

Esther 06-03-14A

This is Tuesday the 14th of March 2006 we continue tonight our study in the book of Esther picking up in chapter 2 with Esther coming to the palace of the king. Let's take a moment as we begin as we always do to make sure that God the Holy Spirit has the opportunity to teach us. He is the one that does the teaching.

If you're just listening to me and not to him you won't learn a thing. He is also the one who can bring these things back to our minds and help us to live in the light of God's Word so that our life counts in God's plan and is not a huge waste of time which it otherwise will be. So let us pray.

Father we are grateful that you have preserved us and sustained us and blessed us brought us to this point where we can once again refresh our souls through the study of your Word and the fellowship of like-minded believers. We thank you for the gifts that you have given to each one of us. We thank you for the freedom and the opportunity to assemble and we ask that you will bless us as we study your Word together.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. You remember in the book of Esther where we are.

We're about a hundred years after the time of Ezekiel and Daniel. In fact we're specifically in 479 BC and we are looking at the Persian Empire with King Xerxes or Ahasuerus and he is kind of a ne'er-do-well in terms of his morality and his scruples and his overall status as a good guy. He seems to be lacking.

We've seen the intrigues that have taken place between himself and various feminine parties in his periphery and between his wife and some of those feminine parties. So this is pretty much a decadent sort of environment into which Esther is pulled. And when we left off last time toward the 15th verse of chapter 2 in the book of Esther, the turn came for Esther, the daughter of Abihael, the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his daughter to go in to the king.

She didn't request anything but what Haggai, the king's eunuch, the custodian of the women advised. And we saw that the king is in the process of replacing the queen. If you've ever seen the story of Henry VIII in writing or dramatized, you know that he ran through quite a few wives for various reasons.

The time spent as royalty, everybody says, oh, I'd love to be the princess, I'd love to be the queen. They tell us fairy tales when we're little, but in reality, life at the top of the monarchical heap is kind of dangerous because people are jockeying for power and have the power to do violent things and get away with it. Now, we know that this was something of a beauty contest, something of a, it's not American Idol, it's more like Persian Queen.

And the judge is the king. And these various women are running there. The king gives them a go or a no-go after he sleeps with them.

And we think, well, now wait a minute, Esther is from Israel. She is from the tribe of Benjamin, from a good family, an aristocratic, noble family. How can she get caught up in such a thing? And should she have protested? Should she have said, oh, no, I will die, you know, death before dishonor.

You'll have to slay me. I'm not going to go in and sleep with the king. What do we say about this? This is kind of a difficult situation to address, isn't it? Well, in answering that question, we're going to learn some things about the plan and purpose of God that apply to us.

First of all, we need to go back and review verse 8. Everybody look at Esther chapter 2, verse 8. Have you got it there? Let's all read this together. Ready? So it was, when the king's command and decree were heard, and when many young women were gathered at Shushan the citadel, under the custody of Haggai, that Esther also was taken to the king's palace. That's far enough right there.

What's the last thing we just read there? Esther also was taken. It doesn't say Esther raised her hand and said, I volunteer, let me fill out an entry form and become part of the contest. Esther was taken.

There is obedience on the part of the troops and the government officials of the empire to the king's command and decree. The command and decree to go out. Any good looking women that you find, corral them, run them past Haggai and those who pass muster with him are going to be brought to the king.

We get the impression from this that Esther really did not have a choice. Mordecai didn't say, hey, I think this will be a good idea to run you into the king. Esther didn't say, you know, I've always wanted to be a queen.

Her good looks were visible and manifest. And when this decree and command went out from the king, Esther was taken to the palace. So this does not appear to be her choice.

Can you think of other people that were taken to a royal palace? Joseph ends up being taken against his will. How about Daniel? How about Hananiah and Mishael and Azariah? Not many young men in their teens are going to raise their hand and say, oh, yes, let me join the eunuchs at the palace. That sounds like a fun life for me.

I'm a young man of royal blood in Israel, in a land and in a time where getting married and having children is one of the main accomplishments of life. Maintaining possession of your tribal and your clan and your family's land. And oh no, let me go and have all possibility of ever fathering children removed in a strange land and to a fate I know not what.

