

The Unlikely Convert

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[0 : 00] Father, please pour the Holy Spirit deep into every one of our hearts, and may your Holy Spirit fall upon us as a congregation, as a people as well.

And we ask, Father, that you would make the gospel more real to us, into not only the depths of our lives, but the very extent and far reaches of our lives, and that you would bring your word home to us.

Father, it's hard for us to give you permission to work deeply within us, so may your Holy Spirit fan into flame within us a deep desire to be receptive to all that your word will do in our lives for your glory.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. That was a great introduction by Daniel, by the way. So, it might look like that was a mistake, but he spent hours working on that delivery to make you all laugh, actually.

It's actually, inadvertently, or I guess as Christians we would say by providence, it's actually a very, very good introduction to the very next things that I wanted to say. I became a Christian when I was in grade 12, after about a year of sort of plunking around the edges of the Christian faith, trying to figure out whether I wanted to be a Christian.

[1 : 26] And, you know, I have to say that, I mean, I could tell you, I could tell you a few of the things that we're going through, I think, in my heart and my mind when I gave my life to Christ.

But I'm sure, because it was a long, long, long time ago. Great. I know I just look like I'm young. No, I know I don't. It was a long time ago. And I bet I know that it was all sorts of things.

It was mixed with me being lonely. It was connected. And, you know, I probably had all sorts of really weird or heretical beliefs about Jesus. Like, if you went back to what was going through my mind that day and that night when I made my decision, if God was, in a sense, to play it all before you on the screen, I would be horrified, probably.

All sorts of weird things going on in my life. All sorts of weird belief. And it's actually sort of helpful to remember that, that it's not up to us having everything all straight and being able to express the Christian faith as clear as the Apostles' Creed is expressed or the Nicene Creed or some other state in the faith is that God takes us in a very confused type of state and a bit of an ambiguous type of state and we give our lives to Christ.

And, you know what? It's always a miracle. It's always a miracle. Because it's only the Holy Spirit that actually makes us Christ.

[2 : 49] It's not being able to know the Creed perfectly or the Bible perfectly and we're having pure motives. It's always a miracle. And miracles are always surprising.

And we're going to look at a very, very 2018-ish type of miracle that happens today in the book of Esther that in many ways, some of us I know have been Christians all our lives.

That's my prayer for all my kids. It's my prayer for my grandkids. Some of us became Christians maybe fairly recently. Some of us are still trying to figure out whether we're going to be a Christian or not.

This story speaks very powerfully about how for some of us who become Christians later in life, the different confusion and ambiguity, yet the surprising nature of such a decision. So it would be very helpful if you turn in your Bibles to Esther chapter 2.

If you don't have your Bible, the text is going to be above me here on the screen. You can sort of follow in either way. You know, the nice thing about having your Bible with you when you come to church and hear a sermon is there might be something you want to underline because it really speaks to your heart or you want to make some little note on the side.

[3 : 58] And that's just one of the nice things about having. There's this old-fashioned thing called a book with paper. And I know there's video. I might do my own devotions, by the way, on a phone. But there's something powerful about paper and just being able to make your own notes and follow along.

So here's how the story goes. So just so you know, the Book of Esther is set around 480 BC. It happens during the reign of King Xerxes, who is sort of at the pinnacle of the Persian Empire. And that king is well-known to historians. He is the king that's present in, if you've seen the movie 300. He is the king whose forces fight the Spartans at the Battle of Thermopylae, if I pronounce that correctly.

And that's sort of the setting. And we're sort of looking at this 10-chapter book and sort of just think about it as if you're watching a Netflix series. And not one that's just going to keep going on and on and on and on forever like network television.

But it tells an overarching story. But each story is a story. And all of them together tell an overarching story. And this is episode 3, so to speak. And what happened in the first episode is we meet one of the main characters.

[5 : 09] We meet the king, who in this book is called King Headache. I'll either call him King Headache or I'll call him King Xerxes. Because the other name is very hard for me to pronounce. Eucerus or something like that.

