

Esther 06-03-07B

Let's resume our study in the book of Esther. We're in chapter two and we have seen that the vacancy left by Vashti being banished has created this opportunity where there is audition going on for a new queen. Now we have not and will not see any more of Vashti in the book of Esther.

However, she is not gone from history and she will return and we will see that she's forgotten but not gone perhaps or gone and not forgotten, but she's going to come back because the next ruler of the Persian empire is going to be her son and she is going to be along with him. And Herodotus and historians record that Vashti sort of comes back with a vengeance after the death of Xerxes. But there will be about a 14 year gap between her banishment and the death of Xerxes and it is in this window of time that Esther is queen.

And all of this begins after Xerxes comes back from his sort of mixed results, he whipped the Greeks but then he got his navy sunk at Solomus and in the meantime he's over there at, I can't remember the name of that town, where he got tangled up with his sister-in-law and her daughter. He comes back and so Vashti is out and these other gals are being prepared. Esther is not revealed in verse 10 of chapter 2, her people or family.

Now there is another biblical principle here and you see it many places in scripture. You don't have to tell everything you know. You don't have to reveal all your cards.

You don't have to lay your hand down on the table. This is what we call discernment and there is a time to give information and there's a time not. If you've been through any of our gospel studies, we went through the gospel of Mark, we went through the gospel of Luke.

As soon as we finish up one or another of our current studies, we'll probably go back and do another gospel, either Matthew or John. But you will remember that time and again Jesus told the disciples, don't tell anyone who I am. And this just really irritates all the people that are big on evangelism because they think at all times, at all places, you should be preaching the gospel and whether people want to hear it or not, give them a tract, give them the gospel, stand in the airports, stand on the street corners, make an opportunity, you know, somebody comes up and waits on you at the restaurant or whatever, why you push the gospel at them.

This is not the bible way and we are not the primary evangelist. We are privileged to be an accessory after the fact when God the Holy Spirit is convicting and working on the heart of someone. But it's not our job to try to get everybody saved.

That's not what being a Christian is all about. We are supposed to be getting ourselves on the straight and narrow path that goes through the narrow gate that leads to life. We are supposed to be reflecting Christ in our life, not doing like the Pharisees who neither go in themselves but prevent anybody else from going in.

They said, Jesus told the Pharisees, you all canvass the earth looking for a proselyte, looking for a convert and when you get him, you make him two-fold the child of hell that you are. And that's an awful thing. We have our hands full trying to get our own thought life in order, take every thought captive for Christ.

But notice this, Esther knows something, Mordecai knows something, and they don't tell it. And it's not out of fear, it's out of wisdom. There is a time and a place when this information is going to be revealed.

But this is not the time and this is not the place and they keep their own counsel. What does James say about the tongue? The man who can bridle his tongue has got his whole body under control. The tongue is like a fire and it is set on fire by the flames of hell.

That's what James says about the tongue. Discipline in the area of conversation. Discipline in the area of what you reveal.

Many times you're going to come into possession of a juicy tidbit of information about one of your friends or one of your family members. Now any half-wit, loose cannon person can blab and gossip and condemn what they know. Anybody can do that.

Anybody that is conscious and knows English can tell what they know, can gossip, can malign, can badmouth, can say all kinds of things. Anybody can do that. It requires no talent, no gifting, no integrity, no character.

All it requires is a functional breathing apparatus and an audience. Anybody can do that. You are You're not special because you can tell something.

You're special if you can refrain from telling something. If you've got discernment and wisdom. There are things that I know and I'm not necessarily putting myself in the category of great people with verbal control, but I have certain pieces of information about various individuals that I have never told to a soul.

And I mean they are some whopping interesting tidbits of information. Would make dazzling dinner conversation. Would be fascinating and engender all kinds of questions and all kinds of speculation.

But there are certain things you just don't reveal. A person of integrity, a person of character has verbal discipline. And you can know a thing and not tell it.

You can be in possession of information and never hint at it, not by an expression. You know, there are people who say, well, technically, I'm not going to tell it, but I'll do a pantomime. And by my lack of response or by my arched eyebrow, you'll know what I mean.

And, you know, wink, wink, nudge, nudge. And it's communicated in a nonverbal way. If you are the possessor of information that is sensitive and that could potentially hurt someone or hurt

someone's feelings, you ought to be like the Sphinx.

You ought to be inscrutable like a Chinaman. You ought to be a mystery wrapped in an enigma inside a riddle or something where people cannot tell that you have the faintest notion of this information. You have to be a person who keeps their own counsel.

There is a time to speak and listen to me. There is a time to shut up and all of us have to know the difference. It's important.

You are not a person of integrity and you are not a person of character. If you can't keep your mouth shut on certain subjects, that's just the way it is. Esther is at the risk of her life if she lets this information slip.

