

Esther Series – More Bad and More Providence Esther 2:1-23

Dave Shepardson, Calvary Chapel Nuevo / wordbymail.com

We're doing the entire second chapter of Esther, all twenty three verses. I've been having a great time studying Esther. It's the first time I've really dug into it, and I've been having a hard time finding good resources on Esther. It's been kind of odd. A lot of people just avoid it. I don't know if it's because the name of God is not in it or what, but a lot of people avoid this book for some reason.

Since I've been having a hard time finding resources for Esther, I just want to acknowledge one of the great teaching mentors, Warren Wiersbe. You can always trust Wiersbe because he always brings it very real.

Let me start with a quote from Warren Wiersbe. Wiersbe says about this chapter, "*God is never surprised by circumstances or at a loss for prepared servants. He's never surprised by your circumstances and there is no situation, no circumstance, no event that God has not already put a prepared servant in the right place, at the right time, for the right reason.*"

Amen? Then we can wrap the message up because that's really what the message is about. It's what the whole book of Esther is about. God is never surprised by your circumstances. He's never at a loss for prepared servants in order to bring his plan and his purpose to pass.

This is the thing that I really pray that we'll grasp through the book of Esther: God is at work. This isn't by chance. This isn't just as we go. We don't have to beg God to see or be involved or be at work in our lives. He is at work. If you belong to him today then his providence means that his loving care and his overriding guidance is at work in your life.

The book of Esther is to get you to open your eyes to that. We act like we're out here all alone and every once in a while we cry out for God to throw us a life preserver – "Oh, God. Please stop by." He's like, "Stop by? I've never left."

He's always there. He's always at work. The book of Esther is to open our eyes so that we can see him at work. So more bad today. But in the midst of the bad we're going to see more good. We're going to see God at work more even though the bad continues. We don't really like that. We don't really understand it, but here's what we've got to receive from God: the how and the why and the when of God's good is up to God.

We know that God is at work for our ultimate good and for his glory. But all those details, guess what? They belong to God. We can't see them and sometimes we say, "Well this still looks bad." Yeah, it does. In fact, it is still bad. But that doesn't mean that God is not at work. He is at work.

Your life is just like the book of Esther in chapter 2. It's still being written. We're just laying the ground work for Esther's life. It's the same in your life. If you belong to God today, he's laying the groundwork in your life. You might say, "Oh no, no, no. There's too much bad. There's too much bad." For God, there's not.

There's more bad, but there's more providence. We see it in the book of Esther today and you see it in your life. I pray that you would receive it and that the confidence of God being at work in the midst of whatever's going on in your life will increase.

Let's Pray. Father God, please as we dive in, Lord, make this book come alive. Make it sing to us, Lord. Help us to see, God, that we serve such an awesome God. That there's so much that you're doing and so much that you're calling us to join you in doing. There's so much, Lord, going on around us.

Help us to see eternally, Lord. Help us to see past the temporal and fleeting circumstances and help us to see into eternity and join you where you're at work in eternity, Lord. Reveal to us, God, that we have an eternal life. That there's an eternal plan and an eternal purpose that's at work around us and help us, Lord, to commit to join you. When we see you work, Lord, may we join you in what you're doing and may you show it to us by illustration today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Last week, we got to know King Ahasuerus. It might be Xerxes in your Bible. That's his Greek form. But we got to know King Ahasuerus last week as he made that drunk and hasty and unwise decision to banish his wife, Queen Vashti. Unfortunately, this hedonistic, worldly, lustful king is still at the forefront of our story today. We're like, "Man, kick this guy to the curb." Trust me, in time.

Remember the possible support for that six month party we looked at last week? That was a pretty hard message, wasn't it? That was a rough message. But it was rough because this guy's an idiot. In six months of drinking and partying and just this big old rave, he makes all these really bad decisions.

But remember I told you that there was probably a political motive for that massive party. It was to get the nation of Persia to support him in his desire to invade Greece. He wants to take over the next big part of the world, so chances are – at least some people believe – that between chapter one and chapter two, King Ahasuerus attempted that invasion of Greece.

And they whooped his tail bad. I mean he was soundly defeated. He watched one battle from a throne on the battlefield. They just wiped out his navy, his army. Wiped him out. Sent him home with his tail between his legs. So when we open up chapter two, we're looking at a man who is finally defeated but not broken. And he's regretting his decision.

