

Date of sermon: 7/05/2020  
Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke  
Bible passage or verse: Esther 1:1-10  
Title of sermon: **There is More to the Story**  
Series: Don't Settle for Normal - #5

**Esther 1:1-10 - NIV:**

<sup>1</sup> This is what happened during the time of Xerxes,<sup>[a]</sup> the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush: <sup>2</sup> At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, <sup>3</sup> and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present.<sup>4</sup> For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty. <sup>5</sup> When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, in the enclosed garden of the king's palace, for all the people from the least to the greatest who were in the citadel of Susa. <sup>6</sup> The garden had hangings of white and blue linen, fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings on marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and other costly stones. <sup>7</sup> Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other, and the royal wine was abundant, in keeping with the king's liberality. <sup>8</sup> By the king's command each guest was allowed to drink with no restrictions, for the king instructed all the wine stewards to serve each man what he wished. <sup>9</sup> Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes. <sup>10</sup> On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him—Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Karkas—

We are in a series called "Don't Settle For Normal." We looked the first couple of weeks at, "God, I have emotions, I'm frustrated. I don't know what to do with all of these things." And we cried out to God in the midst of injustice, and -- just challenges, things we don't understand. And then we looked at two weeks -- last week, we have two weeks -- convictions that I think if you have, you'll be able to endure anything that comes, because you won't be this emotional roller coaster. There will be some things that you believe and hold onto that will see you through. And that's today. Last week we looked at the idea that coincidences are really works of God, and they're not coincidences, but things that God does through the life, as he did in Joseph's life. Today, we're going to look at Esther. And we're going to look at the whole story, actually. I hope it inspires you to go home and read it. It did last night! A number of folks came, or sent me a note, and some even from this morning said they went home, and they texted me already -- "I'm reading it!" It is a beautiful story, and it has a conviction that I think if you hold onto you will rest well today. And it's this -- the sovereign hand of God runs history.

The conviction I have, therefore, is that our country is as in the hand of God today as it's ever been, and the world is as in the hand of God as it's ever been. In other words, we learned last week that God can use evil, He can use evil intent, to bring about his purposes. And today, through this woman's life, we realize that God can take any story and bring about His purposes, because God's sovereign hand runs history. Now, you know, one of the unique characteristics of the book of Esther is that God is never mentioned. Kind of reminds me of today. I don't hear a lot of the public spokespeople talking about various issues, be it race, be it the virus or anything else -- I don't hear a lot of them talking about God. I don't hear them talking about what God is saying, what God is doing, and God's perspective. So, it seems to me this is the perfect book, because in an era where it seems that out on the street God seems to be silent, this text teaches us that the sovereign hand of God runs history. Let me tell you the story. Like any story, you have to have a setting. What is the setting? Well, it's events, it's people, that often seem unrelated -- unless you kind of look at it from God's perspective. In this story, the king, Xerxes is his name -- he's huge, he's powerful, it says that he

ruled over 127 different areas, regions, all the way from India to Cush. But he didn't always have success. There were moments in Xerxes' life where, at the battle of the Bay of Salamis, he lost his entire navy in one battle, and in fact, his ship was blown up, and he snuck onto a fishing boat and made his way home. Here today, it tells us the story that he's celebrating, but people celebrated more with Xerxes because -- well, candidly, he was a king, he was powerful, and he scared you to death! And if he had a party and you didn't show up and you were invited -- well, it didn't go well. One of his commanders one day won a significant battle, and when he came back in, Xerxes was so excited he honored the guy, and he gave him a parade, and he lifted him up and exalted him. Gave him a significant increase. One day the same commander went into the king and made a plea on behalf of one of his sons, and it so ticked Xerxes off that he cut his son in half himself. Spread the pieces out and marched his army through them. So, he's not a safe king. He's not a ruler who has a benevolent and kind heart. He's all over the board.

