

Esther 06-03-14B

Let's continue our study now in the book of Esther. We have hit on this, sort of, I would call it a difficulty in the situation here where Esther is sort of in the grip of forces beyond her control and certainly in terms of engaging in physical relationship with someone with the prospect of being married, but after he's obviously slept with many other women and maybe planning on sleeping with many more, this seems to be at odds with our understanding of the Bible's guidance, but that's what happened and it is incorporated into God's plan and purpose. The world is not perfect and many times we find ourselves in the grip of circumstances that are beyond our control and all we can do is do our best in those circumstances to live our lives in a way that is pleasing to God.

There was a good comment made regarding the difference between the spirit of the law and the letter of the law and certainly the idea in the law of Moses is to keep individuals and the nation of Israel itself pure. Why? Because God is holy and his people are to be holy. Be ye holy for I am holy, God says.

Touch not the unclean things, separate yourselves. Don't intermarry with the people of the land lest they lead you into their perversions and their abominations and so on. Well, there's not really a danger of that here and because Esther is taken to the palace and is put in this situation and it looks as though there is a potential.

Obviously, God gave her this great beauty and personal charm and so on for a reason and if she becomes queen, she's going to be in an amazing position. Much as God gave intelligence and wisdom to Daniel and to his three friends, much as God gave the prophetic gift to Ezekiel during the times, God gifts and prepares people for certain parts of his plan. And when the parents of Moses looked down at him, there was an edict by the government that said, kill the boy babies.

But the midwives were disregarding that command and violating it and so were the parents of Moses when they put him in the basket and set him in the Nile. And God favored him with an extraordinary appearance even as a baby. And Pharaoh's daughters saw him and immediately became attached to him and adopted him and raised him as her own son.

Well, you have a similar situation here. Now, you may find that you are gifted in some area. Maybe you have great physical beauty or maybe you have great artistic ability or music ability or empathy and the ability to sense and be sensitive to the needs and the situation that others are in.

All of us are built by God and we have been designed as a package for certain things. And you'll find that God will, over the course of time, make opportunities available where your gifts and your talents can be employed and can be exercised. Now, somebody can say, well, I can sing.

I want to go on American Idol and become a pop star. Or I can remember everything I read. I

want to go on Jeopardy and win a million dollars.

This is really not the idea we're talking about, is it? These are things that are going to reflect God's glory and are going to be used by Him as a part of His plan. Now, what's the difference? We say, well, I'm not all that concerned about God's glory. What I'm really interested in is becoming rich and famous and successful or happy in some way of my own imagining.

What's the problem with that? Suppose you actually succeed. When you look at the people in Hollywood, do you think they are happy? Do you think they're happier than you are? If you read about their lives, then you can hardly help it anymore. You can't find a homepage for your computer or anything that doesn't foist celebrities and all of their dirty laundry at you.

Those people have got all kinds of personal problems. They have addictions and they can't maintain a relationship. And they hop from one thing to another and they're unstable.

And they wind up having eating disorders and they can't sleep. And they get arrested and they've got legal problems and they've got tax problems. And they burn through their money like it was made out of magician's flash paper.

When I was a little boy, I found a place that sold magic supplies. And I was fascinated by the stuff that they had. You could get clear sheets that had bullet holes and cracks.

You could pretend like you'd broken your parents' windshield or their TV set or something. You could get bottles of red ink. My mom had a beautiful white tablecloth.

And I got this magic ink, dark blood red stuff. And I came in and acted like I'd spilled it all over that tablecloth. Oh, it looked like somebody had been murdered on there.

But when it dried, it disappeared and became clear. To my great relief, because I was about to be severely disciplined. I said, wait, wait, wait, it's disappearing ink.

Same thing with the glass cracking thing, by the way. Matthew remembers when my father was away at work. I got that and I pasted it on the front of our brand new color TV set from Sears.

And then we acted like we'd been wrestling in the house, which we're not supposed to do. And we made wrestling noises just as my dad was walking in the door. And then we said, oh, no, the TV.

My father came in and took one look at the TV and grabbed me by the back and swivel. I said, wait, wait, wait. Almost didn't get a chance to see.