Esther 2:1 ***“After these things, when the anger of King Ahasuerus had abated, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her (again speaking of him banishing her from his presence).”***

Whether it was a military defeat or not, there's a time when every man needs his wife. Wives just know that. Sometimes we're just too stupid to say it or know it. Or we say it in these weird ways like men. But wives just know sometimes we just need our wives. Even this pinhead of a King got to that point.

He was regretting his decision. He was missing his wife, the queen. His servants started realizing that they were in trouble because it was them and maybe these guys that are referenced in the next verse that had encouraged him to banish his wife.

They're like, "Okay. We know this guy. We've got a quick fix here. We can change this little regret problem."

Esther 2:2, ***“Then the king's young men who attended him said, ‘Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king.’”***

Now if you're squeamish with inferences to hedonistic, pagan, lustful, sensual, tragic, disgusting stuff, just take a deep breath because we're diving into some pretty ugly stuff here.

His advisors said, "Listen King. I know. Let's just go round up some young virgins for you. That'll get your mind off of your wife, the queen, who you banished."

Now in case you've ever read Esther or seen a play of Esther and you kind of have this image that Esther's about to go into this beauty pageant. This is no beauty pageant. We're not going into a beauty pageant here. These guys are not suggesting they should send out invitations to the Cinderella Ball of 400 B.C. That's not what they're saying. They're saying, "Listen. We can go out there and we can get you some young virgins and get your mind off this problem with your wife."

Look how it's described in Esther 2:3 – ***“And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather...”*** Notice it doesn't say “to invite.” The literal word is to “gather” and probably, almost certainly, against their will. ***“...to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem...”***

Now if you're a young virgin, the last place you want to be gathered to is a harem. This is not pretty. This is not good. This is not the Miss Persia Pageant. This is really bad news for everybody except the king.

“...gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in Susa the citadel, under custody (your Bible might say “care,” but the inference of the word is control) of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women.”

What these guys are talking about is scouting the whole empire, each of the 127 provinces and taking, literally by force, young and beautiful virgins and placing them in the harem of the king. We see the ultimate goal of this little round-up in verse three and four. At the end of verse three it says, **"Let their cosmetics be given them."** (ESV) This means their beauty treatments. “Beautify them.”

Esther 2:4 **“And let the young woman who pleases (the inference is “who most pleases” or “pleases by comparison”) the king be queen instead of Vashti.”** I don't mean to be redundant; I just mean to be teaching. This is not Match.com. They're not saying, “Why don't you put up a little program on ChristianSingles.net and see if you can find yourself a girl?”

This is about men going out and looking for innocent virgins and saying, “you are coming with us. We're going to put you in this room and we're going to get you all detailed up and then you're going to spend a night with the king.” There were no invitations. It was demanded.

More bad, right? That's worse than the drunken rave we saw last week from this character. It's bad enough that he asked Vashti, the queen, to parade herself so he and his drunken friends could lust after her. Now he's going to take by force young and beautiful virgins and put them in a harem. Hedonistic, worldly behavior by a king we're kind of getting to know. He's an idiot.

So we're not surprised at the end of verse four when it says, **"This pleased the king."** No surprise there. “Hey king how about if we bring you a bunch of young virgins and you do whatever you want with them?” The NLT says, **“This advice was very appealing to the king.”**

Are you disgusted? That was my goal. This is disgusting. We can't pretty-up the Bible. We can't say, “Oh, yeah. This is like a beauty pageant.” This is no beauty pageant. “Oh, yeah. Here, daughter, go be in the harem of the king so you can fulfill his sensual pleasure.” This is disgusting. It's pagan. It's worldly. It's demeaning. It's disgusting behavior from a king that is so far from God that God has got to reach out for him.

Can't you imagine parents all over the empire? They're like, “We've got to hide you. We got to put you in the basement or something. How about marrying that kid next door? Let's just get you married real quick because the king's scouts are coming. At least I've got to make you really ugly. We're going to dress you down. You've got to be ugly by the time these guys get here.” I don't want my daughter in this situation. Honestly, the best thing we can compare this to is the sex slave trafficking. This is really bad stuff.

Finally, in the midst of this we get our first hint of good news. More bad, more providence. The scouts are out there rounding up by force the next Persian Playboy Mansion attendants, but in verse 5 we meet the first of our heroes (our hero and then our heroine).

Right here is the beginning of God's proof to us that even in the midst of this disgusting, hedonistic... (a lot like the sex trade in our culture) Right in the middle of it, God is still at work. God still has a plan. God still has a person. He has a servant. Look at him in verse five.