They were taken against their will, weren't they? And yet, oh, by the way, what does the Bible say about mutilation of the body of an Israelite? Is this something that is done in Israel? Do they make eunuchs in Israel? It's against the law of Moses, isn't it? He said you don't even cut the corners of your beard off. You don't gash yourself like the worshipers of Baal did at Mount

Carmel. You're not to pierce yourself.

You're not to tattoo yourself. And now we're talking, we're not talking about the modern day. You can do what you want.

As far as the Bible goes, what the rest of your family or friends may have to say is something else. But biblically speaking, for Israelites under the law of Moses, they were not to mutilate themselves. They were not to cut off body parts.

Now, piercings, oddly enough, have been a part of culture. You can look at paintings and so on of the Israelites. So if you have pierced ears, you haven't violated the law of Moses.

Not that that would matter. But mutilation, making eunuchs, this is not a part of the law of Moses. And anyone who either accidentally or on purpose was made that way, among other things, could not serve if they were a member of the tribe of Levi.

They couldn't be a priest. This was not to be done. And yet, these four young men are dragged away from Jerusalem and their families and their life and all of their future.

And they are taken to Babylon and made eunuchs. And this is incorporated into the plan and purpose of God. By virtue of being eunuchs and by virtue of being entered into the governmental hierarchy of Babylon, these young men are going to be in a position to make policy, to influence policy, to rule, to judge, and to oversee the well-being of Israel for the next 70 years.

Daniel is going to last past the end of the Babylonian Empire into the Persian Empire, isn't he? So this, even though it is against the law of Moses for this mutilation to take place, God allows this to take place because it is necessary to accomplish his purpose in a pagan land. Now, if you're smart, if you're sharp, you're already beginning to develop an idea in your mind of an analogy to Esther. Are you thinking of it? God allowed something that was a violation of the ritual law of Moses that was given at Mount Sinai for Israelites in the case of Daniel and his three friends, didn't he? Why? They had to function under a foreign government in a foreign land under unusual and exceptional circumstances and be the means of God's deliverance of their people.

To serve as an example, to serve in very extraordinary circumstances, right? The very same thing is taking place here in the book of Esther. It is not normal and it is not usual and it is not recommended for young women to marry outside of Israel, outside of their kindred, outside of their tribe, outside of their people, and certainly not to follow the customs and rituals of the uncircumcised pagans to whom they have become enslaved and become subservient. But in the plan and purpose of God, sometimes these unusual circumstances are thrust upon a person that God is going to use in an extraordinary way.

That is Esther's situation. She was taken to the palace and all Mordecai gets to tell her is, look, don't reveal your background. Don't just tell them you're an orphan, which is the gospel truth.

You don't have to say anything about your nationality or that Mordecai is your cousin or that Abihael was your father or any of that. Your name is Esther, not Hadassah, and you just tell them you're an orphan. Your name is Esther and go from there.

This was Mordecai's counsel to her to not reveal that information. Why? Dangerous. Danger to her life and Mordecai, I think, has an inkling that God has gifted Esther with this extraordinary beauty and extraordinary character and courage that she has developed as she's grown up and that she is going to be in a position to be used by God in a great way.

So he says, keep this stuff under your hat or under your turban or under your veil or whatever it was she was wearing. So in verse 8, it says she was taken to the king's palace into their care. This is where God has placed her, so what does she do? She conforms to the beauty regimen.

She soaks in the camel milk and applies the balms and the ointments and the salves and the creams and the perfumeries and the mascara and the blush and the hair treatments and whatever else, you know, de-lousing and all of the things that they do to make someone beautiful. It takes them a year to infuse them with enough beauty aids to be ready to be presented to the king. So then in verse 15, when the turn came for Esther, the daughter of Abihael, now this is the first time her father's name is given.

It was mentioned that her father had died back in verse 7, but his name wasn't given. Now it's given. This is an interesting name, Abihael.

Notice it's I-L and not E-L, so that ending isn't one of those traditional ones that ends in the name of God. This in Hebrew is Abihael, A-B-I, that's one word, which means my father, and the second word is Chayil, C-H-A-Y-I-L, Chayil. This comes from a root in Hebrew that you will all appreciate, cool.

It's the word in Hebrew, cool, C-H-U-L. Of course, you don't spell it that way, but it's cool to be Chayil, because Chayil means to be strong, to be valiant, to be steady. It's used of a fortress.

