're like a thousand times better than those dummies down south of the border.

[23 : 08] Like maybe a million, billion, trillion, quadrillion. So we're too humble to say we're the best country in the world, but we're up there in the top four. Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, maybe above us.

And we live in the best culture and there's all sorts of things in our culture that everybody just knows. Everybody knows. Everybody knows that if a woman wants to have an abortion, she should have an abortion.

Like if you don't know that, like everybody knows that if a person's having lots of pain and suffering at the end of their life, that they should be able to ask a doctor to kill them. Like everybody knows that.

Like how come you don't know that? Everybody knows that naturalistic evolution explains everything that exists and if you don't know that, like really? You don't believe that?

Like do you not brush your teeth as well? Like is your IQ that of a turnip? Like everybody knows that. Now by the way, when I mentioned the thing about abortion, just a point here, there's a very good chance that at least one of us, just if you're here, you know, it says church, but if we could ever change the name from church, what we should rename ourselves is not the collection of the perfect, not the collection of the holy, not the collection of the virtuous, but the hospital for sinners. [24 : 41] A church is a hospital for sinners. And there's probably at least one of us here who's either had an abortion or contributed to abortion and I didn't bring that up to push you away.

I brought it up because that's in fact something which needs to be talked about in our culture and all I would tell you if you're here and you've had an abortion or you've helped somebody have an abortion is that Jesus loves you and I'm not saying that to trivialize anything and he died for you knowing that you would do bad things and this is an invitation for you to pour out your heart to Jesus because you need to talk it through and you need to know his grace and mercy.

So I just want to encourage you if that describes you that you just, you try to talk to somebody who looks like there's a kind face and they'll listen to you and they'll love you. But the point is this horrific thing at the time wasn't viewed as horrific.

It was viewed as just what everybody knows. Just the way the world works. The way the world should work. Powerful men should have more than one wives and should have concubines.

They have sexual urges. They should be able to act on it. And we know they're wrong and it's a powerful thing for us to realize that lots of what gets said that just everybody knows.

[26 : 05] It's a wake-up call for us. I'm not saying that we should be, there's so much stuff we could learn from the gay and lesbian movement because at the heart of that movement was them saying we're queer and we're here and we're not going away.

We're queer, we're proud that we're queer and we're here. Now we can't say we're Christians and we're proud because that's like a sin. We're Christians and we're humbly here and we're not going away.

And we just disagree with all sorts of things that go on in the world and we're not going away. And we should just, we have to learn to start to go against the tide in an upfront way. Not in a proud way, not in an angry way necessarily, but just I don't believe those things.

I don't think those things. I'm a Christian. I follow Jesus. And we have to start to learn to be more comfortable to just be publicly swimming against the tide and books like Esther help us to understand that in a very, very powerful story where when you actually look at the text and you realize it's not like what often gets talked about by preachers because there's unspeakable evil and Esther is trapped in unspeakable evil and it's going to lead to her conversion moment in a couple of episodes but not today.

So let's get back because the text, I've sort of jumped ahead of that. Look at verse 12 again. Now when the turn came for each young woman to go into king headache after being 12 months under the regulations for the women since this was the regular period of their beautifying, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women, when the young woman went into the king in this way she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the harem to the king's palace.

[27 : 56] Here's the part. In the evening she would go in and in the morning she would return to the second harem in custody of Shazgaz, the king's eunuch, who was in charge of the concubines.

She would not go into the king again unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name. He doesn't even know their names. Night after night a different concubine, a different woman doesn't know their names.

They might have never even seen the king again for the rest of their lives. This is unspeakable evil. And it's not just, I don't want to trivialize the evil to the women, we cannot trivialize the evil to the women.

We cannot, there, I am not, this is just not, but, nothing that I say next is meant to, the evil to the women is atrocious.

But there's also a broader social evil that goes on because it means that there's 400 to 1,500 young men who will never have a wife. polygamy, all polygamy, serves rulers and emperors by creating a large group of young men who can be sacrificed in war.

