

When Power is Your Idol

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[0 : 00] Father, sometimes your word shocks us by saying shocking things. And Father, we know that everything that you write, you cause to be written in your word.

You had it written there so that it would reveal our heart in your presence and would draw us to Jesus. So Father, we ask that the Holy Spirit would come with gentle but very, very deep power as we open your word.

Father, write the gospel on our heart and we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated.

Tape's going. It is sounding a bit weird, right?

It sounds good to you folks? Okay, well, I'm just going to be there. It's just, this is like a thorn in the flesh for me because I hear a bit of an echo as I speak. So some of you know, maybe all of you know, I was raised in a Christian home.

And I don't know if what I'm going to say about the churches that I grew up in, if that's a very fair thing about how I was raised. But when I was raised, the churches I was raised in and the Sunday schools and the youth groups that I went to, when they did talk about what we call the Old Testament, the books in the Bible that were written before the coming of Jesus, whenever we read those in the church, it always seemed as if there was a very obvious hero in the story that we should copy or some very powerful moral in the story that we should learn.

[1 : 28] And that's how I was raised. And then I get ordained and I have to start preaching on the Old Testament, the Tanakh sometimes. And it terrified me.

Time after time, it terrified me because I'd look at it and it didn't make any, like, I just couldn't find those lessons that I grew up with. Some of you, if you know the story of Samson, when I, it seemed to me, my memory is that when I was growing up, that Samson was just like a Baptist deacon, only very strong.

And then I read the story and he's, sorry, he's screwing around with lots of women. He's getting drunk. Let me tell you, that's not what Baptist deacons are supposed to do.

And I wasn't sure how I was going to preach a story like that, but it used to worry me. So we're looking at a story, we're beginning a brand new series today called The Hidden God in a Broken World.

And it's a story of the book of Esther. And let me tell you, I mean, this is a story that has terrible things in it.

[2 : 36] And some of you, in fact, as we read the story, as we read this first episode in the story, you might even wonder why we would read something like this in church. But it's part of, well, let's see what, let's see.

I'm going to open the story to you because I want to encourage you to read the Old Testament. I want to encourage you to try to dive into it, even if it doesn't say things which are very, very shocking. It really is Jesus told us to read it.

And so if he told us to read it, we should learn how to do it. So we're looking at the book of Esther, chapter one, verse one, and let's get into it. And here's how it begins.

What we're going to do is the text is going to be here. I'll pause occasionally just to bring out the significance or a cultural thing so you can enter into the story more powerfully. And then we'll sort of talk a bit more generally about what's sort of going on and we can take away from the text.

Now, in the days of, and I have a hard time pronouncing this name, Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from Ethiopia, India to Ethiopia, over 127 provinces.

[3 : 40] In those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Susa, the citadel, in the third year of his reign, he gave a feast for all his officials and servants, the army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces who were before him.

Now, just sort of pause here. A couple of things. First of all, there's a literary device that begins this story. And the literary device is such that the writer is telling you that he's telling you a true story. That the story that follows is something that happened. That's the claim made by the author. Now, the second thing is this guy with the weird name. So, in Hebrew, in ancient Hebrew, when this name was said out loud, it's a pun.

Now, it's one of the things which is very interesting about this book. This book is going to talk about very, very, very, very dark matters. In this book, there is genocide or an attempt at genocide. There is sex trafficking. There is violence. There is impaling. Lots of impaling. And lots of other things. It's a very, very serious story.

[4 : 50] But the Jewish writer of it also puts bits of humor into it. So, for the ancient Jews, when they would have heard this story read, the word Ahusserus sounds like headache.

So, basically, all the way through the story, they call him King Headache to make a bit of fun of him. So, in fact, what I'm going to do, because I can't pronounce it, I'm going to call him King Headache, because that actually helps you to understand, and now I've just completely vanished.

Have I? He's working on it. Okay. So, he's called King Headache. Now, here's another thing which is really important about this story.

