

Esther 06-02-21B

Let's pick up our study now in Esther chapter 1. We've already seen just by virtue of the nature of this long celebration that Ahasuerus is putting on a little bit about him. He's trying to gain loyalty by impressing people. This is a mistake.

You're not going to get quality relationships. You're not going to get quality people involved with you. You're not going to have quality friendships.

You're not going to have quality dating relationships. You're not going to have any kind of long-lasting, meaningful interaction with other people if you base it on trying to impress them. And that's what Ahasuerus is doing here.

I want everybody on board because I'm a rich, influential, charismatic guy. You will find that the harder people try to impress you, the less they are worth being impressed by. They're not really worth knowing because they're shallow.

If you have integrity, if you have character and quality in your soul, if you are reliable, if you can be counted on, if you are a faithful friend in bad times as well as in good times, you will find yourself in the company of similar people. And one good friend like that is worth 50 people who will flake out and betray you and talk about you behind your back. You get with them and they're laughing and joking and talking about other people.

And as soon as you leave, they go to somebody else and they're laughing and talking and talking about you. And you're the butt of the jokes and you're the object of criticism and comment and fun. It isn't worth it.

You get nothing from association with those kinds of people and you become nothing except like them by association. Here's the point of application from these first several verses of Esther chapter 1. Don't let shallow people drag you into their shallow puddle. Don't become a shallow person.

Our culture and our society cultivates and promotes, encourages, glorifies shallow relationships. Entertainment in all of its forms glorifies and holds up shallowness. It will make you miserable.

It doesn't lead to happiness. It doesn't lead to anything that lasts. And this is a lesson that Xerxes is going to learn.

Now, they serve drinks in golden vessels, all different kinds of cups, royal wine in abundance according to the generosity of the king. In accordance with the law, the drinking was not compulsory, for so the king had ordered all the officers of his household that they should do according to each man's pleasure. Now, this once again is currying favor.

He says, oh, well, if you're moderate and temperate, why, that's absolutely fine. If you're a big

wine-guzzling drunk, well, that's fine, too, whatever you want to do. And in this one area of imbibing and partaking of wine, he gave them complete freedom.

And this is also supposed to sort of hook them. Well, look how liberal and look how generous and look how flexible the king is here. I can drink as much or as little as I want.

I can act at this party pretty much any way I choose. And this is one area. And the idea is I want you to think that all areas are like this because I've given you this one thing.

Now, I'll tell you what this is like. This is like the drug dealer that comes to a person and says, here, try this little dime bag for free. Try this little hit of crack cocaine or black tar heroin or crystal meth or whatever else it might be.

Just try this. You'll like it. And, oh, don't worry about, you know, you say people who are gullible and would even talk to somebody like that say, well, but what's this going to cost me? The guy says, oh, it's on me.

Just try it out. Oh, yeah, no problem. And then as soon as the inevitable craving for that substance hits you and you become dependent, now he's not the nice friend that he was before.

Now it costs you money. And the only thing you can say about that is that people that are dumb enough to try that the first time wind up paying for that stupidity over and over and over again. You have to be smart.

Don't let someone sucker you into a dependency. This is what Ahasuerus is doing here. He's suckering these people in.

He's drawing them into his web so that they he'll have sort of a hold over them. The next time he sees these people and they say, well, I'm not sure I want to send any troops. I'm not sure I want to participate in the war.

I'm not sure I want to speak up for you in the in the locale where I'm a governor. He's going to say, oh, yeah. And and how are you treated as a guest at my palace? What did I force you in any way? Was I not kind to you? And he's going to use this as leverage.

He's going to put the arm on them and get them to do his bidding. You know, they say, beware of Greeks bearing gifts. Going back to the Trojan horse and the Trojan war.

Well, you don't want to be suspicious and all pessimistic and cynical. But at the same time, you want to be smart. And if you know you're dealing with a shallow person or you know you're dealing with a person that has an agenda, you need to be a little bit suspicious.