And it just shows his power, his splendor, and his great vindictiveness. He doesn't get what he wants because he asks his wife to do something. And he punishes his wife by banishing her forever, divorcing her, banishing her forever.

And not only that, but punishing every woman in the entire empire. And he does it in a whim. He does it with all of the might of the power of the Persian Empire. And that was episode 1. Episode 2, we meet two other very important characters in the rest of the series.

We meet somebody by the name of Mordecai. And we meet somebody by the name of Esther. And we meet them in a way. Last week, if you were here, it was a very, very, very, very dark episode.

The king decides that he now misses his queen that he's banished, Vashti. And he wants to have another one. And so he and his plan, the guys, they come up with this brilliant plan.

[6 : 12] And I say brilliant in quotation marks. That basically what they're going to do is they're going to round up a whole pile of beautiful women who are virgins from all over the empire. They're going to use the police.

They're going to use the army. They're going to use the bureaucracy. And they're going to round these women up. They're going to take them against their will from their families. And they're going to bring them to the capital where they will train for a year.

They'll be spoiled for a year for one night with the king. One night of sexual knowing with the king. And then after that, they're banished to another harem.

And they might never see the king again. It's a horrific, horrific, horrific abuse of state power. And it's in the midst of that that we meet Esther and Mordecai.

And because Esther is one of the women who's captured and taken by the king against her will. Maybe not against her will. Who knows? They don't go into whether some women like this or they hated it or whether there was screaming or joy.

[7 : 11] The thing is, it's just horrible. It's a horrible, horrible thing that happens. And we also discover, we're going to learn a little bit more about this in this episode, that Mordecai and Esther are compromised.

They're Jewish people, but they're Jewish by birth, but they hide that they're Jewish. In fact, they both go by non-Jewish names.

Mordecai's name means worshiper of Marduk, an ancient god of the Babylonians. And Esther is named after the goddess Ishtar, the goddess of love and war.

The Greek version of hers is Venus. They named her Venus. And they're compromised Jews in the sense that they dress like Persians, they eat like Persians, they walk like Persians, and they don't do anything at all to draw any attention to the fact that they're Jewish.

And they obviously don't keep kosher, and they obviously don't go to the synagogue. They hide their identity. They live completely and utterly like Persians. And Esther does this on purpose, hides her identity.

[8 : 18] But at the end of the process, Esther is the one who sexually pleases the king and visually pleases the king the most. And he chooses her to be the new queen. And there's a big celebration.

And now the story continues. So if you have your Bibles, it's Esther chapter 2, verse 19. The story continues. Now this, it's a reminder of just the cruelty and the power of the king.

This, listen to it again. Verse 19, not listen to it. Listen for the first time. Now when the virgins were gathered together the second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate.

Now when the, 19 again. Now when the virgins were gathered together the second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. So what does this mean? You might think, and maybe there's some Christians who go through the book of Esther as if now the Esther's become the queen, the king turns over a new leaf, because he has Esther, they have a good marriage.

No. He marries Esther and he says, you know, that was really fun using my army and my police officers and my bureaucracy to round up a whole pile of virgins.

[9 : 32] And I'd have each one of them one night after another until I, you know, that was, let's do it again. That's what he decides. Let's do it again. I'm going to use my power as the king, my army and my police officers and my bureaucrats, and let's go do this all over again.

And that's how this episode begins. They do it again. All over the empire, Herodotus says that when things like this happened, there were 400 young women from all over the empire that brought.

In the case of the last episode, one ancient scholar guessed that it could be just under 1,500. But 400 to 1,500 young women are taken from their home against their will and brought a year of preparation and pampering for one night.

In this case, there's no possibility of them even being a queen. It is just for one night. And then they go to another harem. The king might never know their name. They will never have a husband.

They will never have children unless they get pregnant that one time. And even then, the child will not be viewed as the heir of the king, but just a servant.

[10 : 48] Maybe a soldier, maybe a eunuch if it's a guy. And their lives are ruined. And he decides to do it again with Esther as his queen.