And it's not just fear, it's wisdom. There is a reason for this withholding of information. It's not a deception.

Evidently, nobody asked and she's not volunteering it. Neither is Mordecai. But think about it.

What kind of a person do you want to be? We choose the kind of person that we are. Do you want to be a person that it's like asking the fire station for a drink? It just wandered a little bit and you're giving me the whole truckload here. Or do you want to be someone who can be trusted with sensitive information, who can be counted on, that someone can confide in and not worry that it's going to be all over the nation in a day or two? That's a true friend.

Wouldn't you like to have someone in whom you could confide and know that that information is going to die in their brain and never be revealed and never be told? That is a friend. That is someone of quality, someone of character. And that's the kind of people we want to be.

There is a time to speak and there is a time to refrain from speaking. So they did not reveal this information. Mordecai charged Esther not to reveal it and she obeyed.

She didn't say, you're not my daddy. My daddy's dead. I don't have to do what you say.

I'm beautiful. I can say what I want. Mordecai is her guardian.

She recognizes him as her parental authority, even though technically he's her cousin. He's her peer. But he has taken her in and cared for her and she respects him.

And when he says, Esther, Hadassah, Myrtle, don't tell these folks about your family roots. And she'd say, but this ought to give me an in. We're royal blood here.

We're nobility. We're aristocracy in Judah. This might be an asset.

This might be a valuable thing. Maybe it'll keep me from getting the dregs of treatment. Mordecai says, don't say anything about it.

And she doesn't. That is an admirable quality. Now, every day, verse 11, Mordecai paced in

front of the court of the women's quarters to learn of Esther's welfare and what was happening to her.

Now, he can't go in and she can't come out. He's pacing in front. So how is he learning this information? He's got a glass to the wall and he's listening in and trying to figure out what's going on in there.

There are people coming and going, aren't there? There are servants and there is information available. People coming in and going. He said, well, how's Esther doing? Maybe he talked directly with Haggai when he left work for the day.

He was going home to his little eunuch apartment wherever he lived. Well, he's not going home to his wife, is he? So anyway, Mordecai doesn't... Now, look at Mordecai. We've talked about Esther and her loyalty and her faithfulness and her obedience.

Look at Mordecai. He can say, well, good riddance for that. You know, I didn't really want to warn anyway.

And now the palace is taking care of her. She's got seven maids. I don't have seven maids working for me.

And she's got all the royal accoutrements, Haggai's waiting on her hand and foot. So I'm going to take a vacation. He cares about her.

He is pacing up and down, waiting for someone to come out that he can ask about how she's doing. He cares for her and he is faithful to her on the outside, even as she is faithful to him on the inside. Now, this tells us a lot about the character of these people.

They didn't have to be this way, but they are this way because they are people of integrity. Now, look at verse 12. Each young woman's turn came to go in to King Ahasuerus after she had completed 12 months of preparation.

Now, let's see how good your memory is. Talked about Xerxes coming to the throne in about 484 BC, spent four years preparing for the war. He fights the war in 484-479, which is about the fifth year of his reign.

479, comes back, has all of the intrigue with his sister-in-law and his niece, Vashti, last straw. She had disappointed him before the campaign and then mutilated this woman when he got back. So she's banished.

He's got this program going on to get these virgins in. A lot of them are already there when Esther comes. So it takes a year to get the first one ready.

So the first one is going to come in and see him. The very first one to complete the 12 months of training, it would be, let's say, in 478. Does that make sense? 484, 478, like six years into his reign or so.

That's when the first one is going to come in. And after that, they could be there every night or every week or every month. But the first one is going to be about 478 BC.

Just keep that in your mind. Each woman's turn came to go into King Ahasuerus after she had completed 12 months preparation, according to the regulations for the women. This was the program that Hagar set up.

He said, I don't want to have the king chopping my head off because you don't smell good enough. You don't look good enough. You don't know how to act.

You don't understand the royal protocols and the rules and how to behave. Because if she gets chosen, he can't say, well, Xerxes, I'd like to have her back now so I can teach her for a year how to be queen. She has to know how to be queen because if he says, I like you, be the queen, she's got to be good to go.

She has to know all of the, how to act in a reception line, how to act at a banquet, how to not make the mistake that Vashti made, how to behave herself at state functions and with the visitors and ambassadors and when to leave the harem and when not to and all of this stuff. So it takes a year of training to be the queen. So the first one goes in about 478 BC.

Thus were the days of their preparation of portions. Six months. Now this is just their physical preparation.

They soak them in oil of myrrh for six months. Every day they get a bath of myrrh. Where do you remember myrrh from? Christmas wasn't that long ago, right? What did the wise men bring? Gold, frankincense and myrrh.

It's a very costly spice. Six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying women. Moisturizers, defoliators, wrinkle removers, oil of olay, mascara, eye shadow, lip gloss.