Esther 2:5-6 *"Now there was a Jew in Susa the citadel whose name was Mordecai (Yay!), the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjaminite (meaning he's from the tribe of Benjamin) who had been carried away from Jerusalem among the captives carried away with Jeconiah (your Bible might say Jehoiachin; same guy) King of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away."* That's a lot of words to say that Mordecai was part of the Babylonian captivity.

Now as we add up the math, probably his ancestors were physically carried away from Jerusalem when Nebuchadnezzar finally defeated Jerusalem and God allowed his people to be taken into captivity as prisoners as a consequence of their generations of disobedience. Sin; consequence. It's one of the basic rules of God.

Their consequence for their disobedience into Babylonian captivity most probably was Mordecai's ancestors taken because Mordecai probably, though he was older, was not old enough to have physically been taken which means Mordecai was probably born in Babylon. It's the same geographical area we now call Persia because the Persian Empire took it over from the Babylonian Empire. It's the same area.

Mordecai was probably born into Babylon along with a younger cousin that he raised because her parents were killed. Ready? Enter finally our heroine, Esther. Yay! Esther 2:7 *"he (Mordecai) was bringing up (or raising) Hadassah (that's her Jewish name), that is Esther (her Persian name), the daughter of his uncle (which means she is Mordecai's cousin), for she had neither father nor mother."*

Now this is an interesting sentence that you might think, "Eww," but it fits with the plot. Look at this next sentence. *"The young woman had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at."* Normally that's not how you describe a cousin that you're raising but it's the point of the chapter. She was drop dead gorgeous. She *"had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter."*

2:8 *"So when the king's order and his edict were proclaimed, and when many young women were gathered (So there's an order, an edict. This is not an invitation. It's an edict. It's a law. It's a permanent law. You can't say no to it.) in Susa the citadel in custody of*

Hegai, Esther also was taken into the king's palace and put in custody of Hegai, who had charge of the women."

Have you ever heard that saying "Beauty is a curse"? I know you're like, "Yeah. They tell me all the time." Here beauty really is a curse. I think certainly in our culture it's probably true. Beauty is a curse. Mordecai couldn't make Esther ugly enough or get her married off quick enough. She was beautiful which means the king's scouts, as they came into her province (she would have stood out in the crowd), "Oh yeah. That one's going to the King." That's what we've got here.

So she was taken, probably against her will, and put in the custody of the king's harem. That's the bad part. I hope I made it bad because it really is bad. But God's at work. More bad, more providence.

In Esther 2:9 we see God at work. As soon as she gets put in the harem, God starts setting her path before her, starts directing her path, and setting her steps before her. Esther 2:9 Speaking of Hegai, the eunuch in charge of the harem, it says, "***And the young woman (Esther) pleased him.***" The NLT says he was very impressed with her. Obviously not a righteous (but not an inappropriate) relationship there with Hegai.

"And the young woman pleased him (he was very impressed with her) and won his favor. And he quickly provided her with her cosmetics (her beauty treatments) and her portion of food (that's her special diet), and with seven chosen young women from the king's palace (so the guy in charge immediately starts taking special care of Esther. he gives her all this stuff. These seven chosen young women are her maids), and advanced her and her young women to the best place in the harem (it would have been like little apartments in the harem area)."

As soon as Esther walks in, God gives her great favor with the people in charge. Because God is at work. Esther doesn't know it; Mordecai doesn't know it; the king doesn't know it. Nobody knows it right now except you because you've read the end of the book. But nobody else knows it.

Right now Esther is freaking out. This is not good. I have just been taken from my uncle who has raised me as a father and now I'm being put in this little box of an apartment and I'm being all spruced up for the king's pleasure. There is nothing good happening here. But God is at work.

Let me tell you why I make that such a big point. There is no place you can get that God can't work if you belong to God or will belong to God. And if you will belong to God, you already do belong to God where God exists. Talk to me later about that. If you belong to God, there's no place you can get that God's not at work. God is at work.

This is an ugly, disgusting, hedonistic, sensual thing and God is at work in it. Just like God gave Joseph favor in the Egyptian prison. Just like God gave Daniel favor in not only the lion's den, but in the king's court. He's giving Esther favor, even in a harem of virgins for a horrible king. God is at work. It doesn't mean what's happening is good. You understand that, right? What's happening is bad but God is at work.