Very, very important. And I didn't know until I looked it up. How many of you have watched the movie 300 about the Spartans? There you go. So, the guy the Spartans fight, this is him.

This is him. This is King Xerxes. That's how he's more better known. He's known as the King of Kings. And so, one of the things that the writer sets right off the bat, when the writer says, this is happening three years after King Headache gets made king, the ancient readers would go, oh.

[6 : 06] Oh. That means this is happening in the year 483 BC. Oh. Now, why would they say, oh? If we were to watch a movie about the Civil War in the United States, and the movie was to focus on the Southerners, the Confederates, and we were to see just after war is declared, in fact, there's lots of Confederate movies that are like this, and it shows the white people with all their wealth and the young guys, and we're going to defeat the North, and we're filled with honor, and you'd see all the opulence.

When we watch that movie, what do we know? We know they're going to lose. We know they're going to lose. Even though they dress well, they're well-spoken, they're all excited, they're very confident in their power, we know they're going to lose.

And that's what the author of this story does for most of the ancient people when he begins it by saying it starts third year of being king, 483, because in the year 480, he faces the Spartans, and 300 Spartans are able to hold back a Persian army of tens to tens to tens of thousands, and then shortly after that, the Greeks kick their butt, and King Headache is going to return to Persia, having lost big time.

So that's how this story begins. A bit of a caution, because you're going to see his power and his glory, and in some ways, one of the things that goes all the way through the book of Esther is a meditation upon power.

The claims of power, our desires for power, and how power actually works. So this is who the story is. If you're fans of the movie 300, the Spartans are going to really cause him lots of trouble.

[7 : 56] They're going to lose, they're going to lose. And he's King Xerxes, and we're going to call him King Headache. So back to what happens next. So verse 4, so the King Headache has caused all of the people, it's the biggest empire in the world at the time, and he's brought all of his nobles, his army officers, all of his wise men, all of the rich people.

He brought them all together to his capital. He's probably, well, let's see what happens. Verse 4, he brought them all before him while he showed the riches, verse 4, of his royal glory and the splendor and pomp of his greatness for many days, 180 days.

And when these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in Susa, the capital, both great and small, a feast lasting for seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace. And so part of the thing that's going on here in the story is the king is solidifying his support. And he's building to his support.

He's saying, listen, I'm rich, I'm powerful, I'm strong. Look at my armies. Look at my power. Look at my wealth. Look at my glory. I am a winner.

[9 : 13] And you join with me. You will be a winner too. And we're going to go to Greece and we're going to kick Greek butt and we're going to get lots of Greek pillage and you're going to even be richer because I'm a winner.

I'm powerful. I'm mighty. I'm the king of kings. I'm rich. Are you with me? And at the end of a half a year of this propaganda and team building, I guess we'd call it nowadays, and vision casting, it comes time to celebrate with seven days of partying.

And that's what sort of described next. Verse six. There were white cotton curtains and violet hangings fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rods and marble pillars and also couches of gold, couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother of pearl, and precious stones.

Drinks were served in golden vessels, vessels of different kinds, and the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king.

And drinking was according to this edict. There is no compulsion. For the king had given orders to all the staff of his palace to do as each man desired, and the queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women in the palace that belonged to king headache.

[10:38] Now, just pause here for a second. What does it mean by no compulsion? Well, it doesn't mean that they could drink Perrier water. There was actually a custom in Persia.

Let's say I was the emperor, and you folks, I invited you to a party. Whatever I drank, you had to drink. So if I drank four bottles of wine, you have to drink four bottles of wine.

I drank one bottle, you drink one bottle. I switched to whiskey, you switched to whiskey. So the edict was, you don't have to drink what I'm drinking. You just ask the waiter, and if you feel like some port, they'll bring you port.

You want bourbon, you'll bring you bourbon. You want whiskey, they'll bring you that. You can drink whatever you want and drink to your heart's desire, and I'm sure they did. Now, just sort of pause here for a second.