I don't know what all it was. Camel butter is what I think of. I think they just whipped butter out of camel milk and just soaked them in it, kind of moisturized and made them look very voluptuous.

Thus prepared, each young woman, this is verse 13 of chapter two, went to the king and she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women's quarters to the king's palace. You want a feather boa? Here you go. You want a purple scarf? You want dangly earrings? Do you want fuzzy slippers? Whatever you want, you take it, you design your own outfit, choose your own jewelry and you just get yourself up in the most desirable way you can and then you go see the king and hope and pray that he likes you.

Pray to Marduk or somebody. So each young woman went to the king, given whatever she decided to take with her from the women's quarters to the king's palace. This is the king's palace.

They've got all of the, you know, those little hand clappers where they do the dances and they make little ringing noises with those things and maybe they play the flute or maybe they have a talent and whatever it is, they can take that with them and go in and try to impress the king. Now, look at verse 14. In the evening she went and in the morning she returned to the second house of the women to the custody of Shashgaz, the king's eunuch who kept the concubines.

Now, what does this tell you about the visit of this girl? What does it involve? It involves sleeping with the king. I'm sorry, but that's what it says. She goes in the evening and she comes back in the morning.

Now, they're not staying up playing gin rummy. She goes in the evening. It is her job to basically seduce the king with her feminine wiles and beauty and to try to make sure he has the best time possible.

And after that night, she doesn't return to the house of the virgins with Haggai. She goes to the house of the concubines, which are the women that the king can choose from when he wants to have a good time in the physical sense. She's used at that point.

She's not a virgin anymore and so she goes to a different place. That's what's going on. Now, listen.

This is what Esther is going to do. She's not any different than these other girls and she's going to do this very same routine. You say, whoa, wait a minute.

This is the Bible and this is Esther and she's a woman of character and integrity who's just been talking about what a great woman she is. And she's going to go sleep with this king. Do you not find that shocking? I find that just almost shocking.

If I wasn't a marine, it would be shocking. How can this be in the pages of our Bible? Well, it's there and we just have to deal with it. So, this is what the routine is.

In the evening she went and in the morning she returned to the second house of the women to the custody of Shashgaz. Now, why do we get all of these Persian names? We get the seven advisors. We get the seven astrologers.

We get the eunuchs. We get Shashgaz and Haggai. Pretty soon we're going to get Haman and his ten sons and all of their names.

Why? I ask myself. You go try to look these up in Persian and it's just a mishmash. You can't even figure out what the names mean.

Why do we have this? I'll tell you why. Because in the days when this book was first written and first published, this information was fresh and it was known. And these are real people and this is historical fact.

Many people down through the centuries have tried to argue that this is a myth and a fairy tale.

Well, it's not a myth and it's not a fairy tale. And we know that this book was written before the time of the Maccabees and so on.

And it was verifiable. People could go back and check. And one of the interesting things we're going to see when we get to the sons of Haman, I'll tell you about at that time.

But these names, among other things, tell us that this is a true and historical account. For hundreds of years, they said there's nobody such as Mordecai anywhere in Persian history. He's a fantasy.

He's a figment. He's an apparition in somebody's imagination. He didn't really live.

He's worse than King Arthur. He just never did exist. They have now found abundant tablets.

They've uncovered some of the Persian library. And guess what? Mardukai in 480 BC was signing tablets with his own name. He's an accountant.

He counts things for the king. And somewhere between 480 and 475 BC, they have dated these tablets to the reign of Xerxes. And Mordecai, they've got the tablets.

Recording his efforts, he's a bean counter. He's an accountant. He is a mucky muck.

He works for the king. He's been raised. He's in a position of trust and authority.

But he's got the keys to warehouses and he can go in and count things. And there's his name, bigger than Dallas on these tablets, Mardukai. Now, don't let anyone tell you that the Bible doesn't know what it's talking about.

The Bible does not claim to be a history book. But when it records history, it's accurate. The Bible does not claim to be a science book.

But when the Bible talks about science, it's accurate. The Bible does not claim to be a source of biographical information. But if it mentions an individual and says that they lived in a certain place and did a certain thing, you can bank on it.

The Bible is inerrant, infallible, and inspired by God. And it contains no error whatsoever. The only errors you can find in the Bible are errors that have been introduced by people making imperfect copies and messing up the text.

But the content of the word of God, you can take it to the bank. And that's important because, think about this. If you could prove that the Bible made a mistake, that Mardukai didn't live at this time, or there wasn't an Esther, I think it's amazing that when you go and look at the history of Xerxes, you find this 14-year period where Vashti is off the scene.