It's used of an army. It's used of a warrior. Many times it will be in conjunction with another word, Gibur, G-I-B-B-O-R, and the Giburim are the mighty men.

David's mighty men, his mighty warriors were Giburim, and they are called sons of strength, B'nai Chayil. I could take you to a lot of passages and show you that, but I don't have time. I just have to take my word for it.

When Absalom, here's one place you can find it. When you go to 2 Samuel and you find Absalom trying to depose his father, and you remember there were two different counselors. There was Hushai and there was Ahithophel.

Hushai is trying to give advice to Absalom. He's saying, look, this is how you've got to carry off this coup where you're going to take the government away from your father and drive him out of town. You've got to do it all at once before everybody's courage fails, because everyone

knows that your father David is a mighty man of valor.

He is a Gibur. He's a man of strength, and his followers are B'nai Chayil, sons of strength. And all the men in Israel who are sons of strength, it's used twice.

It is used twice. It's used twice to rally to you quickly before they start thinking too long about the fact that David is a mighty man, and all of his followers are mighty men. And it's going to be mighty men against mighty men, strong men against strong men.

So you've got to get there firstest with the mostest is the idea. And this is over in 2 Samuel. So the point here is, many times in the Bible, a mighty man of valor, a strong man, a steady man, somebody that you can really count on in a crisis, is called a son of Chayil, a son of strength.

So now, what's the name of Esther's father? Abi Chayil. My father is strong, or my father is strength. What does that make him? He's a B'nai Chayil.

If my father is strength, then I'm B'nai Chayil. I'm a strong guy. I'm a steady, reliable, mighty man of valor.

Well, where is Esther's father? He's like John Brown, moldering in the grave, right? John Brown's body lies moldering in the grave. Well, that's where Abi Chayil is. The strength of Israel is in the dust at this point.

And this is sort of symbolized and spoken for by Esther's father. And her presence is sort of unattached. She's kind of an orphan.

And this is how the people of Israel feel 100 years after the conquest of their capital city, 100 years and more after Nebuchadnezzar ravages their land. They are sort of fugitives and vagabonds in a strange land, and many of them have not been able to return yet to the land. And so they're like Esther, and their father may have been a son of strength, but he's not around.

And all you have, her nearest relative is Mordecai, Marduk man, which doesn't do much for anybody. But that's why her father's name is mentioned here, because the turn came for Esther, the daughter of Abi Chayil, the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his daughter to go in to the king. She requested nothing but what Haggai, the king's unit, custodian of women, advised.

She is adapting to her environment. Now, she is not compromising her morality. She's not compromising her integrity.

This is essentially the situation that she has to deal with. It is do this or die. Now, many times we find ourselves in difficult circumstances that we did not choose.

We can be bereaved. We can lose loved ones. Ideally, things would be a different way.

Ideally, you wouldn't have to do some of the things that you end up having to do. There is a difference between adaptation and compromise. Now, what do you think Esther is doing here? Is she compromising so that she can save her life? Is she violating a commandment of God? What does the Bible say about intermarriage with people outside of Israel? Is this against the law of Moses? Everybody nodding your head, yes? Well, you're wrong.

It's not. What does the law of Moses say? When you go into the land of Canaan, do not intermarry with the people of the land because they are marked for destruction because of their abominations and their idolatries. It is the Hivites and the Archites and all of the other ites that are in the land.

God says, you find this in, let's see, I had that up here and now I've lost it. You find it in Exodus. Well, now I've lost my reference.

But in Exodus, it talks about the fact that when you enter the land, do not let your sons intermarry. Here we go. Now I found it.

Sometimes you have to talk to your computer. Exodus 34, 16. God said, if you take of his daughters for your sons and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods, that's what's going to happen if you intermarry with the Canaanites, with the inhabitants of the land.

Deuteronomy 7, verse 3 and 4. When you enter the land of Canaan, you shall not make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods.

The anger of the Lord will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. They were not to intermarry with the Amorites, with the inhabitants, the indigenous inhabitants of the land of Canaan. It doesn't say anything about marrying a Persian or a Greek.