Verse seven, again, says Esther was beautiful, but so were the other women. They were rounding up beautiful women. So, yeah, Esther was beautiful but she certainly wasn't the only beautiful woman. That means that God was at work on her behalf, influencing the decisions of other people.

Have you ever prayed that? I pray that a lot and, apparently, sometimes God says no. I'll pray, "Lord, just give me favor. Just let this one person like me, Lord." Haven't you ever done that? "Lord, just give me favor with this person. I pray that for my kids their whole lives, Lord – especially my son. Give him favor with his teachers and the principal at school, Lord."

That's what's happening here. God is giving Esther favor. Even though she's in a terrible situation, God is going before her. He's setting her path. He's directing her steps. He's influencing those around her. God is making Esther shine and Esther doesn't know it.

Now Esther still has choices to make. This is the other side. This is the "our part" part. Esther still had to make choices and you're going to see her make choices – life or death choices. However, this is another interesting thing and maybe another reason why so many people don't teach the book of Esther. Esther's choices start out a little bit weird. Her choices along with Mordecai's are like, "Ugh. I don't know if I really want to tell a bunch of Christians that."

Look how it starts in verse 10. "***Esther had not made known her people or kindred, for Mordecai had commanded her not to make it known.***" In other words, "Hey, keep that whole God of Israel thing on the down low. You don't need to be telling everybody you believe in God and stuff. Let's just keep it between ourselves."

Some of us who know the story say, "Oh, that was wisdom." No. They didn't know. They didn't know Haman. They didn't know what was going to happen in the next chapter. Mordecai is just saying, "Hey. Just don't make a big display of your faith in God."

It's like, "Really, God? Do you want me to teach this?"

Compare Esther to Daniel. When Daniel went into the King's Court, he never wavered, did he? He never wavered. He was a faithful servant of the Most High God of Israel day in and day out. He kept the dietary laws of Moses. He prayed three times a day. When they threatened him with death he said, "Whatever. I'm still going to pray." And he opened the windows so that people would know he was praying. Daniel was a hotshot.

This guy is a hero and he was a teenager. He was just the radical display of faith in the midst of a perverted world.

So we're like, "Yeah. I can teach that, God. We need to be like Daniel." What about Esther and Mordecai? They're totally hiding their faith in God. I'm like, "God, that doesn't really teach that well. It's like the exact opposite of the heroes of the Bible."

But God's positioning Esther and Mordecai to be the heroes and they're hiding even their heritage of being of the people of God. If they would have been following the Mosaic laws (the laws of Moses), if they would have been worshipping the God of Israel at any time, the people in Persia would have known. This means that Esther and Mordecai were acting like Persians. They were God's people in the world and acting like the world.

This brings up a really good question for me. I hope it does for you, too. Was it right for Mordecai and Esther to keep their heritage of being the people of God a secret in the world? Should they have been outspoken in their faith like Daniel was? But isn't God going to use them just as much as he used Daniel or any other hero of the Bible?

Let me just blow your minds right here. It is almost certain (generally most scholars agree) that Mordecai and Esther at this point are marginal believers. They are marginal worshipers of the God of Israel and God is going to use them to save his people.

He is going to put them in a place where they have to make a crisis of belief/life or death decision – at least Esther does. She has to choose God's will over her own life. And when he puts her there, no one can even tell she's a believer. When he puts her there, she looks like she's living in the world. Everybody paints Esther like this beautiful heroine, and she is. She ends up being this faithful heroine of the people of God and she saves the Jewish people, but right now when God is placing her in that position, you can't even tell she's a believer. That's a good one, isn't it?

It kind of makes us say, "Hey, God. You sure you want to do it this way? The Daniel thing? I can really teach that. Really encourage people to be strong in their faith. Even the Joseph thing, I can teach that. This guy was faithful to no end. I can teach that. But, God. Here you're using marginal believers who look just like unbelievers. They're your people, but they're so in the world that they look like they're in the world. One of them is drop dead gorgeous and you're using her body to achieve your purposes."

That's what's happening, by the way. "God, you sure you want us to paint you like this? Are you sure this casts you in the right light, God? What are those religious people going to say if they realize you're using marginal believers to accomplish your purpose? You sure you want do this, God?"

And right there is where God would say in his Creator of the Universe voice, "Who died and made you God? Is the pot all of a sudden questioning the potter? Are you questioning God?"

"Hey, God. Why would you do this?"