Hilarity kind of went out of that joke pretty fast. But after he calmed down, he said, well, I know how this is. Because when he was a little boy, he got one of these rubber double suction cups.

And he put it in the gravy boat at the dinner table. And stuck the gravy spoon to it and then put the gravy back in. And his father grabbed the spoon and dumped gravy all over the table.

And I don't think he did escape his discipline. I don't think he was able to talk quite fast enough for that. But anyway, there's another thing they sold.

What made me think of all that is this paper that burns instantaneously. It's flash paper. You can have a note or something.

And if it gets anywhere near a flame, it just goes poof and it's gone. Well, this can kind of be the result of our life. If we start trying to live our life to please ourself, it seems great.

And that's what everybody is doing. But your happiness is like that magician's flash paper. It seems substantial.

But as soon as it gets touched by the flame, it just vanishes like a puff of smoke. You can think of good times that you've had. Maybe you went to Six Flags or you went skiing or you went on a trip.

You say, boy, that was a really good time. But when the chips are down and you're having deep problems and you're struggling and you can't meet your obligations and there's a dark cloud of gloom all over the place and your life is hardly worth living. Do you sit and say, well, now, wait a minute.

I remember that skiing trip. Now, boy, that was fun. And I believe I'll just sit here and think about my trip to Six Flags and riding the Mr. Freeze and, well, now I feel better.

Now I can make it through my day because I rode Mr. Freeze four years ago. You know, our past good experiences don't really help us in a time of crisis today. We need something now.

We need something in our souls and it's something only God can give us. This is what Esther has. And this looks bad.

She's not evidently from a wealthy family, although she's from a proud family and a noble family. But she gets swooped up in this net and taken to the palace and they tell her, well, we're going to get you all ready and then we're going to send you into the king and you're going to sleep with him. Well, she figures, well, if God is going to allow this to happen to me, then he must going to be my husband.

So I need to prepare myself and do the very best I can to make this thing succeed. And who knows? Perhaps this is going to be a means of deliverance. We don't know what went through her mind.

It doesn't tell us. But whatever it was, she goes in and she is, in fact, very fascinating to the king. So when she goes in, she is the daughter of Abihael, my father is strength.

And you get the idea that Esther has to rely on her heavenly father. Mordecai isn't there. He's outside the gate and she's inside.

And the only thing she can rely on for strength is what she remembers of the God of Israel. And she is called for by name to go into the king. She goes and this is the tenth month, the month of Tebeth in the seventh year of his reign.

The king loved Esther more than all the other women. 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.

The king made a great feast, the feast of Esther for all his officials and servants. And you get the idea that the king was really happy because this feast has its own name. And at the time that this book was written, this feast was still known.

And it's kind of like saying, well, this became fourth of July, or this became Lincoln's birthday, or this, you know, when they say the feast of Esther, the original people who heard this story and read this story said, oh, so that's where that feast, that's what that feast was. It was well known at the time. It's called the feast of Esther.

You can see it capitalized there for all his officials and servants. And he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces. They had Esther day all through the Persian empire.

Everybody celebrated. Some of you might be too young, but when Prince Charles married Lady Diana Spencer, you remember the hoop law that surrounded that deal? Well, this was sort of like that. Everybody was anxious to hear accounts of how she was dressed and what all the accoutrements were and how many horses drew the chariot and how long was her train and all of this.

It was really a festive occasion. They gave gifts. It was like Christmas.

Everybody exchanged gifts because the king's happy again. He's not going to be looking for somebody's head to chop off. He's not going to be an old grouch.

And he's not going to be sitting thinking black fox about Vashti and issuing decrees about how women are supposed to obey their husbands. He's going to be happy now. And everybody said, whew, that's a relief.

No more weird decrees coming out of the palace. Well, now look at verse 19. When virgins were gathered together a second time.

What? We gathered the virgins together the first time and we had the Miss Persia contest and we got a winner and she's the queen. Why are we gathering the virgins a second time? He's not doing to Esther what he did to Vashti. So why are the virgins being gathered a second time? Well, this has been a long standing problem for people trying to interpret the book because this makes absolutely no sense whatsoever.