And there happens to be in this story a queen. Her name is Vashti. If you were to do this as a play, whoever got Vashti's part would know -- "I'm in Scene One, and then I'm gone." [Chuckles] It's not really good. Vashti was a beautiful woman. She was. The king had an eye for beauty, and since he gets to select his queen, and she doesn't get to say anything, he goes for the kind he likes. She was beautiful. And during this last week, she's over with her ladies. The guys are all smashed drunk, and she's over with the ladies, and she's throwing a party. And Harbona comes over -- he's one of the attendants to the king who often is kind of leading the charge. Harbona comes over and says, "Vashti, the king would like to see you." And she says, "Well, what does he want?" And he goes, "Well, you know the king when he gets drunk. Belligerent. He likes to show you off. And he likes everyone else to be enamored with your beauty. And strangely, he loves it because he knows you belong to him." It doesn't say -- was she tired of being exploited? Was she tired of being an object? Was she sick and tired of having her body paraded around for a bunch of drunk guys to google at? Probably. And so she said no. Says, "I'm not going." Harbona looks at her and says, "Whoa whoa whoa -- what do you mean, you're not going? The king asked you to come and dance. Just do it!" "No. I'm not going." Harbona goes back, and he has to deliver this news. He doesn't want to deliver the news, because the king has killed a messenger before in his lifetime, and so, Harbona goes back scared to death to deliver the message. And he says, "King, Vashti's kinda busy. She's throwing a party. I mean, by the way, you asked her to do it. So, she's just throwing a party." "Where is she?" "She's not gonna come."

The king's furious, and he gets a bunch of his guys together, and he makes a decision -- it's out of impulse. And the guys really don't weigh in -- he's the one who does it. And he says, "You know what? If this kind of behavior is allowed in our country, then every man is going to be disrespected when he asks his wife to do anything! She's gonna say, 'I don't have to!'" And so, tragically, he kicks her out of the castle, demotes her, sends her off to live in the dregs of life. And she's gone. In the setting, there also happens to be an idea. Though no one knew how important it would be. So, Harbona notices -- in fact, it tells us here later, in chapter two, verse one, "When the anger of King Xerxes had subsided" -- in other words, when he got sober -- "he remembered Vashti and what he had done, and thought to himself, 'What an idiot! She was beautiful!'" But -- your pride will keep you from doing a lot of things, and he couldn't bring her back in, because, after all, he'd made it a decree that every woman virtually in his entire region had no voice, could not say a word! If she ever disrespected her husband, it was worthy of death. So, how was he ever supposed to go back on the decree? Because he's the one who did it. So he walks around the castle all the time, moping and mad and frustrated. Harbona one day had an idea, and he came to the king, and he goes, "King -- I've got an idea." "Well, what is it, Harbona?" "You like women." And in his mind, women solved everything, so he says, "How about if I go and recruit a bunch of women" -- virgin women, by

the way -- "and we will find you a new queen!" Well, the king, again, thinking the way he does -- "That's a great idea!" So, they bring them all in. Now, this is the point in time where you hate being a dad with a daughter. I would. Because they come by, and they make a first selection, and they come by every home and they look at the women that fit the bill, and they look at them and make a first judgment -- "Would she be beautiful enough to come and woo the king's heart?" That's the day when you say to your daughter, "Go gain 100 pounds and get as ugly as you can." Because they come in and they take them! But they don't just take them into the palace -- they take them and they put them into a training, for an entire year. She doesn't get to see the king for a year. Why? She probably has to lose some weight and get moderately anorexic, and then she has all of these treatments that she has to do. She has to get as beautiful as the attendant can make her, because the goal is to put a woman before the king that somehow pleases him in a night and he chooses her. No self-respecting father ever wants his daughter to have to live through that. But it's an idea that saved a nation. And to be quite honest with you, I don't think Harbona was going, "Wow, what I'm about to do is going to save the nation of Israel, and it's going to fulfill the covenant of God and bring about the Messiah so that the world can get saved." I guarantee you Harbona didn't think that. But events that unfold often appear unrelated. But God is in them.