What they've done now is they've shown you his, like, I mean, they had furniture made out of gold and furniture made out of silver. And they had precious, the precious stones were so common, they put them right in the floor so that people walked on them.

[11:45] And you drank out of vessels that were made out of gold. And so you see all this wealth, all this beauty, all this power, and the glory of the city, because he was a builder.

And you think to yourself, who on earth could possibly stand against them? Like, who on earth can possibly stand against them? And now we meet his wife.

That's supposed to be a bit of a joke. Who can stand against him? Now we meet his wife. Right off the bat, we're going to see there's a bit of a problem. So what happens? Verse 10 to 12.

On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehumen, Bitstha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abaktha, Zathar, and Carcas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Headache, to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at.

But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. At this, the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him.

[13:08] Now, several things. If you don't know what a eunuch is, a eunuch is a man who's had his testicles removed. That's what a eunuch is. So one of the things about this place, there's power, there's glory, and there's beauty, and there's great cruelty.

Great, great cruelty and great suspicion. Because if they wanted to trust a man to do anything to do with the women under the king's care, the only way you could do that is if you agreed to have your testicles removed.

And what's a concubine? A concubine isn't a lover. A concubine is a woman that belongs to a man, not as a slave, but belongs to a man for sex.

But they have a lower status than a wife. And no matter how many children might be produced by the concubine, they will not be considered part of the lineage. So it's showing that on top of all of this beauty and all of this glory and all of this power, there is a man who will castrate other men. And he will not only have several wives, which is what's going on, but he also has many, many concubines, different women he feels like having sex with on a regular basis that nobody else can have sex with.

[14:28] But they're not going to have the status or the privileges of being a wife. And he demands, after seven days of drinking, he demands that she come.

And it's not clear exactly what it is that he wants her to do, but what we do know is that it was something sexual. In fact, some commentators think that what he said is literally, I want you to

come wearing your crown and nothing else, to stand naked in front of all of the men. It might have been far more demeaning than that. But it's something very demeaning. And she refuses. She says she's not going to come. And the king gets very, very, very, very, very, very mad. And one of the things as well that's very interesting throughout the rest of this story is that we never find out why Queen Vashti said no. We don't know if it's because she'd put on four or five pounds and she wanted like a week's notice so she could get in good shape for the presentation. We don't know if she's a proto-feminist who had been, you know, pumping up the women in the other place and calling them girls, G-R-R-R-R-R-R-L-S, and they're saying no man's going to rule us. [15:51] We don't know what's going on. But you see, this is part of the fact that the explanation for why Queen Vashti never shows up is actually a significant part of the story because it tells us something about how power works.

You see, when you have power and you like having power and you're dealing with an underling or your wife, what excuses matter?

I show up to work at 8.30, you say to your personal assistant, and every day at 10, I have my triple espresso right here, hot, at 10. If it's not here hot at 10, I'm not interested in your explanation. I'm not interested in your reasons. They don't matter to me. I want it at 10. It's here at 10. If it's not here at 10, you're in trouble. Like, that's how power works.

When you have power, real power, and you give yourself the power, little people's explanations, why would I even bother wasting my time listening to them?

[16:59] I want what I want when I want it, and it has to be here, or you suffer the consequences. Sucks to be you. That's how power works. That's one of the interesting things about what the writer does here, to not give Queen Vashti's reason.

So we don't know whether it's a good reason or a bad reason, because from King Heddy's point of view, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. Now, the next part is very, very odd.

So he's really, really angry. He's drunk. He's with a whole pile of drunk men, and he's angry. So he does what a lot of drunk men do when they're angry.

They ask other drunk men for advice, which isn't very smart, in case you don't know, right? So one of the things you have to understand when you read stories like this is just because it happens in the Bible doesn't mean you're supposed to do it.