[29 : 25] And it is fertile ground for men profiting from prostitution. You see, the evil of what goes on in this, and it's what happens in every country, anytime there's a type of an evil that goes on in the culture, the evil isn't just this tiny little singular evil, but the evil spreads just as abortion corrupts

everything it touches.

verses. Verse 15. When the turn came for Esther, here she is, a young woman, she's trapped, and she's going to be brought in for her one night with the king.

When the turn came for Esther, the daughter of Abahel, the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his own daughter to go into the king.

She asked for nothing except what Haggai, the king's eunuch, who had charge of the woman, advised. Now Esther was winning favor in the eyes of all who saw her. Just pause here.

You know, this is what's so wise about the Bible. It just reports what's going on. It doesn't try to trivialize this. It doesn't say this is a good thing she's doing or a bad thing it's doing.

[31 : 00] It's not saying that this Jewish girl who tried to flirt her way to be one of the 400 or 1500 that would become the queen. It's talking about one story. It's not tame, but it's the critique of it is in the dispassionate telling.

without going into what might be going through Esther in the right way or the wrong way and all of that type of stuff.

It would turn it into greeting cards. It would turn it into political slogans, but it just records. Verse 16, when Esther was taken to King Headache, into his royal palace in the tenth month, which is the month of Tibet, in the seventh year of his reign.

At this point in time, it's four years after chapter one, or episode one, four years after. It's after he's been defeated by Persia. The king loved Esther, that woman named after the Persian goddess of love and war, hiding her Jewishness.

The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins. So he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

[32 : 20] Then the king gave a great feast for all his officials and servants. It was Esther's feast. He also granted a remission of taxes to the provinces and gave gifts with royal generosity.

So just a couple of takeaways from this. I mean, you know, I spend more time trying to help you understand and hear the story than my own words because this is God's word and my words are my words.

And it's far better that the story grip you. But if you could put up the first point, Andrew, let's be honest, there is a powerful allure. I know the grammar of this sentence isn't great, but I couldn't fix it.

There is a powerful allure to the path of silence, compromise, and conformity so that you will be accepted. Isn't that true in our culture?

There's something very powerful and alluring about this idea. if I just am going to be silent, and if I'm going to be silent about being a Christian and about what I think, and if I just sort of compromise, and if I just learn to conform, I'll be accepted.

[33 : 31] You know, I have my, I've been, I'm a slow learner, and I have a parrot, and for some reason I keep calling it an African grey, but it's not an African grey, it's an Amazon.

And anyway, it's a, well actually I don't really have it, but my daughter and my wife have it, it's a parrot about this big. Okay, and in the biological world, we took that parrot and we made a chicken suit, a duck suit for it, made out of duck feathers and a little duck head, and because it's a parrot, we trained it how to quack like a duck.

Well that would sort of be amusing for people, you know, we put our parrot in a duck suit, and it wanders around on the floor quacking like a duck, but on a biological level, it's still a parrot.

But at the moral and intellectual level, we become what we put on. In other words, for human beings, when we, not, I mean, not literally, obviously, but if you quack like a duck, poop like a duck, walk like a duck, look like a duck, you're a duck.

And C.S. Lewis, his least favorite, people who read C.S. Lewis, the novel people like the least is *Till We Have Faces*. The novel he loved the most was that novel, *Till We Have Faces*.

[34 : 55] and it's all about a woman who wears a mask and she eventually comes to look like the mask. And he's capturing a very, it's a very powerful novel and it just describes how we become, what we do.

And so, you know, if we think, well, I'm just going to be silent about this issue and I'm going to be silent about this issue and I'm going to compromise on this issue and I'm going to conform on this issue and before you know it, you're not actually a follower of Jesus.

