# Who Is Really In Charge

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Date: 18 January 2026

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. If you haven't already found Esther, go to your concordance and find it and join us there.

It's right before you get to the wisdom literature, and you can mark that for Sunday evenings the next number of weeks.
You know, at first, as we consider the story of the book of Esther, it may feel far removed from us. But upon consideration, there actually are quite a few similarities in our life today and the story we read about in Esther.
We, too, are called to live as exiles. The Bible says that we are aliens passing through. We are exiles in a foreign land, so to speak, as Christians, just as the people of God found themselves in exile in Esther's day.
We're strangers in a land that is not our true home. We are called to be in the world, but not of the world.
[1:25] Just as Esther and her people were in their land, but not to be fully of that land because they had a truer home.

And the people in Esther's world had to figure out, how do you live as strangers in a land? And how do you not fully assimilate into a pagan culture, yet not give in to despair and live and move and have your life in very real ways?
Those are the same questions that we face today. How do we live in the world but not be of the world? How do we live as Christians that would stand out and stand apart from the world while having to live among all of the things that we find in this world?
I think the next number of weeks as we go through Esther, I think you will find that the world that she lives in is really not that far removed from the world that you and I live in.
You have on your sermon insert some key dates to know just to help you to be able to place the events of what we will be studying about in history.
[2:41] As a quick review for you, we're in the Old Testament here, so we're B.C. before Christ. 722 B.C., the northern kingdom of Israel is overcome by Assyria.

586, that southern kingdom of Judah falls to Babylon as the temple is destroyed. This is where the period of the exile takes place as they take in three different waves people from Judah and take them out of Judah into exile, into Babylon.
If you keep going down, we're getting more and more close now to the birth of Christ. 539 B.C. are when the Medo-Persians conquer Babylon.
Cyrus is the ruler of the Medo-Persians that allow the people there of Judah to go back to their homeland. And those returns from Babylon back to Jerusalem area take place in three different waves as well.
In 516 B.C., the temple is rebuilt. And then, shortly after that, fits the story of Esther. 483 to 473 B.C., we read about the story of Esther.
[4:05] And about 30 years after Esther is when the walls of Jerusalem would be rebuilt. And that, of course, is recorded for us in the book of Nehemiah.

So, just a little bit of history to help you to see how all of this fits in. Now, when you think of the book of Esther, there are a few things that should come to mind.
Esther is one of two books of the Old Testament that are named after a lady. Of course, Ruth being one and Esther the other. Esther is also interesting because it is a book of the Bible where the name of God is not found.

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If you just sat down and read it from beginning to end, you will not find the name of God in the book. Which is a bit interesting for us. Because as you read the book and as we study it, the next number of Sunday evenings, what you're going to find is that while God's name is not mentioned, His invisible hand is all around the story.
Which does create a bit of a dilemma for us as God's people. Because if you're familiar with your Old Testament, you know that God can do the miraculous.
[5:31] He rarely, though sometimes, did the miraculous in the Old Testament. Part, the Red Sea, there could be miracles that would take place on occasion.

Predominantly, we see those miracles in just a few eras of time throughout Scripture. But God certainly can do the miraculous. We read about the miraculous that He does throughout the Old Testament where it's recorded for us.
But those miracles are the exception. When you come to the book of Esther, you don't read about miracles.
You read about what we call providence. We'll look tonight in more detail about the importance of that. When we talk about providence, we're talking about the non-miraculous.
Miraculous would be when God interrupts the natural order. He can do that. He can part the waters. And Jesus can walk on the water. And Jesus can heal somebody.
[6:37] But those miracles are not found in the book of Esther. And Esther has a lot of trouble and issues in it.

And you don't find miracles. And this is helpful to me because I think when you look at your life, what you're most likely to find is the invisible hand of God, His providence at work in the details of your life.
Your life probably not filled with miracle after miracle. That's not the norm of how God works. But His invisible hand of providence is all over our lives.
And it can be difficult because when you read about some of the miracles God has done and can do, you might think to yourself, why aren't you doing those miracles in my life?
You come to Esther and you don't read about miracles. You read about God's invisible hand of providence. What God is doing behind the scenes.
[7:46] Not interrupting natural law. Not interrupting natural order. Just orchestrating things according to His purpose, His wisdom, His sovereign will, His design.