You know, you say, dear, I've learned in the Bible that when I get drunk, I should get advice from other drunk men. No, that's not the point of the story. Like, sometimes, in fact, often, the point of the story is not to do certain things.

[18:09] We're going to talk a little bit in a moment about why it is that something like this would even be in the Bible. But he's really, really, really mad, and so he says, remember at the end of verse 12, at this the king's anger became, the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him.

So verse 13, then the king said to the wise men who knew the times, for this was the king's procedure towards all who were versed in law and judgment, the men next to him being Karshena, Shithar, Admantha, Tarshish, Merez, Marcina, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who saw the king's face and sat first in the kingdom.

According to the law, what is to be done to queen Vashti because she has not performed the command of king headache delivered by the eunuchs? Now, just sort of pause here for a second. A couple of things are going on. First of all, the wise men, we meet them, not obviously the same guys, but they're the magi that show up in Matthew chapter 2. The magi were Persian astrologers, and that's what these guys are.

They're experts in astrology, and they're experts in divination. That's what it means in the text when it says, verse 13, then the king said to the wise men, the magi, who knew the times, and that means they understood how to use divination, how to get in touch with the spirit world, they believed, so they'd know when the gods were calling for something, the most chance of success would happen according to the gods, according to the spiritual powers.

[19:45] In the case of the king, who was, by the way, not a pagan, but a Zoroastrian, who believed then that there was just one god, but he believed in spiritual powers and spiritual forces.

And so, you might say to yourself, so just for instance, just so you know, if one of you are drunk, and you call me up at night, and you say with your slurred voice, George, I need your advice.

I'm thinking of doing this. Well, let me tell you, what I'd say to you is, are you driving? And, you're drunk.

I'd say, don't make any decisions when you're drunk. Just so you know, you don't have to bother calling me up at two in the morning. That'll be in my advice. Make no decisions when you're drunk. Why do they think they can make decisions when they're drunk? Well, I didn't know this until I did the research. The ancient Persians often made decisions twice before they'd be final on it.

[20 : 46] They'd first, if they were drunk, and they were going to be making decisions, it was one person's job to be sober and write it down. And after they sobered up, they'd ask the sober guy, what decisions did we make while we were drunk?

And they'd say, well, these are the decisions you made. And they'd look at it, and if it made sense when they were sober, they'd do it. And they also did the opposite. They would be sober, and they'd make a decision, but they often wouldn't act on it.

They'd say, well, now we have to get drunk and consider the issue while we're drunk. And if it makes sense to us while we're drunk, then we know it's the right decision.

Sometimes they would just, like in this case, just make a decision when they're drunk. Now, here's one of the things about this which is very, very, very, very contemporary. How many artists in North America and in the whole first world believe they are more creative when they are stoned or drunk? It's very, very, very, very common. I was just reading a thing about a comedian, and whenever she travels, she makes sure she has, she doesn't like smoking marijuana because she can't control the amount that she's taking, so she likes to consume it because she knows the exact amount, and she always has it with her because it helps her to think better.

[22 : 07] It helps her to be more clear and helps her to be more creative. It's a very, very common thing. You see, the ancient Persians believed they were closer to the spiritual world when they were drunk, just like most of the artists of our world, and who knows how many politicians and even judges think that being stoned for a while or drunk will actually help them to be wiser, get them in touch with their creativity or whatever.

So the ancient Persians being drunk was actually maybe a sign that they were closer to the spiritual world, so their decision is going to be a better decision. And so the king, king headache, he's drunk, he's really, really mad, he asks his seven drunk friends for advice about what they should do. And here's the great advice that they gave him. Here's the great advice. Actually, let's read verse 15 again.

According to the law, king asks, what is to be done to queen Vashti because she has not performed the command of king headache delivered by the eunuchs. And here's the advice.

Then Menukam said in the presence of the king and the officials, not only against the king has queen Vashti done wrong, but also against all the officials and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of king headache.