And there's this very, very powerful image here. Look at verse 19 again. When the virgins were gathered together the second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. And sitting at the king's gate here has sort of a double meaning.

One of them is he actually is there. So he's there and he observes when maybe a large number is this ingathering of women who have been forcibly taken from their homes from all over the empire. And he's sitting there right beside where they'll go into the king's private chambers, never to emerge again probably. And he's sitting there and he sees it happen.

But it also is an idiom for referring to the fact that he's actually an official. He's a bureaucrat. That's what it means by sitting. It doesn't mean sort of he's just lounging around because he can't find any work or he's begging.

[11 : 50] No, the phrase sitting at the king's gate also happens to mean that he's an official. At least a mid-level official but probably higher than a mid-level official. I don't know. Maybe, you know, he's, I don't know, I don't think he wouldn't be as high as a deputy minister.

I should have asked a couple of civil servants for a good analogy about how high he was. But he's high and, you know, not mid-level because he's at the king's gate right in the capital. So the king's gate is where people go to deal with the bureaucracy and to get justice done and to get important business that has to be legal done.

And he's sitting there means he has a job there. He's one of the king's officials. We don't know whether he became an official because Esther pulled some strings to make him, give him that job or if he just already had it.

But that's what he's doing there. He's an official. So he's an official in the Persian bureaucracy and he's watching this happen. Seeing all the virgins being gathered. And then look what happens next. Esther, it just reminds us of something. And this is going to be important for us to remember. Verse 20, Esther had not made known her kindred or her people as Mordecai had commanded her.

[12 : 57] For Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him. And Mordecai isn't her biological dad. Mordecai is her adopted dad. She's actually his niece.

Her parents died and he adopted her as his own daughter. But here, once again, we see that she doesn't go by her Jewish name, Hadassah. She goes by her Persian name after the goddess Ishtar.

And it just reminds us she's keeping her identity. She is not, those of you who know the Bible, she is the opposite of Daniel. Those of you who maybe don't know the Bible very well, in the story of Daniel, Daniel is a Jewish young man with his three friends and they're captured by the Persians. But when they get captured, they refuse to, they publicly identify as Jewish people. They refuse to eat food that isn't kosher. They insist on being able to live like Jews.

And that's part of the tension and the drama of the first few chapters of the book of Daniel. Esther is the opposite. She's not going to synagogue. She's not going to hear the Bible read.

[14:04] She's not keeping kosher. She looks like a Persian, lives like a Persian, worships like a Persian, and lives amongst Persians. And it's intentional. And she's doing it because Mordecai has told her to.

By not telling about her people means she has no connection with other Jews. She's living like a Persian. That's her plan. So, verse 21, we now sort of get into the drama of the rest of the story. It reminds us of the king's evil and the nature that the bureaucracy, that the soldiers, that the police, that the whole ministry of the state, in a sense, it would be the priests would be behind this.

The upper echelons of culture, they're all behind and supportive, in a sense, of this act by the king to take these young women away. Mordecai is, in fact, one of those bureaucrats in the bureaucracy. He's living under the name of a worshiper of Marduk. His adopted daughter is, in fact, the queen, and she's living under the name of Ishtar. And then in verse 21, it says, In those days, as Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Xerxes.

[15:30] That's just a polite way of saying they planned to assassinate him as part of a coup. They planned to assassinate him as part of a coup. And Mordecai overhears it.

Now, just pause here. What should he do? Imagine this is, we go back in time, we're his advisor. You're his Bible study home group leader. He shares with you, what should he do?

I'm his pastor. He comes to me, or his rabbi. I guess back in those days, he asked me, what should I do? Well, he decides to report it. He decides to act in a way that the king won't be assassinated. Look at that, verse 22. And this came to the knowledge of Mordecai, and he told it to Queen Esther. And Esther told the king, in the name of Mordecai, when the affair was investigated and found to be so, the men were both hanged on the gallows.

It also actually just means they were suspended on a stake. They were impaled. Pretty cruel way and public way of killing somebody, a reminder to people not to mess with the king.