Esther is chosen, and she becomes the queen. And she is beautiful. She's not Persian, she's Jewish. But probably she looked enough Persian that they didn't ask, and she didn't tell, because Mordecai, her dad -- really not her dad, more her uncle -- but he raised her -- said, "Don't ever tell anybody where you're from." Every story has a crisis. When sin entered into the world, that was the crisis, and sin entered into this story. What is a crisis? It's an event that is outside of our control that will have the potential of significant and negative consequences. That's a crisis. If it happens to somebody else, it doesn't really affect us. It's not our crisis. A crisis, true crisis, is when the events are outside of our control, and they land in our lap, and the implications are going to affect us significantly, and they're going to bring about horrible and negative consequences. They had a crisis. What was his name? It was Haman. Haman was a man fueled by a vindictive spirit. Now -- after Queen Esther became the queen, they had five years, and it was beautiful. It was fine. There was peace. It was wonderful. And then Haman came along. Who's Haman? Well, he's one of the attendants for the king. He's actually one of his, probably, chief of staff. And one of the assignments that Haman had was to regularly come to a council and oversee the council. It was a representative council. There happened to be an individual by the name of Mordecai who saved on that council. Mordecai was a Jew. He happened to be -- what? The father of Esther. Mordecai, when Esther went into the palace, he went and stayed close to the palace, and every day he checked in on her. It says every day he asked of Esther, "How is she doing?" He encouraged her, gave her wisdom. He just was there for her. And, because he wanted to make a difference, and he was a wise individual, he got selected to be put on the council. And so, the council kind of ran certain things, and they were a representative council, and they made recommendations and represented their people to the king. Haman came to this -- not always, he didn't run the meetings, but he was an individual who came in, and he had this -- because he's a narcissistic, kind of arrogant individual -- whenever he walked into the room, he demanded that everyone stand, rise, salute him and kneel to him. So they're sitting down, they had to get up, stand up -- salute him, and then kneel to him. And there was one individual who just got under Haman's skin, because every time he walked in, he would not stand, he would not bow. And it was Mordecai. Why? More on him later, but let's just put it this way -- there was one person who Mordecai bowed to, and it wasn't Haman. It was God. There was one person he saluted; there was one person he feared. And it wasn't Haman, it was God.

That got under Haman's skin. He hated Mordecai with a passion. And what do you do when you hate somebody? You get rid of them. Oh, no, not for Haman. "I am going to," he devised, "get rid

of Mordecai. But the way I'm gonna do it is, I'm going to get rid of the entire nation." It's a crisis. Caught in the middle of that was Esther. She was caught between an unstable king who was at times impulsive and mean, and a man whom she respected more than anyone -- Mordecai. Why did she respect him? Because he was a person of character. But it was also because he was a person of history. The name Mordecai, interestingly enough, is not Jewish, it's Persian. But the editor, as he's writing, tells us something. As the editor is writing, the editor tells us the lineage of Mordecai. Now, whenever you're reading the Bible and it's -- I call it an "editorial note," drill into those, because they're important. And the editorial note on Mordecai is that he's from the lineage of Kish. Huh? Who's Kish? Kish happens to be the father of Saul, the first king. Now, why do we need to know that? Because Mordecai understood the depth of the crisis. What was the promise that Kish heard from God? "I will be your king." And Kish saw his son raise up, not because of God's choice, not because of Saul's choice, but because of the people. And Kish understood what it meant when you moved away from the plan of God -- it means disaster. And Mordecai understands that when Haman comes to take his life out and the nation of Israel's life out, there's more at stake than just a group of people. There's a covenant that God made. And here's the covenant -- "I will identify a people that I will bless, and I will make them my own -- they're the nation of Israel. And I will love them, and I will bless them, so that they might be a blessing, and through them is going to come a son who's going to die and redeem the world." Harbona -- did he understand the power of his idea? "King, I think you need another queen." I don't think he had a clue. Mordecai? Did he understand what was at stake? Yes, I believe he did. I believe Mordecai knew exactly what was at stake, but a crisis is really not a crisis when you look at it from God's perspective.

From Mordecai's perspective -- "Esther, we have a problem. And you need to go speak to the king about it." But it's hard, because every day Mordecai had been telling her, "Do not tell the king who you are, that you're a Jewish woman." But when Mordecai saw the crisis, what did he do? He put on his old clothes, which was the command of scripture, and he put on ashes, which was a sign of humility and brokenness, and he went to the center of the city, and he cried out to God every day. Esther heard about it. She was caught in the middle. What do you do with this? Harbona comes in, and says, "Hey, you know that guy that -- you know, you've talked with at the city gate? He has kind of an interest in you. Did you know the guy's out there every day, he's got just drabby clothes on and he's crying out to God, asking God for deliverance, and asking God to preserve the nation! I have no idea what he's talking about, but let me tell you what, he's annoying everyone." And Esther says, "Yes, I know." And she puts together some clothes, and she gives them to Harbona, and she says, "God down and tell that guy to change his clothes, to go home, and shut up." So Harbona -- "Well, you are the queen. Okay." So, he takes the clothes down, and he goes down and has a little conversation. He goes, "Hey, I'm Harbona. I'm a representative of the king. I'm an aid to the king. And the queen sent me down here to, like, you know, -- hey, she'd like to, you know, have you change your clothes, and by the way, go home, and quit making a nuisance of yourself. By the way, my name's Harbona. And your name is?" "Mordecai. Please tell the queen 'no, thank you.'" And he sends the clothes back.