[23 : 36] For the queen's behavior will be made known to all women, causing them to look at their husbands with contempt since they will say king headache commanded queen Vashti to be brought before him and she did not come.

This very day, the noble woman of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's behavior will say the same to all the king's officials and there will be contempt and wrath in plenty.

Now just pause. Some of you are saying, did I just read that right? Are they using this as an excuse to shut down and oppress all the women in the kingdom?

You did hear it right. You know, one of the interesting things, and by the way, I could go on a long aside about this. This is very contemporary. He asked them what does the law say and they give them a sociological theory that he doesn't actually, they don't actually say what's in the law.

He gives them a sociological theory about, and it's really what they want to do. And what they want to do is horrible. And so some of you are saying, George, I came to church on Thanksgiving Sunday and I get to hear a text about a whole pile of drunken men making a rule that all women have to serve them and respect them.

[24 : 58] Like I am so disappointed I came to church some of you maybe came with a friend and you're thinking you're shriveling into the seat because this is in the Bible?

Well, I'm going to say a couple of things about it, but let's get all the gory details out first. I think we were at verse 19. So here's the advice, verse 19.

If it please the king, let a royal order go out from him and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be repealed. In other words, it will be eternal.

That Vashti is never again to enter, to come before the king headaché and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she.

So when the decree made by the king is proclaimed throughout all his kingdom, for it is vast, all women will give honor to their husbands, high and low alike. This advice pleased the king and the princess and the king did as Menyakh proposed.

[26 : 03] He sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province in its own script and every people in its own language that every man be master in his own household and speak according to the language of his people.

So what's going on here? Well, several things. First of all, some of you might say, George, do you believe this? Is this what the Bible is teaching? Like, is the Bible teaching that? So just, just pause for a second.

If you're here as a skeptic or a scoffer or just as a curious friend or you came in because it's warm or we're just, we're really glad you're here, just time out. Just ask yourself, do you think Christians base their beliefs on drunken Zoroastrian rulers?

No. They don't. Just because it's in a story like this doesn't mean that we're to say that it's it's what we should be doing.

In fact, it's, the story is showing us quite radically different things than that. I don't know why my mic keeps falling off my head. Anyway, so it's not, so do I believe this?

[27 : 10] I would not use this text as a basis to talk about anything to do between husbands and wives. And in fact, actually, it's interesting. It's all the way through. He never refers to the queen as his wife.

He refers to the queen as the queen. It has to do with power. And, but some of you might say, well, George, why on earth would you even have something like this in the Bible?

And, well, I'm going to talk a little bit in a moment about why Jesus would have us read texts like this because as I've shared with Ruth, and I'll say again, if you go back and you read Luke chapter 24, the reason that we should read Old Testament or Tanakh stories like this is because Jesus tells us to.

And he tells us that everything that was written before him in some ways prepares us to understand better who he is and what he does for us on the cross and what it means to follow him.

And because Jesus tells us to, we should do it. But it always means that we understand that everything in these stories, it's not telling us about how an empire should work or how a king should work.

[28 : 15] It's not, you know, it's not telling us, you know, it's not telling us that Christians should practice astrology or they should practice divination. It's not telling us we should make decisions when we're drunk and it's not telling us that we should pass laws telling women they have to obey and honor their husbands and be content with being a second-class citizen.

It's not telling us any of these things. It's telling us very important things but it's not telling us because those things don't prepare us to understand who Jesus is and what he does for us on the cross. But here's the other thing which is so important about reading stories like this.

This is real life. Like, this is real life. There's lots of places you can go to in the world where women are treated worse than this.

And there's all sorts of things and we live in a world where people get drunk, where artists think they're more creative, they get stoned, where the government thinks it's a good thing to make being able to be stoned illegal things so we can do it legally and there can be more of it.