Now, do you remember what the Septuagint is? The LXX. This is the Greek translation of the Old

Testament books. This phrase a second time is not in the Septuagint.

It's in the Old Testament and a couple of other texts. So some people think, well, some kind of way this got added in there by mistake. But I think maybe the Greeks were just trying to make it simpler for themselves and just kind of left it out on purpose.

But what I'm going to suggest to you is that we understand this as saying, we're going back and taking a second look at the time when the virgins were gathered together. We're going to go back in time a little bit, back to when the virgins were still being gathered together. So you could amend this to say, back when the virgins were being gathered together, we're going to go back a second time to that period before Esther became queen.

While that process was going on, Mordecai sat in the king's gate. As I told you before, we've got inscriptionary evidence. Marduk-i, Mordecai was an accountant.

He was a steward in the government. He had risen to that position, but he was kind of a mid-level functionary. He was no big deal, but he sat within the king's gate.

He's a part of the government. The gate in an ancient city is the place where the government functions. This is sort of like the county courthouse.

When you go down to get a marriage license, you go down to the courthouse. That's kind of what the city gate was. This is where people came to get their driver's license.

This is where they paid their traffic tickets. This is where they met and tried to get small claims court. All of that in the gate.

Well, Mordecai sits in there. He's sort of a low-level government functionary. Now, Esther had not revealed her family and her people, just as Mordecai had charged her.

There are certain things that Esther has no control over. Being dragged into the palace and put in this beauty contest, she didn't have any control. What does she have control over? Will I be obedient to my guardian? Will I be obedient to those who have the rule over me in the government? And in those things, she does.

Now, some of you who are students, you don't have a choice about whether or not to go to school. Left up to yourselves, probably wouldn't go to school. But you have to go.

Well, while you're there, you run into all kinds of situations. Some good situations, some bad situations. You don't have much control over that.

What do you have control over? That's where you exercise your judgment and your faithfulness. You can decide to cheat or not to cheat. You can decide to talk or not to talk.

You can decide to attack the authority of the people in the school or not attack their authority. You can decide to undermine their authority or not undermine it. That's your responsibility.

The fact that you're there may not be your responsibility. But when you're there, there are certain things that you have control over. Some of us are in businesses and jobs.

We may have a lot of freedom. We may have a lot of restriction. In the areas where we have control, that's where our responsibility is.

Now, I'm in a country where my tax money goes to pay for things that I think are horrible. You remember a few years ago, the National Endowment for the Arts, and they're paying money to guys who are putting all kinds of gross art out. And my tax money is paying for that.

My tax money is going overseas to countries that I would just as soon send bombs and live howitzer shells to. Well, I can't control where my tax money goes. What do I control? That I pay my taxes faithfully.

And that in the areas where I do have control, I exercise it as unto the Lord. That's what Esther does here. She has no say about whether or not she's in the palace.

She really has no say about whether or not she's selected to be queen. But she does have the ability to decide whether or not to be obedient to Mordecai and obedient to Haggai, the steward of the virgins in the harem there. And that's what she does.

So, think about your situation. Are there areas where you have the ability to control what happens, where you can make your own decisions? You have an opportunity. You've been given guidance by those who God has supplied to give you guidance.

Parents, teachers, people in your family, people in your periphery, that's where responsibility is. You can't say, well, I never wanted to be here in the first place. So, all bets are off.

I don't really have any responsibility to be faithful or to be obedient or to have integrity because I just really shouldn't be here to begin with. So, you know, nothing applies to me. It's all off the scale.

It's all out of bounds. Not so. Esther doesn't use the excuse, well, I got snatched up against my will.

So, I don't have to pay any attention to Mordecai anymore. I don't have to pay any attention to Haggai. I'm here against my will.

Do you ever see people think this way? Do you see people who say, well, I'm in an unfair situation. So, I'm not responsible for anything. Think about it.

God holds you responsible for things that you can control. And we all have a responsibility to exercise that as best we can. We are believers.