We don't know for sure who the author is. Some have put forth Ezra. Others have said Nehemiah. Josephus, the historian, puts forth Mordecai as the author.
Here's what we do know. The land is Persia. The place is Susa, the capital of Persia. And there's some names you need to know.
The king is Ahasuerus. That's his Persian name. Xerxes is his Greek name. Same person. His wife that we meet is Vashti.
Now, when we come to the book of Esther, some of the Jews have already returned back home. When the Medo-Persians overtook the Babylonians, Cyrus said you can go back home. And some have already returned.
[8:53] But many of the Jews stayed behind. They had lives that were flourishing. They had places and positions of influence and of leadership. But I do want you to understand as the history unfolds that the Jewish people have now been in a foreign land for a little over a hundred years.

That time of exile between about 605 and 586. And now we're in 483 to 473. So about a hundred years the people have been living in a foreign land.
They're there because of their disobedience. And so the title of the series, I've called it Pride and Providence. Because you see all throughout the story of the danger of human pride and the providence of God.
You see pride all throughout the story. The king, Ahasuerus, as we will read about in just a moment, is trying to impress people. And his pride tries to overwhelm people with his power.
The king, in his pride, will try to objectify even his own wife, Queen Vashti. Another man we will meet, Haman, in his pride, wants to have a man put to death because that man did not bow down in his presence.
[10:17] Pride is deadly. And if you wonder, is there anything in this Old Testament book from a foreign time, from a foreign land with strange names and weird locations, is there anything that really applies in our life today?

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Let me just remind you that the key sin that runs all throughout this book is the sin of pride and the deadly dangers of it. Not much has changed in the human condition, has it?
Pride continues to lead people astray. Pride continues to cause people to do foolish things. It's a story of pride, but it's a story also of providence.
It's a story of a God who is at work. And I want to challenge you over these next number of weeks on Sunday evenings, starting tonight, we begin on Sunday nights studying the book of Esther.
I want to challenge you, and those who will be here with us Sunday night after Sunday after Sunday night this semester, here's what you're going to learn. You're going to learn to see God's hand of providence at work in your life.
[11:31] It is the most encouraging thing you can know that God's hand of providence is at work. We don't see providence looking ahead.

We don't often even know providence in the moment, but as we look back, what we can see is how God is at work orchestrating the events of our life in such a way as we have just sung for His glory and for our good.
And if you want to be encouraged, learn to see the hand of providence in your life. If I were to tell you about my life, I would not tell you about miracle after miracle.
I could tell you about God's hand of providence over and over and over again. If you go through your life looking for miracles, you will be often frustrated.
If you learn to see God's hand of providence at work in your life, you will never have another day of your life where you think that God is silent or absent or has abandoned you because you learn to see how God is at work in the routine, in the mundane, in the details of your life.
[12:48] When we get to the end of this study in a number of weeks, if you're with us on Sunday nights, you will learn to see how the providential hand of God holds you, comforts you, and secures you through every season of life.

Let's turn our attention to chapter 1. Verses 1 to 9, make note first, we see a prideful display. A prideful display in verses 1 to 9.
And what we see is there are three banquets that are given. The first banquet lasts 180 days. Look with me at verse 1. Now in the days of Ahasuerus, Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces.
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 of his officials and his servants.
Ahasuerus reigned from 486 to 465. He took the throne in his 30s. He is the son and the successor to Darius I.
[14:07] He's the grandson to Cyrus, the leader who had conquered the Babylonians and decreed that the Jews could go back home.

History speaks of Ahasuerus and describes him, one source says, as opulent, extravagant, and irrational.
This is what pride does. Opulent, extravagant, and irrational. When we meet him in Esther 1, he is ruling all of the known world except for this small part, the rest of Greece.
Archaeologists have found works that refer to the facts given to us here in the book of Esther. His kingdom was so vast, it was said the sun never set on his empire.
It was so large. We find this happening here in Susa. This is a familiar name to us as you read the Old Testament.
[15:24] Daniel was in Susa. We see that vision in Daniel 8. Nehemiah was a cupbearer. He served in Susa. This is the city where the most people lived.