You need to be a little bit careful. You need to be wise and objective. And remember that we are not here to get in good with people.

Sometimes a popular person or a well-known person comes or somebody that's desirable in some way strikes up a conversation or an acquaintance or you wind up rubbing elbows with him. You say, oh, wow, I'm kind of I'm moving up. I'm in the glowing charm circle of the popular people or the powerful people or whatever it may be.

You have to be careful. We aren't here to be popular. We're not here to be powerful in the secular sense.

We're here to reflect the glory of God. Now, Ahasuerus is here to impress people with the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty. Now, here's a little pop quiz for you.

Everybody look up here. I want you to tell me about the splendor and the majesty of Xerxes, of Ahasuerus. Tell me something about his splendor and his majesty that doesn't come out of this little section right here.

Have you ever seen an archaeological dig of his palace? Did he have hanging gardens like Nebuchadnezzar had? Where is the splendor and the majesty of Ahasuerus? Do you know anything about it at all? If it wasn't for this couple of verses here, a lot of critics of the Bible don't even believe Xerxes existed. Because all of his splendor and all of his majesty has turned to dust. And it's gone.

His bones are dust. His queen is dust. His palace is dust.

Everything he ever did, everything he ever was, is dust. It's gone. The riches of his glorious kingdom, where are they? Who knows? The splendor of his excellent majesty, where is it? It's gone.

And it's been gone for 2,500 years. So, he was a big noise at the time, but he's nothing now, is he? Well, God has riches and God has majesty that are eternal, universal, unending, and never fade away. Psalm 76 says, In Judah God is known.

His name is great in Israel. In Jerusalem also is his tabernacle. And his dwelling place is in Zion.

There he broke the arrows of the bow, the shield and sword of battle. You are more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey. And all of these that have been defeated, God is more glorious and more excellent.

Psalm 145 verse 5, the psalmist says, I will meditate on the glorious splendor of your majesty. We have a choice. We can either be impressed with somebody's new shoes, or new bracelet, or new whatever it is they got, new car, new mp3 player, new computer, new xbox, whatever it may be.

Or we can be impressed with that which never changes and never fades away. Where is your loyalty going to be? Are you going to go with the temporary or are you going to go with the

eternal? Are you going to bite the apple in the garden? Or are you going to partake of the hidden manna that is everlasting? That's the choice that we have. Satan is there saying, Oh, look at this fruit, it's desirable to make you wise, to make you popular, to get you ahead, to win friends and influence people.

God says there is manna that you can partake of that will make you a person of quality, that will make you a person of character, that will make you a person that is going to go beyond the grave into the kingdom of the son and into the kingdom of the father and take all of it with you. Take the treasure in your soul with you. It's a choice that we make, all of us make, and we make it all the time.

What splendor and what majesty are we impressed with? What are we seeking? What are we looking for? Is it Xerxes or is it God? Even the Jews in this kingdom have to make a decision. Are we going to say rah-rah for the king of Persia or do we remember the God of Israel? Do we remember the God of our fathers and the eternal promises that He has made? I will meditate on the glorious splendor of your majesty. Now, what's the problem with that? What's the problem with Psalm 145.5? The psalmist says, I will meditate on the glorious splendor of your majesty.

I just got through asking you if you could think of anything that was glorious and splendid about Xerxes. Can you think of anything that is glorious and splendid about God and His majesty? If you can't, you're in big trouble, aren't you? How can you meditate on God if you don't know anything about Him? How can you be impressed with God? How can you partake of the things that He has that are eternal of heavenly quality if you don't know any of it? Well, that's why we're here, isn't it? That's why we're in Bible class. To learn how God deals with His people.

To learn about His character and learn about His promises and learn about His plan and purpose. Then when it's time to meditate on the glorious splendor of God's majesty, you can think, you know, look at the things that God did for Israel. Look at the things that God did for Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all of these others.