Remember Timothy in the New Testament? What was his parentage? Remember 1 and 2 Timothy? Who were Timothy's parents? His mother was Jewish and his father was what? Greek. Didn't mess up Timothy, did it? He became one of the first generation of pastors after the apostles. So, when you find in Ezra chapter 9 and in Nehemiah chapter 10, that during the time of the occupation, during the time of the captivity, there had been some marriage problems, what kind of problem was it? Ezra chapter 9 and verse 2. These people who remained in the land and did not go into captivity, they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands.

Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass. That's Ezra chapter 9 verse 2. Nehemiah chapter 10 and verse 30. We would not give our daughters as wives to the peoples of the land nor take their daughters for our sons.

This is the Eretz. This is the land that God promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that has been squatted upon by these Amorites, which is sort of the generic name for all of the ites that live in

the land. So, this is not a recommended course.

Normally, people in Israel would marry within Israel. It's sort of like the Bible says, to not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. However, occasionally God will break this pattern to make a point.

Do you remember the prophet Hosea? If you ever study, if you ever read in the very first chapter of the book of Hosea, God comes to the prophet Hosea and he says, Hosea, there is a prostitute down here and I want you to marry her. And he does and they have three children. And then she leaves him and goes and starts hooking, starts being a prostitute again.

And he has to go get her and bring her back. Now, is this the recommended course of action? Is this the Bible pattern? Let's go find some ne'er-do-well and marry them and watch them leave and then try to get them back? Not at all. But God had a purpose because Hosea is a prophet and his ministry is symbolic.

And, I mean, worst of all, you know what the lady's name was? Gomer. Every day when Hosea finished prophesying, came home for dinner, walked through the door of the hut and said, I'm home, Gomer. Where's my supper? And she wasn't even there.

She'd gone off. Well, God had a purpose in this. It's extraordinary.

Same thing here in the situation with Esther. Now, we sometimes find ourselves in difficult circumstances and we have to make choices. We don't always get to be where we want to be.

We don't get to associate with who we want to associate with. We find ourselves facing difficulties and challenges, it's important to know the Word of God. We have to do two things.

Are you ready? Two things. There are certain things that are essentials. The Bible tells us things that are essential.

And about those, we are inflexible. We do not compromise. We don't compromise our integrity.

We don't compromise our character. We don't compromise the Word of God. We don't rely on human strength, human wisdom, human ideas, human solutions when we're supposed to be relying on God and operating in faith.

And it's a clear choice. Every day, you make choices. Every day, I make choices.

And we either decide that we're going to do just like all the rest of the fools on the planet and try to operate in our own strength and waste our time and waste our lives on activities and endeavors that have no meaning, no value, no lasting impact whatsoever, or we live our life in the light of God's Word and we live to please Him. And we don't compromise on those things. Now, every thing that is strong is flexible.

Have you ever been in an airplane during a storm? Have you ever been up in the air? And you

hit turbulence and it goes ding, the light comes on, the captain says, turn on the fasten your seatbelt light. And if you sit in a window seat and you look out and you can see the wings, what are they doing? They're flapping like a bird. They're moving all over the place.

And that's a good thing. You should be happy when you see that because that flexibility is what keeps the plane from cracking apart. If you ever look out there and the wings are not moving, that's when you better start worrying because they're about to snap off.

A tree, you know, there's some kind of a song, you know, Karen Carpenter sang something about I'm going to bend in the wind or whatever. A strong tree bends but does not break. We are bent but not broken, right? You are flexible to a certain extent, but you do not break.

Esther is having to be flexible. And when she was a little girl, this was not her dream to be the queen of a pagan nation, married to a pagan king. But this is the situation to which God has brought her.

And she is not compromising her integrity. She's not compromising her morality. She's not sleeping around, is she? She is going through the betrothal in anticipation of marriage to this king.

And she does everything exactly as she is instructed to do. She obeys Mordecai and she obeys Haggai. And that's the best that she can do under these circumstances.

And that's what you and I have to try to do. We look at the cards as they are dealt to us, the circumstances that God puts in our path, and we do our best to honor God in every area of our life. And when we do that, God will bless us and God will be pleased with us and God will use us in His plan and purpose.

We may know it now or we may not, but you can be sure that your life counts for something. Your life makes a difference. And that's a rare and precious thing.

But how can you know whether you're compromising or being flexible? We have to know God's word, don't we? And this portion is going to tell us a lot about that. We're going to pause and take our break. We're going to come back and see exactly what Esther is thinking and what Esther does here in the rest of chapter two.