It's the citadel. It means it's the seat of the government. And this big, long feast takes place in the third year of his reign.
Here's what's happening behind the scenes. He rules over most of the known world. There's this other part that he wants to go and conquer. And so he has this long, long, extravagant feast while people are coming and feasting with him as he's trying to drum up support for his desire to go and attack and to try to get this other part of the world.
The military leaders who would have come to that feast, they're not coming and staying the whole time. They're coming and going. But it's just this non-stop, constant, ongoing party and feast where he is drumming up support to try to go and conquer what his father, Darius, could not conquer.

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A second feast is given. It's found in verse 5. It lasts for seven days. It says, When these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in suits to the citadel, both great and small, a feast lasting for seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace.
[16:56] And there were white curtains and violet hangings fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rods and marble pillars and also couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement.

And what we see described here in these verses is a description of things that are exotic. These are decorations that had been brought in from all over the world.
He is extravagant. He is trying to show His power and His greatness. In fact, if you look in verse 7, it says, 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. In other words, He said, you're free to drink as much as you want, which is interesting to talk about freedom when the freedom is given to you so the king says you're free to drink as much as you want only because I've given an edict that you're free to do that.
That's how life worked in the kingdom. The king's edicts were final. Even down to your freedom of how much you could drink.
[18:23] What the king said had to be carried out. Tuck that away in your mind. That will become a very important understanding of the empire as we go through the story.

Then there's a third banquet. Ahasuerus has the very long banquet. He has a short banquet. And then verse 9 tells us of a third banquet. That's Queen Vashti's. It says that she also gave a feast to the women in the palace.
So she's giving a feast for ladies. It's a separate feast from the king's feast. And what you see is this prideful display of Ahasuerus showing his power, his might, his opulency, his extravagance, and wanting to flex his authority as he says, don't worry at this feast.
I will let you even be in charge of deciding how much you drink. It feels like freedom. It's actually a show of power.
It's a prideful display. That leads us in verses 10 and 12 to a personal decision that becomes very important in the story.
[19:34] Verse 10 it says, the king's heart was merry with wine. Verse 11 to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown in order to show the peoples and the princess her beauty for she was lovely to look at.

In other words, what's happening here at the end of this feast is the king has become drunk. It's impairing his decision making and now he says, I want to show you how beautiful my queen is and so he gives orders to go and get the queen, tell her to put on her royal headdress, bring her in and he wants to show her off to all these other people who like him are intoxicated at this feast.
To him, the queen portrayed here is nothing more than an object for him. Look at the decision the queen makes in verse 12. But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs.
And at this, the king became enraged and his anger burned within him. Queen Vashti has some sense of what's going on and of what he's wanting her to do and how he just wants to objectify her and parade her around and she says, I will not do that.
And it's ironic here this man who loves to flex his power, who controls 127 provinces around the empire, cannot make his wife do something she doesn't want to do.
[21:24] And this is a far more shocking situation than our western minds might think of because in that culture, so steeped with an honor and shame understanding, for someone to defy the king, for a woman to defy the king, for the queen to defy the king would just be completely unheard of and her personal decision is that she will not do that.

That leads in verses 13 to 22 to a punitive decree. A punitive decree. What's going to happen to Queen Vashti?
Verse 15, according to the law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti? Because she has not performed the command of King Ahasuerus delivered by the eunuchs.
The king has been shamed and the question now becomes, what are we going to do with her?
Verse 16, then Mimucan 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 Ahasuerus.

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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 Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him and she did not come.
[23:04] This very day the noble women 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.

The king gets with his officials and says, what are we going to do? My queen has shamed me. She's embarrassed me. She defied me. She refused to come and dance and perform when I called for her to come.
And the officials say, we've got a huge problem on our hands because word of this is going to get out. And other wives are going to say, you know what? The queen defied the king.
We can do the same thing. So they convince themselves they're going to have trouble throughout all the empire because of what the queen has done. I might just stop for just a minute here and let me read you the words of one author that thought was so insightful.
I say this to the husbands in the room. If Christian husbands were more like Christ and less like Ahasuerus, perhaps we'd find our wives more ready to submit to our leadership.
[24:25] It's a good word. Leadership in the home, men, is not about demanding your way and giving orders and barking off commands.

That's how the world leads. Biblical leadership in the home is about servant leadership. It's about loving your wife.
It's about laying down your life for your wife. It's about putting her needs and interests ahead of your own. Well, back to Queen Vashti, the question comes up, what are we going to do with her?
And so there's a punishment. 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 that Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she.
Her actions have consequences. In fact, did you notice in the verse I just read to you what she was called?
[25:39] Vashti. What word was missing? Queen. She's lost her title. She's lost her husband.