The problem is not why would God do it. The problem is why would you question him? That's the real problem. What if this is all going exactly how God wants it to go? What if God has a plan to accomplish his purpose that can only be achieved this way? What if there is no way in the world that you and I could ever grasp the reasons that God is using this approach in this time and place to accomplish his purpose? What if his ways are so high that we can't grasp them? What if his thoughts are so high that we can't think them? What if that's the case?

Then we say, "Okay, God. You want to use a marginal believer who is drawn into her position because of her body to save your people? Okay. You're God. I'm not." There's a great lesson right there, so take it. You're not God. I hope I'm not breaking any news to you, but you're not going to be.

He's God. He's going always be. You're never going to understand his ways. But you can understand him. You can understand who he is. His character, his nature – you can understand and you can trust. So let me just say before we move on, that does not mean you get to live like a marginal believer and still think God's going to use you. Esther does end up making a life or death decision for God's people. She does end up laying her life down for God, but when God starts his work in her life, she's a marginal believer.

What I'm trying to tell you is that if you're a marginal believer right now, God is at work in your life because God sees where you're going. God's not saying, "Okay, let me get the most religious person I can see who has done the most and earned the most and deserves the most."

God's like, "Excuse me. Pardon me. Excuse me. Pardon me. I'm looking for the guy or woman who knows where they're at. Whose face is in the dirt? Who knows that they're not worthy? Who knows that they have nothing to offer God?"

That's where Esther's at and that's why God is using her. Don't think for a minute, "Well, I'm not that big of a Christian so God's probably not using me." Not true. Too many times to remember, I have gone back to when I was five years old and recounted God's hand in my life. And I didn't get saved until I was 19, and I was still an idiot up to week before last. And God was still at work. He is still at work for something that I can't see – something that is ahead of me that I don't know. It's the same in your life. Look for it.

So God's placing these two heroes in the Persian kingdom where the people can't even tell they're Jews. But verse 11 says one thing for sure. They respect and have concern for each other.

Esther 2:11 ***“And every day Mordecai walked in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and what was happening to her.”*** So Mordecai's out there kicking rocks. Do you ever do that? Walking around kicking rocks. "Hey, what are you doing?"

"Oh, nothing. You heard anything about Esther?"

He's just trying to find out something about Esther. Why? Because he's freaked out because his little cousin that he's raised as a father (his adopted daughter) has been taken as a virgin to be spruced up for the king's pleasure. He's totally worried about her. No father would want their daughter in this situation. Even though there are some worldly benefits the first year.

I thought as I read that this it's a lot like our sex slavery industry. Do you know we have a sex slavery industry in this country? Don't think we don't. You talk to someone if you get a chance. You go to XXXChurch.com and you can talk to someone who has been in the sex industry. They will tell you they were imprisoned. And the women were generally lured, initially, by some worldly benefit and then imprisoned in that sex industry. Not that big of a difference here.

Esther 2:12 ***“Now when the turn came for each young woman to go in to King Ahasuerus, after being twelve months under the regulations for the women, since this was the regular period of their beautifying, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women –”***

Again, the NLT just tells it like it is. I'm not making this stuff up. The NLT says, ***“Before each young woman was taken to the king's bed, she was given the prescribed twelve months of beauty treatments.”***

So for twelve months these young girls were made over. Six months of oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments. Not to mention the special diet and the maids that we just talked about – all of this care. And they probably thought it was for them, and it wasn't. They actually had nothing to do with it. It was 100 % for the king's pleasure. This is where you're going to be disgusted. This is like detailing a car before a potential owner test drove it. That's what this was. That's all it was. This is disgusting.

What I want you to see is that God is not dethroned. He's not derailed. He does not even miss a beat or get off track for a second. God is at work and he will bring his plan and his purpose to pass. No matter how horrible or sinful or disgusting the world gets, God is still on the throne and his purpose still will win in the end.

Esther 2:13 ***“When the young woman went in to the king in this way, she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the harem to the king's palace.”*** So the only choice they get is, “What do you want to wear? What jewelry do you want? What do you think will help you get the King's vote?” It just must have been a horrific moment. One chance they get with the king. That's it. And then they're moved to the harem of the concubines.

Esther 2:14 ***“In the evening she would go in, and in the morning she would return to the second harem in custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, who was in charge of the concubines. She would not go in to the king again, unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name*** (which probably happened very seldom).”

