

Voices: Throughout Advent and Christmas, you can trust God's heart

December 14, 2016

This fall, I have been preaching through the book of Esther on Sunday evenings. What a challenge!



Zac Harrel

Esther is one of the most interesting books in the Old Testament. What makes it so intriguing is it never mentions God directly or indirectly. God's name never is spoken, and he is not prayed to within the narrative.

Just reading through the book without the context of the rest of Scripture, it looks as if God is nowhere to be found. Through the persecution of his people, to the blatant idolatry of Haman, to the dismissal and abuse of Queen Vashti and countless other women in the Persian kingdom, you wonder: Where is God? He is not named. He is not mentioned.

Broken reality

Esther is an example of the broken reality of this world. If we are honest, in our own lives, sometimes it is hard to see God at work and hard to trust his plan and purposes.

With the help of the rest of the scriptural witness, we know God is there and God is working. We can know God is faithful, even when we don't recognize his presence. Esther reminds me of that famous saying sometimes attributed to Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "When we cannot trace God's hand, we must trust God's heart."



The reality of Esther has been helpful for me leading up to this Advent season. This life is hard, and sometimes, we wonder where God is in the mess of this world, in the mess of our lives. We may go days, weeks, months, years without recognizing the hand of God or mentioning his name.

Waiting for God

Throughout Esther, the reader is waiting for God to show up, for God to save his people, for God to intervene. And he does all that—through the faithfulness, courage and boldness of Esther and Mordecai.

Before ultimate salvation, the sense of anticipation throughout the book is palpable. We can relate. Advent is about this sense of anticipation. It is this palpable feeling of waiting for God to save, waiting for God to intervene, and he does through the faithfulness and obedience of Jesus. The story of the birth of Jesus is the story of God showing his glory in a time when many were wondering where he was.

Christmas reminds us God is right here. Jesus entered into the brokenness of this world, the brokenness of our lives. That manger in Bethlehem reminds us God has not abandoned his world or us. In the midst of idolatry, abuse and evil, Jesus enters into this world to make all things new. The

anticipation we feel inside us for salvation and the groaning of the creation for redemption find their fulfillment in Jesus.

Know God's heart

We can know God's heart for us because we know Jesus left the throne room of heaven to put on flesh and blood, to become fully human with all our struggles and pain. He endured abuse and abandonment. We can relate to Jesus when he cries out from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This is the cry of our broken hearts, and the answer we can trust because of Jesus is that God is right here. You can trust his heart, even when you feel alone and abandoned.

No one will ever know the reason we go through pain and grief. There is no easy answer for the evil and suffering we experience in this world.

I cannot trace God's hand all the time, but I do trust his heart. I trust his heart, because Jesus entered into this broken world and took all my sin and endured so much suffering so that he might redeem and restore not only me but also all his creation. Jesus came to make all things new.

Esther reminds me of the messy reality of life in this fallen world. Christmas reminds me God has not left us alone, and God is always working to redeem and restore.

In the brokenness of your life, trust his heart.

Zac Harrel is pastor of First Baptist Church in Gustine, Texas.