And we live in a real world and this is describing the real world and that's a very important thing because you see at the end of the day the gospel is real. Jesus actually enters into history and he lives at a particular point in time just like real human beings do and he dies a real death just outside of Jerusalem in the spring of the year 30 or the spring of the year 33 depending on how you deal with some historical questions but one of those two times he dies on a cross outside of Jerusalem and he's buried in a grave and on the third day the grave is empty and he really does in history appear to people to prove that he's alive.

[29 : 57] And the gospel, what Jesus does is to make us right with God and help us to live in the real world, in your world, in my world, in a world where there might be unemployment, there might be prosperity, there might be tornadoes, there might be marital problems, there might be a problem

of not being able to be married, you have conflicting desires, you live in a real world.

You see, all of these stories like this that communicate the real world are helping us to understand that Jesus wants to be our Savior and our Lord in your real world and mine. It's very important that it's not just fairy tales and magical types of things.

I think I've told this story when I was going to do my master's degree in counseling, I went through, there was this one, it's called a practicum, it was in group therapy and by coincidence, everybody in it except me was a nun in my group and they had to do this thing once about how they're trying to picture a parent coming in to try to deal with two or three children fighting and they got the nuns to act it out and I watched it and I, at the end of it I said, time out, that's not how real children actually talk to each other because they were all polite, they very quickly said, oh, I'm wrong, I did it.

No, that's not what happens. Kids don't just naturally say, yes, you caught me, I'm wrong, please, no, no, I didn't do it, nothing happened, it was his fault, like that's how it works and it's just not real life, right?

But the gospel is going to be for our real life, that's why it's very important. So, if that's the case then, George, well, why on earth would we even read a story like this? Well, here's the thing, let's put up a first point, if you could put up the first point, Daniel, that would be great.

[31 : 45] One of the things which is so wonderful as we enter into the story of Esther, which is going to be ten chapters, we're going to do it over nine weeks, is the first thing is that power is an idol you are always tempted to worship.

power is an idol that you are always tempted to worship. In fact, if you put up the next point, Daniel, that would be great.

Without realizing it, you and me can easily become a fully devoted worshiper of power. In other words, what I'm saying is that the idol of power is something that we are always tempted to.

Every single one of us here are tempted to the idol of power to worship it. But some of us aren't tempted to worship the idol of power because we don't resist it. We're full-fledged, fully devoted, proud worshippers of power.

And this is a human problem. It's not just a religious or a Christian problem, it's a human problem.

And some of you might say, George, I'm a Christian or I'm a spiritual person or I'm a Canadian.

[32 : 57] I don't worship idols. If you could put up the next point. Here's the thing. You worship an idol by believing it, trusting it, serving it, being guided by it, thinking by it, deriving meaning from it, and getting your identification from it.

So what happens in this story, for instance? All King Headache wants is more power. The whole point of the six months of gathering is to show how powerful he is and why they should give him more power.

He gets his identity from power. He thinks in terms of power. When Queen Vashti doesn't do what he wants, he thinks by the dynamics of power because in the dynamics of power, it's always a matter of, it's always a zero-sum game.

It's like those old things. For those of us who are really old, then we remember when there were teeter-totters. Young people don't know that anymore because it can hurt you, but there's these teeter-totters. There used to be these things that, you know, there was a thing in the middle and a big wooden board or a metal board.

If you sat on one end, it would go down, and so somebody got on the other side, and they could make it go down, and you'd have fun going back and forth, or else you'd eventually have a mean kid who was heavier who would just sit here trapping his younger brother or sister up on the top while they screamed for their mommy, and that's probably why they stopped making teeter-totters.

[34 : 19] Upper one's going down, and it's the same thing for power. In terms of when he, you know, he's serving power, so if he doesn't get what he wants, if he gives in to Queen Vashti, that means her power is going up and his is going down, and that is unconscionable.

How could he ever allow that to happen? He gets his meaning from being the most powerful person. He gets his identity from it, and that's what happens for us, and it's not just with power.