Now, all of these people are assembled and these are the big mucky mucks in the capital city Shushan, right? He's got all the most powerful influential people right there for this week. Now look at verse 9. Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women in the royal palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus. So all the men are over here eating and drinking and making merry.

All the women are across in another courtyard, another area, eating and drinking and making merry. And they're talking about all the latest fashions and who's the best dress designer in Shushan. You know, look at these shoes I've got and look at this purse I found.

They're talking about all this stuff over here and all the men are over here saying, so how many Greeks do you think there are over there that we're going to have to fight and so on? Now look

at verse 10. The women were probably talking about really wise, important, philosophical things over there also. And the men were probably saying, where'd you get those sandals? They look pretty nice.

I'm not saying that there's an intellectual difference. It's just they were just separated. Don't get me all in trouble there.

On the seventh day, the heart of the king was merry with wine. He's feeling good. And he feels like this whole six-month endeavor has been a success.

And he's gotten everybody to kind of climb on board and be ready to go fight this Greek war. He gets, me who man, biztha, harbona, bigtha, abagtha, zethar, and carcass. Seven eunuchs who serve in the presence of the king to bring Queen Vashti before the king wearing her royal crown.

Now, why do we have these men listed out by their names? Because this isn't, he doesn't just elbow the nearest waiter or servant with a towel over his arm and say, hey, go get the queen and tell her to come in. These men are cabinet ministers. What he wants is for these potentates, these second-in-command type guys to go get the queen and come in in this procession and make this, this will be the creme de la creme, the final big fancy thing.

Not the coup de grace, that's coming up later. But this is going to be a big final wrap-up. You know how they do, they get the Olympic Games going on and they light the thing at the beginning and then they have a big fanfare and parade and all that and then they put out the torch and they end it.

Well, this is the big finale. That's the word I was looking for. So, you've got this, the harbona, the hooman, the bagtha, the zethar, and carcass.

Seven eunuchs. Nice big procession. They're going to escort the queen and she's going to come in wearing her royal crown, showing off her beauty to the people and the officials because she's beautiful to behold.

She's very regal. Now, it doesn't say anything about how smart she is or that she had a lot of children for the king or that she was a trusted and faithful advisor being the first lady and moving policy along or anything like that. She's just a good-looking babe and he's got all these men in there and he says, I want to show you that I've conquered everything else in the world and I've got the prettiest girl in the kingdom as my queen, as my wife.

She was beautiful to behold and he wants to show her beauty. Ahasuerus is superficial. He wants to impress people with these superficial things.

Well, he sends all of these eunuchs over there and they say, you know, the king wants us to do a parade and she says, I'm not going. Why? You have to understand the dynamics on both sides of this equation. Ahasuerus wants to make this big impression.

Vashti also is making a big impression. She's making a big impression with all the women over there. Now, how's it going to look when seven eunuchs come in and say, hey, the king wants you to come over here and all of these women are around and she has to say, okay, I will obediently go over here.

She's just been making much for a week with all of these other women. I'm the queen. I've got the king wrapped around my finger.

You know, I'm going to send him off to fight this little pathetic war in Greece and I'll run the country while he's gone. The whole reason it tells us she's putting on a feast is she's essentially doing the same thing he is and now their interests come into conflict because she's putting on the dog over here. He's putting on the dog over here.

He says, now I want you to come over here and make a big splash in my party and she says, I'm busy with my party and she won't go. She refused to come at the king's command brought by the eunuchs. Seven of them go marching in and think how great she looks in front of all these women when she says, be gone, seven eunuchs.

Be gone, Abagtha. Be gone, Zethar. Be gone, Harbona.

I'm not going. And all the women are going, ooh. Well, see, this enrages the king because not only has she not come and made the big final parade splash at his party, but this is sowing the seeds of rebellion.