But we sort of think that we can be. When I was part of the Diocese of Ottawa, there would be several people that, you know, when different things were going on in the Diocese of Ottawa, that were just wrong and virtually nobody would speak against it and there were several people with great qualifications who were evangelicals and they just were silent but because they would say they're becoming silent because they can get on this committee or in this key position and then they'd eventually make change.

But they compromised and they compromised and they compromised and they compromised and when they got into that position there was always one more level they could reach and so they would compromise and conform and at the end of the day, they were a liberal.

Their backbone was removed, given a different one. There's a powerful allure to the path of silence, compromise, and conformity so that you will be accepted.

[36 : 29] Second point, but what does this story show us? The path of silence, compromise, and conformity makes you promises that will not work out. Esther went by another name, Mordecai went by another name, Esther still gets captured.

We're going to see this part of what makes the book of Esther so important is that what's going to happen in the next, not this episode, not this next episode, but the episode after that is the plan to have genocide to kill every Jew is going to be put in place.

That's going to be what drives the last episodes of this story, the plan by the Persian government to kill every Jewish person. And the fact of the matter is, is the path of silence and compromise and conformity does not deliver what it promises, either in terms of effectiveness or your peace, nor your eternal destiny.

By the way, I'm not saying that as if I'm, this is a time now I wish I got off the stage and was down there. Let me just share with you, sorry, two minutes. I got into this hour and a half long conversation with a guy yesterday.

It was so funny. Here I am, on one level I pray for opportunities to share the gospel, and I go into the coffee shop and I get down, I'm going to be working on my sermon for this morning. I get five minutes into it, this guy starts talking to me.

[37 : 52] It ends up to me in an hour and a half. By the time it's over, I am so exhausted, I can't work on the sermon. And it's far ranging about creation, about God, but we get into this one part of the conversation because he's into chakras and auras and all of that type of stuff.

And he challenges me about whether Christianity can account for that type of stuff. And I want to try to win him and I'm trying to defend things. And he says we have no account for that type of stuff. And in my mind, I say part of what we Christians would say, and I don't want to say it because I want to be silent because he's going to think I'm a knuckle dragging, narrow minded fundamentalist. And then probably in heaven I'll find out one of you were praying for me that exact moment so that I had courage because I didn't have it in my flesh. And I said, well, part of what we would say that what you're seeing is demonic.

It's demons. He goes, whoa. Now the interesting thing is it didn't end the conversation. You see, that's always the thing about compromise, right?

[39 : 01] The devil whispers into me enough and says, if you say something like demonic, he's going to think you're stupid. He's going to think you're blah, blah, blah, blah. You shouldn't say something like that. You can't. I said, natter away.

And I just said, well, that part of how we would account for it is it's you're experiencing demons. They're only leading you away from God. We still talk for another 40 minutes after that.

And he wants to talk with me again. What I'm just saying to you, when I make these points, I'm not saying that I'm somehow some superstar. I am so Canadian and I, like you, have a sinful flesh.

We need to pray for each other that we learn to bear witness to Jesus unashamed of the gospel and the whole counsel of God.

God. And willing to be a fool for Christ. Next thing, if you put up next point, this is really a thing to remember because many people will read the book of Esther as if Esther is a hero.

[40 : 15] There's only one hero in the Bible, folks. It's Jesus. Jesus is the only hero in the Bible. In fact, part of what is so important about what those books in the Old Testament that prepare us for Jesus, part of the way they prepare us for Jesus is that every, I mean, they're sort of heroes with all very small letters with lots of quote marks and caveats around them.

But you look at all of them and all of them, you see they're sinful. All of them, you see they fail. All of them, they do something which is wrong. All of them, they do something where God has to deliver them.

And then you come to Jesus. And then you read the rest of the New Testament after Jesus and you see Paul and he fights with Barnabas and you see, you know, you hear about this person and that person and you see the things that you see the fights and the messiness and all of that type of stuff. And what shines throughout all of it is Jesus. Only Jesus is without sin. Only him. All of the Bible is preparing us to understand Jesus.