Can I ask you a question? When you feel the crisis of our country -- and it is -- it's a crisis of trust. It's a crisis of equity. It's a crisis of law and obedience. What do you do? Do you get on Facebook and post your rage? Do you run around the house? Do you become despondent? Or do you head to the city center and cry out to God? Because you understand, "God, the only thing that's gonna save us is you." See, a crisis is really not a crisis if you look at it from God's perspective. Why? Because a crisis is really God's hand at work in the human tensions of life. I believe that with every fiber of my being, that our country is as sovereignly led by God as it's ever been. But we need a few Mordecais who will go to the city center and cry out to God, and not be silenced. Mordecai

requests a conversation with the queen. "Esther, I've told you all your life, don't tell 'em who you are. Just serve him and love him. But times have changed. There's a death sentence on my head. More importantly, there's a death sentence on the nation of Israel. And do you think for a moment, once they find out that you're a Jew, that they're somehow going to spare you? Haman will not stop until all of us are dead, and might you consider that in this moment, God is the one who put you in the palace, not the king? Might you consider that the space where you live and the opportunity to talk to the king that not everyone has -- I don't, you have -- might be because God put you there, not the king."

My friend, we see God's sovereignty always revealed in His timing. God is perfect in His timing. And so, Esther hears Mordecai's words, and she says to herself, "I will do it. If I die, I die." And so, she goes in to the king. And it's a huge risk, because if you go to the king, and you haven't been summoned by the king, it is an automatic death sentence. He has the right and the privilege right there to kill you. So she's already taken her life into her hands, and she goes in to the king, and she says to him, "I have something that I have to tell you." And he goes, "There's something that's bothering you, Esther -- what is it?" He loved her. She was a beautiful woman. But she was actually, I think, more beautiful on the inside in the way she loved people and treated people, and he saw it in her. And he wanted to hear. He was going to give her the scepter. He was going to allow her to speak, and of all crazy things, she says -- "Can we have lunch tomorrow?" What? "And by the way, can you invite Haman?" "What do you want me to invite Haman for? You hate Haman! I mean, you've never liked Haman. You've asked me to fire Haman for five years! What do you want him to come for?" "Oh -- just invite Haman." And so he does. Harbona goes and tells Haman, "Hey, Haman, make sure you clear your schedule tomorrow. You're going to have lunch with the king." "I am? What's it about?" "Well -- he just wants you -- and by the way, the queen, she's going to be there, and she's the one who asked for you to be there." Haman goes home, and he is absolutely on top of the world, floating forever. Harbona goes down and tells Mordecai, when Mordecai asks, "Hey, did you talk to the king?" and it gets back that she didn't.

Now I don't know about you, but when you're waiting for something and it's really critical, like your life is on the line, you don't like delays. But my friends, you have to understand that a delay is never an accident with God, ever. The fact that you didn't get a current job that you wanted is not an accident. The fact that maybe something is being held back -- a contract, or whatever the case may be -- never look at them as accidents, because they're not. No delay is an accident, it just provides God the time that He needs. Why? What happened? She goes in to the king, and she's going to tell him what's going on, that actually "Haman, this guy that works for you, has finagled a deal to kill my people, Mordecai, and by the way, me." She doesn't tell him. Why? Because there's two really important things that needed to happen that night. Number one, Haman goes home, and he throws a party. Now, when I throw a party, we feed people -- we just had one on Friday where we had a bunch of the folks from the Drop-In Class -- it never crossed my mind to have a collective group build a gallows. Now, who does this? Who brings his best friends together and says, "Hey, guys -- we're not going to do a barn-raising tonight. In fact, I'm not even going to serve you dessert. What I'd like to do is build a gallows!" What a sick individual. And so, they built it. Why? Because he'd told a story -- "I'm gonna get Mordecai, and I'm gonna put him on those gallows, and I'm gonna be done with him, and I'm never gonna have to see him not bow to me again." And they all got excited, because, to be honest with you, if they're in with Haman, they're in with the king. And so, they helped him build the gallows. That needed to happen. Because God had somebody that he wanted to put on it. Probably more importantly is the king. The king went to bed that night, and he had insomnia. Seems like that's not a normal thing. What do you do when you have insomnia? I know what I do -- I get up and I read the Bible, and then I will do scripture memory,