Our life is supposed to reflect love for God and conformity to His plan. That's why we're here. Do you think God has an ample supply of people who don't live their lives to please Him and

reflect His glory? Do you think we need any more people running around being fools and headed for destruction? We really have a pretty adequate supply of those, don't we? The world is full of them.

What is God looking for? You go over to the Psalms. It says God is searching the earth to see if there are any who understand, if there's any that seek after Him and want to please Him. And when He finds those few, hopefully you and me are in that group, God is pleased and God is going to bless and God is going to provide and God is going to give you a life beyond your wildest dreams.

But it is only when we deny ourselves and take up the cross and follow Jesus. What does it mean to take up the cross? What did Esther have to do here? She had to go in a direction that didn't seem very attractive to her. But that's what was laid out.

So she did her best. Esther had not revealed her family and her people, just as Mordecai had charged her, for Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him. Notice, she is submissive.

She assumes the role of someone who is to be obedient. And where is she going to end up? She's going to be the queen of the realm and everyone is going to have to obey her. There is a great theme of reversal.

The Bible says, listen to this, humble yourself under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time. Humble yourself that you may be exalted in due time. What do you think is going to happen if we try to exalt ourselves? We will be humbled in due time, won't we? If you try to promote yourself, you're going to be abased.

If we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, and that doesn't mean that we have to do anything strange, it just means be obedient, be faithful. God will exalt us in due time. That's what is happening with Esther.

Now, this is before she's chosen. This is back when the virgins are still collecting, when she's in her year of beauty treatment. In those days, while Mordecai sat within the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs, Big Than and Tiresh, doorkeepers.

Now, when it says doorkeepers, these are not janitors, okay? They're not the old guy in the gray dungarees with a mop and a bucket. Doorkeepers, these are men in the secret service. These are men in the security business.

Doorkeepers, what do they do? They're in charge of making sure that nobody comes in to assassinate the king. They are the FBI. They're the CIA.

They're actually what we would call the secret service. They're high mucky mucks. They're important men in the palace and in the government of Persia.

Big Than and Tiresh are like the director and the deputy director of the secret service. They became furious and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. Why? I don't know.

Bible doesn't say. They were extremely angry with the king. Maybe they just got sick of all of this partying and all these feasts and all the trouble they had trying to provide security for the king when everybody's getting drunk and wandering around from room to room.

And he keeps inviting everybody over and they're just going nuts trying to keep him protected. They say, you know, we'll just kill him ourselves. We won't have to protect him anymore.

Whatever it was, they sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. They disagreed with him violently on something. Maybe they thought he was just a big idiot and they needed a different king.

So the matter became known to Mordecai. Now, Mordecai is quietly plugged into the grapevine. How do we know this? He says he walked up and down outside the harem where the virgins are and he kept apprised of how Esther was doing.

Well, Mordecai, being sort of an invisible type of guy, got to know some of the servants, got to know some of the butlers and the bakers and the maids that turned up the beds and swept out and so on. And he wasn't too proud to talk with them and became friendly with them. And they're giving him information about what's going on inside the palace.

And as you know, many times it's these invisible maids and butlers and, you know, hod carriers and bellboys and so on who really know a lot of what's going on because the big time people just ignore them. And Mordecai talks to them. So he finds out all kinds of things.

Well, during this time, some of these low-level people say, hey, Mordecai, here's how Esther's doing. And by the way, did you know the big fan of T-Rex are going to kill the king? And so the matter becomes known to Mordecai. And he told Queen Esther and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name.

Well, now it says Queen Esther and she informs the king in Mordecai's name. So this must have happened very shortly before or during the time that she was becoming the queen because the virgins are still gathered. They haven't dispersed.

They haven't all been sent home. Well, thank you. We have our prize winner.

Appreciate your participation. You can take this free sample of camel butter and go home. They're all still there.

So this is right around the time she becomes the queen. She goes in and tells the king and says, there is a man called Mordecai. She doesn't say, by the way, he's my cousin.

An inquiry is made into the matter. It was confirmed. And big fan and T-Rex get hanged.

They didn't have a long appeals process. They didn't sit on death row. You know, they looked

into it.