So you get all dolled up for a year. You spend one night with an idiot king and then you become his. He owns you. He puts you over there in the stable and you never leave. You can never leave the harem of the concubines. You can never get married until that pinhead dies, which they all do ultimately. Until then, you just go sit over there in case he wants you again.

Remember the title is "More Bad, More Providence." I don't want you to say, “Yeah, but that's not as bad as my life.” Trust me. This is bad and God is still bringing good.

Verse 15, the revolving door of the king's search finally gets to Esther and now you're going to go, “Oh, no. Not Esther.” I do, too. I go, "God, isn't there some other way?" I don't know. I can't make sense of it.

Esther 2:15 ***“When the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his own daughter, to go in to the king, she asked for nothing except what Hegai the king's eunuch, who had charge of the women, advised. (look at this last sentence) Now Esther was winning favor in the eyes of all who saw her.”***

Super bad situation and right in the middle of it, Esther is winning favor in the eyes of all who saw her. What does it mean? It means God is at work in the midst of a really terrible situation. God is at work. His hand is upon Esther and he is setting her path before her. Though she didn't outwardly worship the God of Israel, she definitely had wisdom. She had wisdom to know when to take someone else's advice. If you haven't learned that yet, that's a great bit of wisdom.

She took advice from her Uncle Mordecai about keeping her faith quiet, her heritage quiet. Now she takes the faith of the head eunuch when she goes into the king and probably went in with nothing to sell herself. The storm right here is at the peak and God is at work. In the midst of the king's lust and the king's power, Esther is walking through the storm with God surrounding her. I know it doesn't sound right but it's Esther's make or break night with the king.

Esther 2:16 ***“And when Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign (Verse 17) the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.”***

That's it. One night with the king and you are now the Queen of Persia. You have gone from who knows where, as a Jewish immigrant in Persia living with your uncle, to a horrible, horrible situation in a harem to one night with the king. And when you come out the next morning, you've got the crown on your head. I know there are some questions in there that you go, "Really, God? Couldn't you have done it another way?" And yeah, he could have. But God used this king's dysfunction to bring about his plan and his purpose.

Doesn't that catch you wrong? God used this king's dysfunction – his lust, his power, his ego, his quick pendulum-type decisions swinging from one side to another. God used this king's dysfunction to set up his plan and his purpose.

I don't know if I should clap or what because that's not very religious of him. Like I said, it's been hard finding good scholars on this book because they all just gloss over this stuff because we can't answer that question.

But we know this, one night with the king and Esther is now queen. It is Queen Esther and that sets up the salvation of God's people. In God's perfect timing (just as he would have it) on the perfect night, Esther walks in to the royal room and suddenly the camera goes to soft focus. Have you ever seen that in the movies? “What happened there? How come she's all soft focus and why is that halo light around her?” you notice they never do that to men.

So she walks in and he sees her in soft focus and the halo light goes on behind her and immediately this dirt bag falls in love with a new queen because God is at work. And so he falls in love and chooses the exact queen that God needs him to choose.

Proverbs 21:1, write it in your margin. ***“The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord.”*** Amen? Doesn't that make you feel good about your boss? You can say that about your boss. "Lord, you can change his heart. Just change his heart. His heart is like a stream of water in your hand.”

It is. God is going to use Esther to change the heart of this king. He's putty. From now on, it's over. God's got full control of this guy through Esther. Does Esther have a role? Yes. She has to maintain her role and she will. She will. She'll make the right choices at the right time and she'll be willing to lay her life down for God's people. But for now, time for another huge party. That's this guy Ahasuerus. He's like, "Okay, I got a queen. Let's throw another rip-roaring party."

Esther 2:18 ***"Then the king gave a great feast for all his officials and servants; (Didn't we just finish one of those? It might have been before the invasion of Greece.) it was Esther's feast. he also granted a remission of taxes (that's important) to the provinces and gave gifts with royal generosity."***

The king's all about public approval ratings. Have you ever heard of those? This guy's all about approval ratings so he throws a party. He introduces Esther. Esther comes with a party; she comes with lower taxes. Remission of taxes. And she comes with gifts. What does that make all the people do? Love Esther, right? Do you think that's changed in government? "I know. Let's give them a bunch of stuff so that they'll vote for me at the next election." Have you ever heard of that approach? That's what it's about. So the people love Esther because she comes with all the good stuff. So everything's good. It's all good, but not so much at the city gate.