She'll never again be referred to as Queen Vashti. She'll never again be allowed in his presence. You know why this edict was able to take place?
Because the king surrounded himself with advisors who had far more enthusiasm than they had wisdom.
will do in your life, in your life, in your family, in our church, when you surround yourself with counselors who have far more enthusiasm than they have biblical wisdom, wisdom.
Danger always follows. We need both. We need enthusiasm, and we need wisdom. wisdom. But unfortunately, in our culture, what often gets recognized, noticed, and promoted are those who have great personalities, great charisma, great enthusiasm, and where you get counselors with much enthusiasm, and an absence of wisdom, the people get led astray.
[27:19] Verse 20 says, 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.

In other words, they say, make this decree, put it out throughout the entire kingdom kingdom, that the women must honor their husbands. And this advice pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Mimicum proposed.
Verse 22, when he put the decree in motion. Husbands, be careful. Leadership is biblical. Dictatorship is not. Your job is the leader in your household. It's not to be the dictator.
It's to be the leader. And if you confuse leadership with domineering, you'll find yourself neither a servant nor a leader.
[28:31] Now, what are some implications for us here in these early parts of the story? We're learning the history, learning some of the events that took place.

What is there for us? I think a lot. And what you're going to find at the end of each chapter, as we go through this on Sunday evenings, we're going to spend some time at the end, just looking at some of the implications for us, and there are many of them.
number one, make note that pride leads to self-promotion, which leads to foolishness.
Pride leads to self-promotion, which leads to foolishness. It's been said that when ego rules, wisdom leaves the room.

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That's true. when your ego rules the day, wisdom has fled. That's true in your business, that's true in your home, that's true in the church.
[29:31] When people who are making decisions do so according to their own ego, they cease to be wise. Don't make rules and decisions prompted by the love for yourself or self-promotion as Proverbs 27.2 says, let another praise you, not your own mouth.

Number two, make note that God is working in secret ways that may not yet be seen. God is working in secret ways that may not yet be seen.
We've read the words of chapter one. You know what name we haven't read yet? Esther.
Where's Esther? When you get to Esther chapter four, it's the one verse from Esther that if most people know a verse, it's the verse they know that says, perhaps you were born for such a time as this.
And in chapter one, we don't even find her yet. the Lord is at work. The Lord is preparing. He is working in secret ways that are not yet seen.
[30:58] Now, if you're familiar with the story of Esther, you know this. If you only know what we've looked at today, you don't know this yet. But the big threat in the book of Esther is not the demotion of Queen Vashti.

The real threat is there will soon be an edict that all the Jewish people are to be killed. And against that threat, God doesn't do a miracle.
In providence, He raises up a man named Mordecai and a lady named Esther. God, in chapter one, is already working behind the scenes in ways that we do not yet see.
And the same thing is true in your life. So let me just ask you, anybody here this morning going through a hard season? Anybody here feel physically run down?
Anybody here feel spiritually overwhelmed? Anybody here going through something in your life or your ministry or your relationships and you just say to yourself, I can't even make sense of this.
[32:11] I have no idea what God is doing. I have no idea why God is allowing this. I have no idea what God is accomplishing. I don't see any good from this.

If that's you, you're the very person who needs to be here to study Esther with us. because your heart needs to be reminded how our God is often working in secret ways that in the moment are not yet seen.
His hand may be hidden, but it's never absent. It's true. And as you read the book of Esther, his name doesn't appear a single time, and yet when you get to the end of the story, it's clear he has been working behind the scenes in every single part of it.
But as Esther unfolds, you have to wait and see what God is doing, which is exactly what you have to do in your life. You have to trust the invisible hand of God at work in ways you do not see and cannot yet comprehend, while you trust and rest and confidence in the truth that God is always at work.
Here's a third implication for us. As one has phrased that I thought was really helpful, rage and fear are bad motivations for making wise decisions.
[33:56] Rage and fear are bad motivations for making wise decisions. King Ahasuerus was defied by Queen Vashti and rage filled his heart.

