



SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE  
FOR ALL SAINTS SMALL GROUPS

“Humorous or Horrible” | Rev. Tim Frickenschmidt | June 7, 2020

**From Esther 1 & 2**

Now in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces,<sup>2</sup> in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Susa, the citadel,<sup>3</sup> in the third year of his reign he gave a feast for all his officials and servants. The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces were before him,<sup>4</sup> while he showed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor and pomp of his greatness for many days, 180 days.<sup>5</sup> And when these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in Susa the citadel, both great and small, a feast lasting for seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace....

<sup>8</sup> And drinking was according to this edict: “There is no compulsion.” For the king had given orders to all the staff of his palace to do as each man desired. On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded ... the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus,<sup>11</sup> to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at.<sup>12</sup> But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. At this the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him.

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.<sup>2</sup> Then the king's young men who attended him said, “Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king.<sup>3</sup> And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in Susa the citadel, under custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women. Let their cosmetics be given them.<sup>4</sup> And let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti.” This pleased the king, and he did so.<sup>5</sup> Now there was a Jew in Susa the citadel whose name was Mordecai...<sup>6</sup> who had been carried away from Jerusalem among the captives carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away.<sup>7</sup> He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, the daughter of his uncle, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman

Tim prefaced his message with an account of his conversation with a pastor of a prominent, largely black church with a history of leadership in racial equality issues. Part of the discussion focused on what it is like to live as a minority in our nation, and the conversation led to insights into the problems of any minority, even those of a religious minority. In the time of Esther, the Jewish nation was a repressed minority under the reign of Ahasuerus, a powerful and secular king. The Book of Esther gives a satirical and comic, yet tragic look at the times.

**The World's Wisdom**

In Chapter 1, Ahasuerus puts his pomp and wealth on parade for six months, and in chapter 2, Esther is on parade for a year, a tragic but ridiculous picture of what a Godless world considers of highest importance—wealth and power for a man and beauty and sexuality for a woman. The author of the book clearly intends the reader to catch this caricature and find it both humorous and revolting. The king's dictum that the only rule shall be that no one shall be under compulsion compared to his demand that his queen, Vashti, should display herself to an orgy of drunken courtiers at the king's whim illustrates the false freedom of the situation. When she refuses, an equally specious chain of reasoning declares that she is a threat to all marriages in the kingdom, and she is divorced, to be replaced by the winner of a huge beauty pageant. The entire passage omits any mention of God or godliness, depicting only an entirely worldly nation, similar to the fictional nation of *The Hunger Games*. Both systems dismiss anyone who won't play the game and reward those who do it best.

**Esther's Compliance**

Esther takes six steps of compliance to win the beauty competition: she goes to the pageant and participates; she pleases Hegai; she stays silent about her Jewish background; she submits to the year-long beauty regimen; she asks Hegai's advice about how to please the king; and she follows his advice. She not only pleases the king, she pleases everyone she meets and wins. A liberal feminist reading the passage would despise Esther for selling out to false values, and a conservative theologian would condemn her for selling out to the pagan king who had trampled on and obliterated her nation, trading sleeping with the enemy for security and position in the pagan world. Yet who in our times is not in some part an Esther? Do we sell out to jobs, to appearances, to values different from God's, to publicly fashionable behavior? We are all Esther in some way or another. How does God deal with people like us?

**God's Ways**

*Hidden*

There are no coincidences—all elements line up to create a miraculous salvation for Esther's people. There are no obvious miracles along the way, but the end of the story leads to a spectacular rescue. Don't mistake God as being absent. He is present even when we don't see Him working. God works most often through the mundane and ordinary, bringing extraordinary results out of a chain of small coincidences.

*Persistent*

God stays with Esther, changing her throughout the book. By the end she no longer seeks to please man, but rather eventually puts her life on the line to please God. “If I perish, I perish.” At the start she looks like Salome—using her body to please man in exchange for a horrible favor. At the end of the book, she looks more like John the Baptist, sacrificing herself to serve God's purposes. No matter where we have been or what we have done, God pursues us, asking us to serve Him. He transforms us to His servants through His grace.

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. <sup>8</sup> So when the king's order and his edict were proclaimed, and when many young women were gathered 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. <sup>9</sup> And the young woman pleased him and won his favor. And he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and her portion of food, and with seven chosen young women from the king's palace, and advanced her and her young women to the best place in the harem. <sup>10</sup> Esther had not made known her people or kindred, for Mordecai had commanded her not to make it known... <sup>15</sup> When the turn came for Esther... to go in to the king, she asked for nothing except what Hegai the king's eunuch, who had charge of the women, advised. Now Esther was winning favor in the eyes of all who saw her. <sup>16</sup> And when Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace... <sup>17</sup> 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.

Romans 12:1-2

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Matthew 14:1-11

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus, <sup>2</sup> and he said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him." <sup>3</sup> For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, <sup>4</sup> because John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." <sup>5</sup> And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet. <sup>6</sup> But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and pleased Herod, <sup>7</sup> so that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. <sup>8</sup> Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter." <sup>9</sup> And the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he commanded it to be given. <sup>10</sup> He sent and had John beheaded in the prison, <sup>11</sup> and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother.

#### Discussion

Have you suppressed the voice of God in a particular area of your life, selling out to values or behaviors that do not honor God? Pray that God would reveal anything in your life that would not please Him and would stand in the way of your service to Him.

Consider the difficulties of holding out against a culture that rewards only ungodly values and behaviors. Have you felt pressure to conform to the world's values or behaviors? Discuss them with another believer and commit them to prayer.

How do we trust God for the future when we only see the present? What ways can you remind yourself that God is at work at all times? Watch for those little God-given coincidences.