Completely different than any prophet or apostle. Patriarch or patron. If you could put up the next point, please. What do we see in this story?

[41 : 33] This story is so wonderful because it touches at a fundamental level a deep fear that many of us have. It's the lie. You see, one of the things I try to pray when I prepare for sermons is I say, what lies does this text come against?

What lies that Canadians easily believe does this text come against? And a common complaint, whether it's the rich, the one percent, whether it's the Republicans, whether it's the Democrats, whether it's the conservatives, whether it's the liberals, whether it's Islam, whether it's Christianity, whether it's Buddhism, is that the many sacrifice for the benefit of the few or even the one. In the world, often the many are sacrificed for the good of the few. In the gospel, the one sacrificed himself for the good of the many. The one sacrificed himself.

The many are sacrificed for the good of the one or the few. people. But this is preparing us to see how radically different Jesus is. He is the one who willingly dies himself and offers his life himself, not for his own benefit, but for the benefit of all who will receive what he has done.

And if you could up the final point, one of the things which is so powerful about this story is, you know what? You know what's described here? One of the things I said to my atheist friend on Friday morning is I said, you're wrong.

[43 : 13] This story could be written today. This story is going on with Boko Haram. This story is going on in the streets of this city.

This story is as contemporary as anything you could possibly imagine. And it's all part of a larger story preparing us to meet Jesus.

And the very realism of the story, that there are, you know, we understand how the power of the state with its police and its judiciary and its soldiers can be used to enforce that which is atrociously evil.

This is the earth today. It is a realistic story about real people and it's helping us to understand the real God offers a real gospel with a real savior for the real you in the real world.

Not the God described or that we fear in our imagination as a God who will sacrifice many for his causes and his glory, but the God revealed in the person of Jesus in the words of the Bible that describes the one who will sacrifice himself for the many.

[44 : 37] And the real gospel is that it really did happen, he really did come, he really did die, he really did, his perfect life will stand for your imperfect and compromised life and his death will pay the punishment that your compromises deserve and he really does it and he really dies and the grave is really empty on the third day and he really does appear and it really happened.

He's a real savior, it's real news that comes from God for real people like you in your real world that he will take you for himself when you put your faith and trust in him.

And for those of us who compromise after we are his, we have this great confidence that he has done it all to make me right with him and he will never let me go and he will never forsake me.

It's all done by him and that I can turn to him every Sunday when I gather with God's people or in my private devotions and say yesterday or this week I screwed up again God.

I compromised myself here and I compromised myself here and I compromised myself here and I'm sorry. Thank you for Jesus. Help me to learn to walk with Jesus in this real world without compromise and for your great glory.

[46 : 06] Please stand. Lord. If you have never called out to Jesus to be your savior, you should do it now.

Stop listening to me. Just say, Jesus, be my savior and my Lord. I thank you that you died for me. The real me in the real world, I thank you that you died for me.

Be my savior. Be my Lord. Thank you that you will never let me go. Just pray it in your own words right now. But for all of us, let's just do some business with God.

Father, thank you so much that you know who we really are and you know what we're really like and you know our compromises and you know those times when we don't compromise, Father, because we don't always compromise.

You know our growth. You know how we're going. Some of us are going downhill and backwards and some of us are moving forward. Father, you know us. You know us as a motley collection of people and all sorts of conditions of life and of holiness and of sinfulness.

[47 : 20] Thank you, Father. You know each of us as individuals. You know us as a whole and still you love us. And thank you, Father, that you are always more willing to hear us when we confess to you than we are to confess to you.

You're always more willing to hear us and you're always more willing to give us help than we are to ask for help. So, Father, we ask for your help. We ask for your mercy. We ask for your grace. We ask that you would grip us with the gospel.

Grip us with the gospel that we might start to live lives of courage, to swim against the flow in a way that loves people, seeks their best, and brings you great glory.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus and all God's people said, Amen.