All the men are saying, well, now how am I going to get my wife to do what she's supposed to do when your wife, the queen, won't do what you tell her to do? So, he has egg on his face at his party because he basically asked his wife to get egg on her face at her party and come over to his party. Now, have you ever been put in this position? Has somebody ever asked you to do a thing? A friend or a family member has said, I really want you to do this thing, but if you do that, it's going to put you in a bind. It's, it's, well, that'll make you happy, but there's going to be six people over here that are unhappy if I do this thing.

Or, I'm going to fail to meet my obligations, fail to meet my duty. Whatever reason it is, somebody wants you to do something and it compromises you and you really feel like saying, shame on you for asking me that. Why are you asking me this thing? You know what kind of a bind this is putting me in.

Why are you asking me this? And you don't do it. And what does it inevitably do? It causes a rift. And there are two problems there.

The thing should have never been asked and the fact that it is asked anyway means that there's already some kind of a problem. Now, if Ahasuerus and Vashti were big romantic lovers and just gazed into each other's eyes in the evening and, you know, embraced and wrapped their arms around each other, drinking their wine glasses and all that, this wouldn't happen, would it? You get the idea that there's already a distance between them. And Vashti's doing her thing.

Ahasuerus is doing his thing. And he gets this idea and he hasn't asked her. He didn't tell her.

He didn't warn her. He didn't talk her into it. He just commands it.

And that tells you that there is a lack of communication. There's a lack of warmth. There's a lack of rapport.

And this tears it. Now, Vashti knows what the effect of her refusal is going to be. She knows this king.

But she says no anyway. So, what happens? The king was furious, verse 12, and his anger burned within him. This is the second negative observation we make about Ahasuerus.

And this is what you'll find about this kind of person. When they don't get their way, they get mad. Superficial people, when they don't get their way, get mad.

Lack of depth. Any numbskull, any lame brain, can throw a fit. You don't have to be smart.

You don't have to be talented. You don't have to be anything but breathing air to throw a fit. Fit throwing is despicable.

It is something to despise. It is lack of self-control. It is emotion getting the better of intellect.

Emotions don't think. People in the middle of a fit are not coherent. They're not rational.

They're not meaningful. All they're saying is wah, wah, wah, I'm upset. Well, if you're the king of a mighty empire with 127 provinces and you're up there going wah, wah, wah, this is going to rapidly undo your six months of groundwork and impressing, right? So, he's furious.

His anger burns within him because he is a shallow person. Doesn't have integrity. Doesn't have character.

He doesn't say, excuse me, men. I'll be right back. I've got to go talk to Vashti in private.

He just gets enraged. So, the king says to the wise men who understood the times, for this was the king's manner toward all who knew law and justice, those closest to him being, and now we get another list, Karshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Marys, Marcena, and Mimucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media who had access to the king's presence and who ranked highest in the kingdom. So, he calls his cabinet.

Now, if you have ever been in a crowd, if you've ever been in a group and somebody gets ticked off at you, this happens especially for those of you that are still in school. Somebody in your circle of acquaintance gets mad at you. What's the first thing they do? They gather up all their friends and try to get them mad at you also, don't they? And they start bad-mouthing you.

They start saying, well, what are we going to do to so-and-so? So-and-so is stuck up. So-and-so is, you know, we're all going to do this thing and they're not going to do it. We're all going to

cheat on the test and he won't cheat or she won't cheat.

We're all going to boycott this thing. We're going to sit there with a grim look on our face and this person doesn't want to chime in and go along. This person is not playing the game.

This person is not being a dutiful sheep like the rest of us. So, how can we punish them? What shall we do? Don't be sitting there looking like you haven't seen this before. I know you have.

Some of you are living through it right now. Trust me, I've seen it and all the rest of you have seen it as well. People will oppose you by conglomerating, by gathering others around them and trying to outnumber you.

This is what the king does. He's just a petty man and this is his habit. It says, this was his manner toward all who knew law and justice.

Whenever he got upset with somebody, he wanted to gather everybody and say, now how can we outlaw this? How can we use the law? How can we use our political power, our ruling power to squash this person that I don't like? I'm enraged and I'm furious. Where's a law that I can mash him with? He's got seven guys whose full-time job is to figure out a way to mash someone who's opposing the king. What shall we do to Queen Vashti according to the law? Because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus brought to her by the eunuchs.