It wasn't just rage as he talked to his counselors. They became fearful that this kind of attitude they said would spread throughout the entire empire and families and homes and the government will collapse in the chaos of what takes place.
And they began to make decisions from places of rage and fear and that never leads to wisdom. So friend, when you're trying to make decisions and your heart's filled with rage or your heart's filled with fear, take a step back.
Slow down from that. Don't let rage be what fuels your decision making and for goodness sake, do not live your life in fear.
Pray through that. Worship through that. Trust through that. Work through that. Get into your life wise counselors who know the Bible, who know the Lord, who are strong and trustworthy, not easily shaken, and do not let rage nor fear be what drives you as you make decisions in your life.
[35:31] And then a fourth implication, integrity is often costly. Integrity is often costly.

We see that in chapter 1 already, don't we? With Queen Vashti. Vashti's at her party with the ladies and people come and tell her, hey, the king is demanding you come and put on your royal headdress and come and dance and parade and all kinds of things that could be at issue and at

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work and that demand there.
And she says, the king is drunk. I know what the king's asking me to come and do. I'm not going to do it. And she refuses. And what does she get for her integrity?
Demotion? Hatred? Loss of power and position of a relationship? I'm going to be honest with you, friends.
Integrity in this world is often costly. Sometimes you say to yourself, I'm just going to do the right thing. I'm just going to stay clear from sin.
[36:47] I'm going to do the right thing. And sometimes we suffer because of our sin and sometimes we suffer because of other people's sin. You can live your life as pure and holy as you possibly can.

You will not be able to separate yourself from the trials of this world because if your sin doesn't create trouble for you, somebody else's sin will find trouble for you. That's the way life works.
You can't be so good and so faithful that you avoid trial. It's impossible. But you can live your life in submission to the Lord.
And you can live your life in integrity. Just understand integrity is often costly. Now here's the truth. Your faithfulness will ultimately be rewarded, but it will be costly. And you have to know as you go through life that you want to avoid what Ahasuerus did.
[37:56] You don't want to live life in arrogance and in pride. You don't want to make decisions out of fear and out of rage. You want to avoid that. But even for Queen Vashti, the problem that came into her life wasn't because of her disobedience.

It was because of the sinfulness and the folly of another. And when the folly and sinfulness of another made sinful demands of her, she stood up against that and did the right thing and it cost her greatly.
So just don't think that you can go to middle school next week and be so faithful and so godly that everything will be easy.
That's not the way it works. It's true. Sometimes our own sin and foolishness cost us, but other times, even if we are faithful, somebody else's sin and foolishness will bring trial to your life and in that moment you stay faithful.
Stay faithful. The question of today is who is really in charge? Is it Ahasuerus?
[39:18] Is he the one that's really in charge? It seems like his counselor is maybe the one in charge or the one who convinced him to make this edict that goes out throughout all the land.

Maybe they're really in charge. As we'll soon find out, it's not the king nor the king's counselors who are in charge here.
This is my father's world. I rest in this thought, the hymn writer said. God is in charge of this world. And he is free to interrupt the natural order and he is free to perform any miracle he chooses. But the norm is through his kind work of providence to prepare his people for something for his glory and their good that they normally don't see in the moment.
You have to trust and you have to wait. If you've ever been in a situation where you find yourself in need of the Lord, but waiting, Esther is a good word for you.
[40:55] If you ever find yourself confused at why the Lord is doing or allowing these things in your life that just seem to not even make sense or even be fair to you, Esther is a good word for you.

And what you see all throughout the story will not be the public performance of miracles. It will be the silent hand of providence.
Leading, guiding, and preserving his people for his glory and for their good.
It's not at five o'clock. We'll pick up with the story in chapter two as we continue to see how to trust God behind the scenes. Lord, we thank you today for your word and I pray that it would be an encouragement to your people.
I pray it would help each of us to know you, to trust you, and to honor you with all of our heart. Lord, for any in the sanctuary this morning who may not know you as Savior, may they even this day recognize their own sinfulness, their own need for forgiveness.
[42:15] May they recognize that you are still the God who saves his people. And I pray, Lord, for any who do not know you as Savior, that even this day they would confess their sin, turn to you asking for forgiveness, and they would find in you the only one able to save.

Lord, I pray for those who are believers today that are going through seasons of trial or hurt or struggle, that they would see that you are still working. You have not abandoned, neglected, nor

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forgotten them.
You are working for your glory and for their good. May your people, even this day, find comfort in that. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. [43:16] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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