[16:44] And the fact that Mordecai had done this and what had happened, it was recorded in the book of the Chronicles in the presence of the king. This is a very, very, very curious thing, isn't it? I mean, I don't know, what would we have told him to do?

Would we have told him to allow? I mean, this guy's obviously a very cruel king. And Mordecai has just watched him use his state power. And who knows, maybe Mordecai even was somehow complicit with it in some small way.

Maybe not. He might have had a completely different area of the bureaucracy. But he knows the cruelty of the king, and he does nothing. And, in fact, doesn't even do nothing to allow events to take their course.

He actually does something very particular to protect the life of the king. And it doesn't talk about motives, by the way. It just records. This is what he did. This is who Mordecai is.

So, now, what's going to happen next to Mordecai? Mordecai and Esther. I mean, is Esther going to have a higher place amongst the queens?

[17:44] Is Mordecai going to get a reward? Well, you know, the next thing that happens is so true to life. I bet that if we got talking, not maybe all of us, but most of us could tell a story about how you did really, really good work, and somebody took the credit and got the promotion.

Or you did spectacular work, but nobody noticed, but somebody else gets the promotion. That happened. Probably every single one of us could tell a story.

Either, maybe not personally about it, but we could tell a story about it happening to our brother or our friend or somebody in our home group or a Bible study. Well, that's what happens to Mordecai here. If you look at the next chapter 3, verse 1, after these things, what just happened, King Xerxes promoted Haman.

Whoa, where'd he come from? This is our final important character in the rest of the book. Mordecai doesn't get promoted, but somehow or another, it doesn't explain why, but after these things,

chapter 3, verse 1 again, after these things, King Xerxes promoted Haman, the Agagite, the son of Hamadatha, and advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who are with him.

Isn't that just like real life? No explanation given, but Haman is given a promotion. Now, in the Old Testament books, those are the books in the Bible that are written before Jesus, often names in how people are introduced are very significant to understand what goes on in the story.

[19 : 29] We're going to return to his name in a moment, but how does Mordecai react to this? Well, this is where the book and the story gets very, very, very interesting and very puzzling.

Look at what happens next, verse 2. Now, maybe it's because he's mad. I don't know.

Well, actually, the book is going to tell us a very surprising reason about why it doesn't. But the one thing to understand right off the bat is that there's nothing inherently wrong with Mordecai paying homage or bowing.

It would just be a custom. It would just be like sometimes when I go to pass the piece with people and they say, you know, you can't shake hands because, you know, I have a cold and I'll do this, you know, or I'll just do this.

I say, let's do sort of more, you know, Japanese way and we'll just bow and we'll bow to each other. It doesn't mean anything. I'm not worshipping them or they're not worshipping me. And paying homage just means way to go.

[20 : 41] You are fantastic. I mean, nowadays it's called, you know, bringing all the staff together and the boss pays homage. You're fantastic. You're great. We're going to win. We're going to beat this.

And everybody says, you're the best boss. That's all it means. Nothing inherently in there that a Christian or a Jewish person couldn't do. But Mordecai won't do it.

And everybody's bowing like this. Mordecai doesn't. And everybody's saying, way to go. Haman, Mordecai doesn't. He's silent. So in verse 3, then the king's servants who are at the king's gate, in other words, this official place.

So it's the office workers, right? It's the people who are, you know, working on Parliament Hill amongst the other, you know, the staff. It's the people who are working in the office buildings.

They're very close to here where government workers.

So it's all around the water fountain. It's all around the Tim Hortons lineup and the Starbucks lineup and the lunch lineup and the lunchroom. They're all talking about this. The king's servants, verse 3, who are at the king's gate, said to Mordecai, why do you transgress the king's command?

[21 : 47] And when they spoke to him day after day after day after day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman in order to see whether Mordecai's words would stand.

And now he finally tells them the only reason why he hasn't done it, for he had told them that he was a Jew. The man whose name means, I am a worshiper of Marduk.

