

The Curse Reversed: God's Surprising Work in the Book of Esther

April 3rd, 2022

Jeff Bruce, Lead Pastor

Why Do You Hide Your Face? Reflections on the Book of Esther

Why don't we experience God's presence?

1. Sin:

"And I will surely hide my face in that day because of all the evil that they have done, because they have turned to other gods." (Deuteronomy 31:18)

2. Suffering:

"O LORD, why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me?" (Psalm 88:14)

3. Sanctification:

"In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered." (Hebrews 5:7-8)

For Further Thought and Discussion:

Getting Started:

1. What was helpful to you in this week's sermon? What didn't you understand?

Going Deeper:

2. In Esther, no character mentions God's name (even in places it appears they should; see 4:13-14), every character seems oblivious to God (note 4:3, 16; compare 3:12 with Exodus 12:1, 6f) and the author never refers to God. How do we make sense of this omission? What is the author trying to convey about this period of Israel's history (see Deuteronomy 31:17-18; compare with Deuteronomy 32:36-43)?
3. How does sin impact our experience of God's presence (see Matthew 5:8; compare James 1:6-8; 4:8)? Jeff noted that God's people often *think* they want God's presence, but don't want his purity. How do we see this in Israel's history (see Numbers 11:1-6)? How had the Israelites in Esther's day grown comfortable in their exile?
4. In their suffering, God's people often express feelings of abandonment (see Job 13:24; Psalm 13:1f; 44:24; 88:14)? Given that God will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5-6), and that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ (Romans 8:38-39), is it appropriate for believers to pray this way? Why are such prayers in the Bible?
5. Read Hebrews 5:7-8. How did Jesus "*learn obedience*"? How did he experience a sense of alienation from God (see Mark 14:33-42; 15:34)? How did this experience bring Jesus' faithfulness to completion? How does this encourage us when we feel that God has abandoned us (see Hebrews 4:15-16)?

Application:

6. Jeff provided a number of questions for us to ask ourselves when we feel that God is distant. Which of these was most helpful to you? Why?
7. What's one thing you can do this week to apply this message?