So, Mamucan answered before the king and the princes, Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king, but she has wronged all the princes and all the people who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. Her behavior has wronged the entire country. The queen's behavior will become known to all women and they will despise their husbands in their eyes when they report King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in before him and she did not come.

This very day, the ladies of Persia and Media will say to all the king's officials that they have heard of the behavior of the queen. Thus, there will be excessive contempt and wrath. Now, what is the substance of this? This kind of sounds like a reasonable argument, doesn't it? We don't want to set a bad example.

You can't let this pass or it will set a bad example. What kind of marriages are there amongst these nobles that the women are all going to get up and rebel because the queen rebelled? How come the women aren't saying she is a bad woman for not doing what her husband said? If he was in fact in the right, what kind of a nation is this? What kind of marriages are these where one bad example is going to spoil the whole country? This sounds kind of like an Islamofascist state, doesn't it? One cartoon is going to destroy our religion. One bad example and it will all come unglued.

Everybody has to conform. Everybody has to be exactly the same. Nobody can ever do anything wrong because the first time they do, we've got to make an example out of them so nobody else will do it.

This is petty and it reflects lack of character, lack of depth, lack of genuine relationship in these people. The fact that there's somebody in the country, some woman who is flouting the authority of her husband does not and should not cause people who have a wonderful, healthy marriage any concern. That's them.

This is us. They obviously have problems that we don't have. But this is the fear and this is the concern and this is what Mimoukan brings up here.

So, if we let one get out of line, the whole thing will come unglued. That's the argument. To please the king, let a royal decree go out from him.

Let it be recorded in the laws of the Persians and the Medes. Notice Persians first because they're the big guys on the block now. So that it will not be altered that Vashti shall come no more before King Ahasuerus.

Let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. When the king's decree which he will make is proclaimed throughout all his empire for it is great, all wives will honor their husbands both great and small. We'll slap her down and keep everybody in line.

Do you ever see this go on in your circles? Do you see cliques try to punish someone who violates the code of the clique? Gangs will punish somebody who disrupts the ethos of the gang. Groups of friends, circles of acquaintance will do this. This is lame.

This is a group of people that don't have character, that don't have integrity, that don't have independent thought and have to rely on group think and group pressure to try to keep people in line and make them conform. What good is this going to do you? Are you going to celebrate to your kids and grandkids and say, you know, I was once a part of a group where they made me do everything they wanted to do. I was a sheep one time.

And boy, when they would jump at the empty place where the bale of hay used to be, I would jump right there too. Is this something to be proud of? To be herd bound? To be clique bound? To be dictated to by a group? And whether you really want to do something or not, well, I don't want to get out of line or I'll get punished. I'll get bad-mouthed.

I'll be talked about. This is a horrible way to live. But that's the way these people are.

This reply pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Mamucan. He sent letters to all the provinces, each province in its own script, every people in their own language. Each man should be master in his own house and speak in the language of his own people.

Now this sounds good, and I'm sure there have been husbands who have come to this book and said, you know, old Xerxes, he had it figured out. You know, a woman ought to be submissive and a man ought to be dominant. You cannot legislate respect and you cannot legislate obedience.

You have to earn respect and you have to, on that basis, request compliance. You have to be worthy as a leader so that people will follow your leadership and will respond to your authority. You can't just legislate it.

It'll never work. You can't ask that of people. You can't try to dominate them with rules.

They'll just leak out around the edges and that's what Xerxes is going to discover. Well, this concludes chapter one. Gives us plenty to think about.

We'll pick up here chapter two next week. Father, thank you for the graphic illustration we have in your word of the difference between living life as your child, encouraged by your Holy Spirit and the power of your word, or suffering the slings and arrows of life in this world. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will impress these truths on our hearts.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.