The man who made sure that his adopted daughter was named after Ishtar, the goddess of love and war. The man who repeatedly tells his daughter, we are not going to look like Jews.

We are not going to talk like Jews. We are not going to hang around with Jews. We are not going to read the Torah. We are not going to keep kosher. We are going to be completely and utterly a part of this people.

All of a sudden, in such a context, says, I am a Jew. Nobody should expect that to have come.

[22 : 54] And in fact, it probably is a conversion moment. Because the fact of the matter is, he's already Jewish. And if you go and you read the Old Testament from cover to cover, those 39 books, you'll see that there's a distinction made in the Old Testament between those who are just physically or biologically Jewish, biologically Jewish, ethnically or culturally Jewish, and those who are Jewish in a different sense, where there is, in a sense, an embracing of the fact that the Jewish people, it's not like saying, when you say I am a Jew, it's not like saying I'm a Leafs fan or a Sens fan or something like that.

It's remembering that there is a God who does exist who called Abraham, and then he called Isaac, and he called Jacob or Israel, and then he called the patriarchs, and on and on and on and on.

And that when they were in bondage in the land of Egypt, there were slaves in the land of Egypt, that God redeemed them with his might and power. He redeemed them and called them to be his own people, that he would be their God, and he would be their people, and that they were to learn his ways, and that they were to learn how to live under his gentle and kind and firm rule and protection, and they were to not be like the other nations.

They were not to leave their babies out for abandonment. They were not to go into the temple prostitutes to worship by having sex with a priestess. They were not to sacrifice their sons and daughters.

They were not to live in a way that was murderous and adulterous, and they were to live in a way that would learn and model the holiness and the purity and the truthfulness and the life-giving nature of the Lord, and they were to understand that they were under, that he had delivered them. [24 : 45] He had invited them to live in the covenant. He would be their God. They would be their people. They were to learn to say, I am a Jew. I follow Yahweh.

I do not worship idols. And so what we see here is going to change and make the rest of the story the story that it is.

This comes completely and utterly out of left field. In a sense, in a Jewish sense, in an Old Testament sense, Mordecai has gotten converted.

And it makes no sense. Just like my conversion didn't make any sense.

Or yours. We're going to talk more about this in a moment. If you read my blog, not that I expect people to read my blog, but if you read my blog, in my blog this week I said, does God have a wonderful plan for your life?

[25 : 53] And those of us of a certain age, I don't know, maybe it still goes on. And for decades there was an entire evangelistic campaign centered around the fact that God has a wonderful plan for your life. And this would not be one of the scripture texts that they would point to to support that idea.

Because how do people react now to the fact that Mordecai has become an out Jew, that he's embraced the fact that Yahweh is his Lord and that he's going to be part of God's covenant people? Do people all give him high fives? Do they throw a party for him? Do they say, way to go, Mordecai? Is there dancing in the streets? Does he get the girl? Does he live happily ever after? Does he become richer and more famous?

No. Look at verse 5. And when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury.

Haman was filled with rage. We're going to stop here because the next week we're going to look at what happens. But I just want you to let know it's not just look at verse 6. We're not going to talk about verse 6, but it sets the stage for next week.

[27 : 00] He's so filled with anger at Mordecai, so filled with rage, that in verse 6 he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone.

So as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.

He said they wouldn't use that as a Bible verse to support that God has a wonderful plan for your life. What Mordecai did required a lot of courage.

And it doesn't go through why he makes that decision, but it just happens. So here's the thing. Why is this like, just draw this to a, to try to think a little bit about what's going on in the story. You know, one of the things which this story, like why does the Bible even have like such horrible stories like this in it?

I shared with you, I think last week, how when I told somebody about what the story was about last week, about the forced roundup of young women, and, you know, the use of the bureaucracy and the police and, and the judiciary and the nobility and all of the elites to do this and, and support it.

[28 : 15] And this is like, and this isn't just like, this isn't like us talking about North Korea. This isn't like us talking about ISIS. This is like us talking about, and fill in the blank.