That's how we can understand how anything can be an idol for us. It, you know, it can be money, it can be our husband, it can be our wife, it can be our kid, it can be our job, it can be our reputation, it can be our nationality, it can be our political party, it can be our political leader.

That we think by it, we get our identity by it, we seek more of it, we organize our time around it, that it becomes more and more powerful, it becomes functionally something that we worship.

And, you know, I can give you those as ideas. This is the powerful thing about stories, is that stories presents it in a way that forms us in a deeper level to see that this is a man who's made an idol of power.

[35 : 35] In fact, there's a couple of different really important questions for us. is, I mean, we can ask, is power an idol in your, is power an idol in your life?

You know, one of the signs of idolatry, one of the things which indicates what we've made an idol in our life is when we get angry. Anger often reveals an idol that we worship.

And if you don't get more power and you get really angry, is it possible that you've made an idol out of power?

Is your anger rooted in an idol? And just in general, maybe it's not that, but maybe your anger is rooted in something else. And just one other thing about idols, that most of us have more than one idol.

In fact, it makes us even more miserable. In fact, it's very possible that in a marriage we have at least three or four idols going on. We have an idol for power. We have an idol around our spouse.

[36 : 48] And maybe we have an idol around money. And they keep bumping into each other and contradicting each other. Because on one hand, our whole identity is around a person to love.

our whole identity is around that. But at the same time, we worship power. And if the person that we love starts to have a bit too much power over us, we get very anxious.

Very, very anxious. And then maybe they also do something, our loved one does something that involves spending a little bit too much money. And because money is an idol in our lives, that makes us very anxious.

And we're just very confused because we have several idols that we're trying to worship. And each of them wants our fully devoted attention. And we can't fully devote ourselves to three different or four or five different idols.

And it causes us a lot of anxiety. If you could put up the next thing, and this is what, this is like, just follows from that.

[37 : 51] Like all idols, the idol of power deceives you and does not deliver what it promises. Like all idols, the power, the idol of power deceives you and does not deliver what it promises.

So you think about this for a second. In this story that we've just read, the king passes a law and when I pass a law, it never changes.

We should all laugh at that. He's been dead for 2,500 years. He got assassinated by his bodyguard 15 years after this.

And it would be very interesting that the women's study department at Ottawa U, if they think that his rule about women following men and honoring them is still eternal to the day. No. This is very, very, very important pause here for those of us who are Christians.

there are many, many things in our culture, especially around the culture of death, that our culture says have been finally decided and will last forever. And just like King Headache thinking his decision lasted forever and it doesn't, so it is when the culture of death or any politician or any culturally powerful person says something's decided will never change, they're wrong.

[39 : 22] They're just wrong. They're wrong. This is a profound encouragement for us to pray, to not lose heart in praying that things which are evil in our society, that the time may come when they would change.

In fact, one of the things we're going to see as the book of Esther plays itself out is that, in fact, Esther, a Jewish woman, ends up being the one responsible for saving her people from genocide. that's actually one of the big messages of the whole book. So it's a profound encouragement for you and me to pray. The culture of death does not have the final word and we should pray against it.

Final point, if you could put it up. See, here's one of the things about how idols deceive us. You see, if the idol of power is where we're getting, we think by the idol of power, we understand life by the idol of power, we want to serve the idol of power, we want to become more and more powerful and then our wife does something or, you know, if Louise is serving the idol of power and I do something and you start to think about, you know, she starts to think about me and I think about her and I get anxious about this and I get worried about this and, you know, from the idol of power it either just seems like you're winning or you're losing, you know, and it doesn't seem like there's any sort of other type of framework to think about it but this is where the gospel is so powerful because, you

see, only Jesus, the crucified Messiah who loves you and died in your place to save you, only he reveals the true and living God.