and I do a couple of things. What I don't do is read the chronicles of Mark Hanke's success stories. I'll tell you why -- they haven't been written. But this king had them. There was a chronicler. A remembering one. That's what it is -- we say historian. And every king had a historian. And the historian would always write his memoirs, and the chronicles of the king. And so, Harbona comes in, and he gets woken up because he's always woken up when the king has a problem. And he comes in, "Can I get you the chronicles of your life?" And the king says, "That's a great idea! Yeah, I'd like to do that." And he starts to read. And he finds this little story as he's reading that night, about a guy who came to the palace every day and overheard two of the guards' conspiracy to kill the king. Huh! And he began to wonder. He's like, "You know what, I've heard about this story, and I knew about the guy, but I never knew his name. And it's in there, and his name is, of all things, Mordecai. Is that the crazy guy that's been down in the city center praying? He saved my life?" And he thought to himself, "Wow. We've never thrown that guy a party. I've never honored him. Not once!"

Don't ever discount the regular things that you do every day. They're often where God shows up. It just happened to be a regular day when Mordecai went to the palace to check in on his daughter, that he overheard. You know, that regular visit that you make to the Dunkin' Donuts shop, or to the donut shop where you buy your coffee every day -- that's often the places where God will show up. It's the regular things that you do where God knows, "I'm gonna use that." And He did. The king got up the next morning, and Harbona comes in, as he always does. It's the first thing he does in the morning, to go in when the king wakes up, Harbona is there. "How can I service you, King?" And he goes, "You know what? I was reading in the chronicles last night, and I came upon this story of this guy Mordecai, who saved my life. Have we ever done anything for him?" And Harbona, who knows who Mordecai is -- "No, no, we never have. Never thrown --" "Well then, let's throw him a party." And Harbona says, "Sure. I think it's a great idea. Who would you like to coordinate it?" And the king says, "Why don't you have Haman do it?" And Harbona smiles. "Sure. I'll ask Haman to do it." About that time, of all things, Haman comes in the palace. He was there early that day. I know he wasn't going to come until lunch, but I mean, after all, when you're going to have lunch with a king and a queen and you're probably going to get a promotion, why not show up to work early? And so, he comes to work early, and he comes in, and the king says, "Hey, Haman! I've got a job. We have a guy in our kingdom that we've never honored. He's a man who has served so well, and I think we need to buy robes and everything and celebrate him." And Haman, the entire time is thinking -- what a narcissist -- that it's all about him. And he's getting all excited. It's like, "Wow, this is gonna be my coming-out party! I am gonna have robes and everything!" And the king looks at him and says, "Hey, by the way -- the guy I want to celebrate is Mordecai." Now, of all the stories in the Bible, I tell ya, I would pay money to have been there on that day. I would have. And when I get to Heaven, I'm gonna pay whatever it takes to get Netflix binge-watching in Heaven -- that's the one I want to see. I want to see Haman's mouth fall to the floor.

Well, Haman is out in the foyer sulking because the very man he wants to destroy he now has to go buy robes for and lead the processional party for his parade. Esther, she gains strength, and she tells the king, "You know Haman -- he's actually going to kill me. He's arranged to kill Mordecai and all of the nation of Israel, and by the way, you signed off on it. And you need to know that I'm going to die. Because I'm a Jewish woman." The king is perplexed, and he leaves the room, and Esther goes and sits on the couch. Haman comes in. It looks probably worse than it is -- he's just pleading for his life, but he is lying on her as she's on the couch, pleading. And the king comes back in. And he's filled with rage, because the woman he loves was about to be killed by now a man he hates. He grabs Haman, and he throws him up against the wall. And he says to him, "How dare you molest my wife?" And he turns to Harbona, and he goes, "Harbona, do we have a gallows made anywhere in

the region that we could use today?" And Harbona smiles. "I heard of one that got built last night. Yes, we do."

Sovereign hand of God runs history. Not Haman. Not Antifa. The sovereign hand of God. And though we will have days where men like Haman rise, God knows all things. And He knows history. And He knows the intentions of people's hearts. And it's for that reason that you and I, no matter how you interpret these days, you can trust that the sovereign hand of God will run history. Our history. It's not out of control. It's not a crisis. Not when you look at it from God's perspective. In our country, in your life and in my life, God is just moving the pieces. And you may have a Haman in your life -- you may. You may have a person who is trying to get you. But I want you to know this. Listen carefully. You are Esther. Every person in this room is Esther. You are called to a place. You were sent to a family. You are on mission from God. And it's in this moment that God will have assignments for you. And if you trust that God put you in the palace, whatever that is -- not the king - - then you will come to the same conclusion that she did -- "If I perish, I perish." But I will trust the sovereign purposes of God, because He runs this country.

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