If you think Sweden or Norway or Switzerland, the greatest place in the world, this is us talking about Switzerland or Sweden. This isn't us talking about North Korea.

You take whatever it is you think the best country in the world is, and you drink coffee, you can talk about what the best country in the world is. I think I shared last week, us Canadians are humble, so we'd say like we're the fourth best country in the world.

But we're definitely like a thousand times better than North Korea and ISIS or ISIL or whatever you call it. This isn't them talking about like the garbage of the world cultures. This is an elite culture.

This is a place of poetry. This is a place of beauty, of craftsmanship, of prosperity. And yet it's a place of unspeakable evil, of unspeakable evil individuals and institutionalized evil, of the bending of the wills, of the will of the state and of the elites to pursue things which are completely and utterly

abhorrent.

[29 : 23] And why does the Bible have stories like this in it? I think it should try to shock us into thinking about how confused we are.

Can you put up the first point, Andrew? See, the thing, I'll say the point out loud in a moment, although you can all read. The thing about it is, is there's this persistent thought amongst us human beings.

Like for many people, we would just say, well, the world is evil and it's just evil. And when you die, you just die. And there's a lot of people who think that. And it's often very good to talk to them about it.

Although often they really think there's actually a little bit more to about hope. But if you think about the history of religion, you think about the history of philosophy, you think about the history of spirituality, regularly what it is, is like in fact, actually, the religion of King Xerxes was Zoroastrianism.

This guy Zoroaster had this understanding. He came up with these ideas about how God was and how the spiritual world was and how you got through spiritual levels to be in keeping with the divine and with God.

[30 : 40] And people will have ideas about how idols and how stories should work. And people come up, and it doesn't matter whether it's somebody like Marx who thinks that he's figured out how history is going to move to some type of perfect world in the future or Freud before that and how he thinks he's thought through how consciousness is going to develop or Rudolf Steiner and how...

But here's the thing. These are all people who live in this world. And why is it that any one of us would think that anything could emerge from this world that would be different from what this world produces?

Like, why do we keep falling for it? Like, I don't care what you pick. If you're all right-wing, look at right-wing news sources. If you're all left-wing, look at left-wing news sources.

If you're all... Like, you know, you can look at Muslim news sources. You can look at European news sources. You can look at Asian news sources. And if you look at any news source, you take any sample over the next week, it's filled with corruption and murder and death and betrayal and abuse of power.

And that's the way of the world. And yet we still tend to think that even though that's the way of the world, that somehow or another the world is going to produce some way by which we can have salvation or perfection.

[31 : 55] Like, why do we think that? As I put it up above, if salvation is real, it cannot originate in this world.

How can it? Like, just think about that. So this story helps us in an odd way to understand, to sort of think, to try to make us think. Like, if the Swedens and the Norweys and the Switzerlands and the Canadas of the world, won't we just produce what Switzerland and Sweden and, like, you know, you look in their newspapers, it's filled with racial tension and murder and abuse of power.

So, you know, in an odd way, a story like this prepares us to consider this, if you could put up the next point, Andrew, that for salvation to be real, if there is something that really is something like salvation, it might be defined in different ways, but it really is something that is real, it has to come from outside of this world, into this world, with real power.

Like, if it's just something outside of this world, and somehow or another you get a glimpse of it or an idea of it, but it doesn't come into this world, then that's no good. That's like being stuck in a high-security prison and you hear that people are having picnics outside.

Well, fun for them sucks to be me. Like, it starts to prepare us for the fact that this world can only produce what this world can produce.

[33 : 29] And it's not just all bad, you know, because if you go back and you read the beginning of this, that's what's so wonderful about this story. It talks about the beauty of the gold and the beauty of the artwork and the creativity and even in the sense of the excellence of the wine and the excellence of the food.

And it's not saying that this is just, this isn't like Mordor. There's beauty and there's splendor, but at the same time, there's this, and there's nobility, but mixed in with all of this, are these things can be used for unspeakable evil.

And so why would we think that anything that emerges from this world would not be some mixture of almost inexpressible beauty and inexpressible evil?