Only Jesus, the crucified Messiah who loves you and died in your place to save you, only he reveals the true and living God and when we receive the gospel and the gospel starts to grip us, it begins to give us a whole different way to start to understand how the world works and this is, you see, part of the huge significance of the gospel because, you know, you read John's gospel at the beginning and it says, in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

[41 : 38] He was with God in the beginning. All things were made through him and without him nothing was made that was made. So when we worship Jesus, we're worshipping the creator of all things.

He understands how the real world works and in the story of Jesus, we see this story of God, the Son of God, looking at ordinary human beings, not just emperors, not just kings, not people who think they're king of kings and lord of lords, but ordinary people like you and me in our real life and he looked down from heaven and he saw that we could not save ourselves from death and that we could not deliver ourselves from idols and out of love for you and me.

He sets aside his glory, he sets aside his divine prerogative, he sets aside his appearance of majesty, but remaining fully God, he takes into himself our human nature and he actually stoops and lowers himself to the womb of the Virgin Mary and lives an ordinary human life, suffering the trials and temptations that you and I do only without sin and teaching and ultimately his stooping to save you and me goes to the point of dying as an innocent man, a criminal's death, burying in his very body and person the sins and rebellion and the shame that you and I have accomplished, but he willingly bears the punishment that that deserves upon himself and he stoops even lower to save us by entering into death and tasting everything there is to taste of death with nothing left out and Jesus who is God, the Son of God, he stoops and descends to save you and me and when we put our faith and trust in him, we receive the power of God for salvation, the power to give you a new life, to be born again, to be regenerate.

We receive that power effectually from God, not because of my power, not because of anything in me, but because God acts with power in our lives to make us right with him. And so we see in the cross and in the gospel, we see perfect love, perfect power, perfect mercy, perfect justice, perfect grace, all at one, not at war with each other, but at one.

And as we receive the gospel, not only do we now enter into a relationship with Jesus to start to try to deal with idols, but as the gospel grips us and shapes us and as we stand by it and start to see it and understand it to unmask idols and to think differently about the world and about the options.

[44 : 23] George, if you're drunk and you're mad at your wife, maybe you should sober up and maybe you should love her and serve her more. And maybe it's not about power.

A whole new universe of thought and life and of business and of family and of culture opens up. Please stand. It's not just a matter that the Lord makes you feel guilty about our idol worship because Christians, like other human beings, can start to worship idols.

But that this is a call for us to be gripped by the gospel and to ask the Lord to reveal whether the roots of our anchor are coming not out of the fact that we have a concern for holiness but that there's in fact hidden idols which are making us angry and hidden idols which are making us anxious and a call to be gripped by the gospel.

To be gripped and shaped by the gospel to call out to God that he would write the gospel on our heart and make the gospel real to us by the power of his Holy Spirit. And if you are here and you've never given your life to Jesus, there is no better time than right now.

Jesus is not like the king of Persia full of anger and on a whim he would hate you. He died to save you. He died to save you because he loves you and he will fit you for heaven and there is no better time than now to say I cannot free myself from idols, I cannot free myself from death, I cannot free myself from my sin.

[46 : 12] But Jesus, I know that you can do that and I give myself to you and I ask that you would be my savior and my lord and I know you will never let me go and there is no time better than right now to call out to Jesus and say that.

No time better than right now and he will hear. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, you know the idols that we serve and we don't even realize we serve them.

You know the idols that we're really tempted to, they really call out to us. Our flesh wants to worship them and we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would move deeply in our lives to help us to see the idols that tempt us for what they are as idols and we ask, Father, that you make us disciples of Jesus who are gripped by the gospel, who stand on the gospel, who are shaped by the gospel, who are drawn by the gospel and not by idols, that you would help us to die to all idols that we might live free to bring you glory and for the good of others and for the good of this people of Ottawa and the good of the world.

Father, may your Holy Spirit do that mighty work and if there are any here who have called out to you, Father, or to Jesus for the first time to be yours, may your Holy Spirit flood into them in a very deep way and that they may know your presence and your power and your love and all these things we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior and all God's people said, Amen.