We don't have any mention made of Esther in what they have uncovered of Persian records, but the gap is there in which she fits very nicely. If that was not the case, if you could prove that the

Bible was wrong about science, or about history, or about geography, well, if you can find demonstrable errors there, then how are you going to know what it says about unprovable things? How do we know that there's an Ark of the Covenant in heaven? How do we know that there are angels surrounding the throne of God? How do we know that Jesus is up there at the right hand of the Father? If you can find a verifiable mistake down here on earth, how can you trust the Bible on stuff that you can't check? Why does God give us these details? And these details of names and so on don't do us as much good as they did the initial people who received this book because they could say, you know what, this thing is right on everything I can check, so I can only assume that it's right on the stuff I can't check. And you can find all kinds of things.

If you want to laugh yourself silly, look on the web and find the skeptics' Bible, and they go from Genesis to Revelation poking fun and making mocking remarks about the Word of God and saying, well, this couldn't have happened, and this is ridiculous, and this is a contradiction, and it's the most ignorant buffoonery. I find it hugely funny. I read it when I'm looking for light entertainment because it just shows me how dumb people can be.

And it's like, this is the analogy that always comes to my mind. One of these days in math, if you get far enough, you'll learn about binary math, the computers run on, where all numbers are 1s and 0s. In binary math, what's the first thing you learn in math? 1 plus 1 equals 2, right? 1 plus 1 is 2. Simplest thing in math.

But in binary math, you know what 1 plus 1 equals? 1, 0. Looks like a 10. 1 plus 1 equals 1, 0. Now, can you imagine a fourth grader walking into a college classroom where they're studying binary math, and the professor goes up and writes on the board, 1 plus 1 equals 1, 0, and the fourth grader is just laughing himself sick. Look at these people who think they're so smart, and they don't even know 1 plus 1 equals 2. Well, that's exactly what you get with people like the skeptics and the skeptics' Bible.

They are so incredibly stupid about the Bible that they think they're smart. The wisdom of man is his foolishness with God. Well, this is an accurate account.

So, you have Shashgaz here, who is in charge of the women who have already slept with the king, keeps the concubine. She would not go into the king again unless the king delighted in her and called for her by name. So, she's in the library of books that have already been checked out and read once, and he wants to read that book again.

He can go call Shashgaz and say, Remember, you Odiah, or one of these other women? Well, bring her back. Now, verse 15. When the turn came for Esther, the daughter of Abihael, the uncle of Mordecai.

We didn't even get Abihael's name last time, did we? And now, we do. The uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his daughter to go into the king, she requested nothing but what Haggai, the king's eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised. This is smart.

She's not like the other women that say, Well, give me the golden clappers and the feather boa, and I'm going to go in and do my hoochie-coochie dance, and that will really impress the king. She knows that Haggai knows the king and is smart. And she defers to his knowledge and his wisdom.

And she knows that God has allowed her to earn favor in his sight, and that he's in her court. Now, this is important, and this is the last point we're going to have for tonight. If God has given you wise counsel, if God has put somebody in your periphery who knows what they're talking about, someone with character, and someone with humility, and someone with wisdom is going to listen to that godly counsel, is going to listen to that wise counsel, is going to listen to that person that God has put there to give you good information.

It is arrogance, and it is pride, and it is self-centeredness that keeps us from availing ourselves of what God gives us. God puts it there. God gave Esther the smartest man in the kingdom about what Xerxes likes and doesn't like, and Esther put herself completely in his hands.

Now, is he a Jew? Is he a believer? He's not a Jew, and we don't have any clue that he's a believer, but he certainly knows about this, doesn't he? And so Esther says, you tell me what I should take, and that's what I'll take. That's wisdom. That's humility.

She doesn't go charging off saying, I have a dream, I've got a plan, I know how it'll work, I know what my strengths and weaknesses are. She knows that Haggai knows best, and that's who she listens to. She requested nothing but what Haggai the king's eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised.

And look at this. Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her. It's that same phrase.

She earned it. She earned it by the way she acted. She earned it by the choices that she made.

She earned it by keeping her own counsel and only saying what needed to be said. All who saw her favored her. So in verse 16, Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus into his royal palace in the tenth month, which is the month of Tibet, in the seventh year of his reign.

Comes to the throne in 484. What year is this? 477. After the battle in 479, two years after, there's been a year of other women coming in, and this is in the seventh year of his reign.

This fits precisely into history as we know it from Herodotus and the other writers. It explains the feasts. Everything synchronizes perfectly with all of the information that we have.

Seventh year of his reign. Vashti is off the scene. The mutilation of the sister-in-law and the going away of the niece and all that have already taken place.

And here she is. We know the month and the year that Esther comes into the king, and that is 477 BC. And the king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins.

So he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. God's time and God's place. And we'll talk about what she went through and why she did what she did next time.

Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the memorable way that you communicate the truths that we need to live our lives in a way that pleases you.

We pray that our study will equip us for every good work and allow us to follow in the footsteps of our Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.