Doesn't it reveal the idea that if there is to be something like salvation, it has to come from a world other than ours into our world with real power?

But the other thing which is so wonderful about this story to help prepare us to think about it is the next thing, because what happens if that power that is outside of the world is in fact just like King Xerxes?

[34 : 37] Like what happens if the God that does exist is like King Xerxes? You know what we should do? Fight him. Shouldn't we?

It tells us something else, if you could put up the next point. If we are not saved by love for love, by truth for truth, by goodness for goodness, by justice for justice, by mercy for mercy, by life for life, then it is not salvation.

If the God, the one who would come from outside into this earth, if he is not good, if he is not true, if he is not just, if he is not merciful, if he is not life in the midst of death, if he is not light in the midst of darkness, then that is not salvation, it is demonic.

It is evil. John begins his introduction to Jesus by saying, in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

He was with God in the beginning. All things were made through him, and without him, nothing was made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

[36 : 15] And then describes this life, this light, entering into our created world. There is a God who does exist. He's a God of order, a God of creation, a God of beauty, a God who is true, a God who is comprehensible, a God who is just, a God who is merciful and loving, a God who is life himself.

He does not have life, he is life. He does not sort of love, he is love. He does not sort of know the truth, he is truth. He doesn't sort of, he doesn't know what is good, he is goodness. He doesn't know what is merciful so much as he is mercy, and so he can do nothing that is not merciful.

And it is this very same God who comes down to walk amongst us, with gentleness, with love, with patience, who comes and takes into himself our human nature because he stoops down and down and down and down and down till he comes to us and taking aside all of his splendor and his prerogatives as God, but still being fully God, he comes down and is so humble that he would even experience what it means to be a fetus, in the womb of a woman, and that vulnerable, and lives a human life only without sin, and continues to stoop, to experience temptation only without sin, and then he continues to stoop to die the death that I cannot die without unmaking me after he has lived the life that I can never live, and he offers me his life and his death on my behalf, my doom for his destiny, my crushedness for his life, my darkness for his light, my death for his life.

He offers that to me. Tastes all there is to taste of death. And then in history, the grave is empty. He's risen from the dead. He proves that he's alive.

He ascends to heaven. He will come again. If you just turn in your Bibles to, those of you who have Bibles out and open, it's not up on the screen. I should have had it up on the screen.

[38 : 29] Turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 4. And I'm just going to look at two verses. 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verses 5 and 6. And this is a very, very powerful text in light of this story of the darkness of Mordecai and the darkness of the Haggagite and Haman and what he plans and the king and his evil and their compromise.

And look at here, verse 5. This is a word to us. Chapter 4, verse 5 of 2 Corinthians. For what we proclaim, okay, for those of us who are Christians, what do we proclaim?

Not ourselves. I don't proclaim myself. I'm not a perfect husband. I'm not a perfect dad. I'm not a perfect grandfather. I'm not a perfect pastor. Lord, have mercy if I proclaim myself.

We proclaim, but what do we proclaim? But Jesus Christ is Lord with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. And then listen to this wonderful line. For God who said, let light shine out of darkness has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

See, that's what conversion is. Conversion. It's so wonderful text because when it says, let the light shine out of darkness, it's pointing back to the fact that God is the one who creates all things out of nothing.

[39 : 51] The very first thing he creates is you get this image of separating light from darkness and the light coming into a dark world and creating all things. And so the same God who creates the world that we live in, before there was any evil, before there was any rebellion against God, before

there was any death, before all of those times, that same God who creates all things, when any single one of us becomes a Christian, it is a miracle.

It is not my doing or your doing. But it's somehow or another the Holy Spirit moves and works in your confused and ambiguous life to bring you to the point where you say, I need to give my life to Jesus.

And God, who created all things and is described as light, he pierces your darkness with the same light that created all things good.

And he pierces your darkness and comes in. The light comes in and will never leave. It's the light of creation. And it's a miracle.