Verse 19 ***"Now when the virgins were gathered together the second time (which I could explain that but for time's sake, it's not that important), Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate."***

That's the important thing. It seems that Mordecai now has been given a position in the royal palace to sit at the king's gate – either as a judge or an attorney, a counselor. He's given the position there probably at Esther's request to the king. But look at verse 20. Still nobody knows they're Jews.

Verse 20 ***"Esther had not made known her kindred or her people, as Mordecai had commanded her, for Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him."***

Verse 21 ***"In those days, as Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, (the word means the door to his private rooms, his bedrooms in essence; the two guys who guarded that door) became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasueru (it really means to assassinate the king)."***

These guys may have been supporters of Vashti. They may have known that Esther was an outsider and that wasn't really that kosher to marry an outsider. Anyway, these two hit men get mad. They want to assassinate the king.

Do you know how they set you up in a movie? You see something up front in the movie and you go, "What's that about?" Then three quarters of the way through the movie it comes back up and you go, "Oh. That's why the dog bit him in the first five minutes."

Verse 22 ***"And this came to the knowledge of Mordecai, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told the king in the name of Mordecai."*** So she said, "Listen. Mordecai who sits at your gate gave me this information," and it saves the king life.

Verse 23 ***“When the affair was investigated and found to be so, the men were both hanged on the gallows*** (That's kind of the politically correct translation. Literally it means “impaled on poles,” which is much more likely. Both were impaled on poles.) ***And it was recorded in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.”***

You think, “What's that about?” It's about a lot. Mordecai hears this assassination plot. He tells Esther. Esther tells the king. They impale these two guys on a pole and write about it in a book. That's really important. Remember that. We're coming back to it. Notice that in verse 23, Mordecai gets no appreciation from the king. No thanks. No recognition. If you've read the book, you know that's important also. We'll see it.

Have we seen more bad today? I didn't want to do it. I wanted to gloss over it and make it look like a beauty pageant like all the other (weak) esteemed men of God. This is bad. What has happened here is bad. But is God at work? God is at work. If you've ever had something bad happen and you think there's no way God was at work there, you are wrong. God was at work. If you belonged to him, he was at work. He is at work and he will be at work. He will never leave you nor forsake you. He will finish the good work that he has begun in you. It is done. Tetelestai. It is finished where God exists. Your story is finished where God exists and you win.

So a king's bruised ego gets him on a hunt for a new queen. The hunt is terrible, worldly, ungodly. God is still at work. In the end, God is plan and God's purpose will prevail. Suddenly a Jewish girl out of nowhere is the Queen of the Persian Empire and God is going to use her to save the people. Soon she'll be in a crisis of belief and it's the same for you and me.

Let me ask you some questions. These are the questions that my prayer is you will answer before we're done with the book of Esther. Is it only in the Bible that God is sovereign? Is it only in the Bible that God is involved in people's lives? Can we say, “Oh, yeah. But that was just in the Bible.” No. We can't.

Is it only in the Bible that God is not only at work, but that God orchestrates people's circumstances so that they're brought to a place of a crisis of belief where they have to choose God's will or their will? Is that only for the Bible? Is it relegated for the Bible? No.

God is sovereign. He is at work and he is orchestrating circumstances in your life to put you in a crisis of belief where you have to choose God's will or your will. Be ready for it because that's the point of Esther.

Is this verse true? Hebrews 13:8, ***“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”*** Say yes. God is just as involved in your life as he was in Esther's and Mordecai's. God is orchestrating events in your life just as he was then. God is going to

bring you to a crisis of belief where you have to choose his will or your will, just like in the book of Esther. Be ready. Watch for it. Be ready.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much. Lord, there's so much bad in this chapter. God, there's stuff we don't want to talk about, Lord. There's stuff that good, religious people shouldn't be discussing. But God, you're at work in the terrible places, God. And God, there's no place that we've ever been or are now or will ever be that you're not at work. We can't get outside of where you work, Lord. God, help us to see you. Give us the faith to see, the eyes to see, Lord.

Help us to walk by faith and not by sight. God, may we see you at work in our lives. And may we join you where you're working. And Lord, when you bring us to that crisis of belief, God give us the gift of faith to step up and to be your hero.

Help us to choose you. To be part of your eternal plan and your eternal purpose. And we thank you, Lord, that you have already won. That our victory is in you, Jesus. That the work is finished. And that, Lord, we are privileged to be part of your army of your servants. In Jesus' name, amen.