Hey, these guys are guilty and they're hung on a gallows. And it was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king. This is the official history.

They've got scribes sitting around, writing down everything that happens. Well, that ends chapter two. After these things, King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hamadath of the Agagite.

This is the Agag that you have way back in 1 Samuel chapter 15. And King Saul was supposed to kill him and all of his people, but he was kind of a jolly fellow. And nobody really had the heart to kill him.

And so he was still standing there when the prophet Samuel comes back. And Samuel says, why am I hearing all of this lowing and bleeding of cows and sheep? And why is this king still standing here? God said, wipe everything out. And Saul says, well, you know, the people, they wanted to bring all these back and sacrifice them to God.

And Agag, he's kind of a card, kind of a cut up, kind of a funny guy. And we shouldn't have the heart to kill him. Well, Samuel whips out his, grabs his sword from the nearest guy and just hacks Agag up into giblets.

Right there before the Lord, says he hewed Agag in pieces. Well, Agag, of course, already had had his marriage and his family, and he had sons and they had descendants. And Haman, clear over here in Persia, is descended from Agag.

He's an Agagite. So already you have the great, great, great grandchildren of the Benjamites facing the great, great, great grandson of Agag. It's like a new little conflict there with the same old types of people.

But the king promoted Haman, advanced him, set a seat above all the princes who were with him. All the king's servants who were within the gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage.

Now, we just got through talking about how Esther was flexible in this area that seems to have been non-essential. She said, well, I'm not, they're not asking me to do some incredibly immoral thing. I'm just supposed to go and see if I can become the wife of the king.

And she did that. Well, now here's a clear command from the king that says bow to Haman. And Mordecai says, nope, not going to do it.

Not going to bow to Haman. Now, this whole idea of bowing, have we seen this before? What about our Daniel study? There are certain things that Israelites will do and there are certain things they will not do. And it's the difference between non-essential things in which you can be flexible and essential things in which we must be inflexible.

And bowing and acknowledging the divinity of someone or the superiority of someone such as Haman is something that Mordecai refused to do. The king's servants who were within the king's gate said to Mordecai, why are you doing that, Mordecai? Why are you transgressing the king's command? It happened. They spoke to him daily and he would not listen to them.

He didn't give a big long explanation. He didn't say, well, you know, let me tell you the whole history of the people of Israel. He just said, I'm not going to bow down to him.

And notice it says, they talked to him daily. It doesn't say he said anything back. You don't have to explain yourself when you're living your life to please the Lord.

You don't have to give a bunch of excuses. Just do what you have to do. When they spoke to him daily, he would not listen to them.

They told Haman to see whether Mordecai's words would stand. Mordecai had told them he was a Jew. So he must have given them this much explanation.

They still don't know that there's any connection between Mordecai and Esther. But he said, look, I don't bow to humans because I worship the God of Israel. I'm a Jew.

When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay him homage, he was filled with wrath. He disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. They had told him of the people of Mordecai.

Haman sought to destroy all the Jews throughout the whole kingdom. Now this is sort of a satanically inspired thing. Well, what's our point here? What do we have to leave off with tonight? We're out of time for this evening.

What's the point here? You and I have to try to pay attention to what we know of God's word and discern what is non-essential and what is essential. We can be flexible about non-essential things, as Esther was, and we must be inflexible about essential things. There are certain things that we do not compromise, that we do not allow ourselves to become disobedient in.

How do we know the difference? Ask. God says, Ask and it shall be given. Seek and you will find.

Knock and the door will be opened. Who is it that's going to know the truth of these things? How are you going to know whether you're doing the right thing or not? You have to want to know. Do you seriously think anybody who goes to God and asks for wisdom, God's going to say, Oh no, sorry, I'm too busy.

I can't give you that information. It's available. God is searching the earth for someone who will ask him for this wisdom.

And you and I can be those people. Well, we'll pick up here in chapter three next week. Father, thank you for the privilege of studying your word.

We thank you for this great example that we have in Esther and Mordecai. We pray that God

the Holy Spirit will impress it on our hearts. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.