And it doesn't say, George, you became a Christian because you could tell me all about Calvin or all about Aquinas, where you'd memorize the Bible, where you'd figured out the Chalcedonian definition of the Trinity.

[41 : 08] No, I didn't know any of that stuff. And who knows what was going through in my mind. And it wasn't my type of accomplishment, but there's this spectacular truth that God breaks through, that the light shines out of the darkness into our hearts to give light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Every conversion is a miracle. You know, it's really on my heart. I bear witness to Jesus. And on one level, I don't see all sorts of people becoming Christians.

But you know what? I pray, I bear witness to Jesus. And the fact of the matter is I know that this miracle still happens because it happened in me and it happened in you. It's always a miracle.

And here we have this weird story of Mordecai. And you'd think there was ever any time that he is going to come out as an out Jew.

That would not be the time. You'd think, well, maybe when I have a higher promotion, when I'm very secure, when I have my life in complete and utter order, where I have all the promotions I want, where things are all going my way, then maybe I'll become...

[42 : 20] No! He becomes an out Jew in the most outrageous time. It is so completely unlikely that this would happen.

But it happens in his life. And part of the reason I think that it doesn't go through what Mordecai was going through his mind as to why he decided to become an out Jew is because it would just be like if I recorded every single thing that went through my mind when I became a Christian.

You'd all, like, giggle or shake your head. But it still happens and it still works.

Let's just draw it up very quickly. If you could put up the next point. See, here's the thing which is so powerful about this. Your salvation does not depend on the strength and purity of your mind and will.

It depends on the Lord's power to save you. All of you. Body, soul, and spirit. Past, present, future. Your coming to faith and your growing does not depend upon your strength or the purity of your mind or the purity of your will.

[43 : 29] It depends completely and utterly on the Lord's power to save you. The same light that created all things pierces into your darkness and makes Jesus as your Savior and your Lord real to you.

It comes to your body. It comes to your soul. It comes to your spirit. It comes to your past. It comes to your present. It comes to your future. And there's more. See, when Mordecai says, I am a Jew, it doesn't mean now he's like gotten enlightened and he's still by himself.

He has a people and he has a Lord that he follows. Next point, Andrew, you enter the Jesus way by yourself, but you walk the Jesus way with Jesus and others in his world and into his future.

See, that's the wonderful thing for those of us who are Christians. Jesus is coming back. He will return. The Lord has the final say. If you're here, there's no better time.

You haven't given your life to Christ. There's no better time than to do, to call out to him to be your Savior. And Lord, if you could put up the next point, Andrew, and let me tell you, it takes courage to become a Christian today.

[44 : 42] It really does. It takes courage to become a Christian today. I just urge you, choose to be courageous. Choose to be courageous. And you know what?

It is very hard nowadays to be publicly or to be an out Christian. we believe all sorts of things which go against the grain of the world. If you could put up the final point, Andrew, and while he puts that up, could you all stand, please?

It takes courage to be an out Christian. Choose to be courageous. Choose to be courageous. Choose to be courageous. Choose to be courageous.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, I don't know why on earth, Father, you led me to become a Christian, but you did.

I don't know why on earth you put me on that path, but you did. And I don't know why on earth it is that you just would be so, I mean, other than the fact that you're loving and you're good and you're powerful and you don't take any of the light in the death of a sinner, but that we would turn from our wickedness and live.

[45 : 58] But Father, thank you so much for the miracle of conversion, the miracle of grace, the grace of Jesus, the power of salvation, that you would shine that very same light that created all things, that that would come into my confused and ambiguous and topsy-turvy life, and that you would shine the light of the glory of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ into my life to make me yours.

It is all your power. It is not mine. It is all your work, not mine. It is all your doing, not mine. And Father, I thank you. We thank you for what you have done for us in Jesus.

And we ask, Father, that the Holy Spirit would grip us with this gospel, that the light of the gospel would come to every corner of who we are, every aspect of who we are, and that your light would fill us so that we are filled with light to live as out Christians in this country and to the ends of the earth. And we ask all of this in the precious name of Jesus and all of God's people said, Amen.