

Providence over Life's Details - Esther 2:1-18
Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading

Notes from the Sermon

In chapter 2 of Esther we have the story of the “beauty contest”. Or at least that is what it has been called. I have seen this story spun in a Disney Princess sort of story where an empty king holds the “Miss Persia” contest hoping to find love. Meanwhile the sweet innocent Esther gets caught up in the moment and ends up winning the contest. Then she has a chance to go on a date with the king where she captures his heart, they fall in love, get married, and live happily ever after. If only chapter 2 were that simple.

In reality, we are introduced to Mordecai and Esther in a chapter that is full of details and conflict that is very tough to interpret. The story begins with King Ahasuerus remembering Queen Vashti. Right away we are reminded that this is a narcissistic man in power who believes the whole world exists for his pleasure. Take a look at verse 1 and notice what is missing. He blames Vashti, but no mention of the word “I”, as he deflects any blame for the horrible response of banishing his wife. But it gets worse, as his young men tell the king he should start the Bachelor, Persia, capturing beautiful virgin women from all over the Persian Empire and bringing them in Susa. It is here that we need to start being honest about this chapter (and you may want to edit for younger ears). Basically, this is the sex slave trade and these women are nothing more than play things for the king, as each gets her one night with the king in his bedroom. There is no dinner at an exclusive restaurant, no movie or Broadway play, no walk on the beach. The king uses these women for his pleasure and then banishes them to his harem of concubines. If they did not pleasure him they are doomed to live the rest of their lives in this house full of women who have the same story. No prospect for marriage, for kids, for anything purposeful. Just waiting for another chance to possibly please the king. It is awful, and is a reminder that this is the true nature of humanity. Around the world the sex slave trade robs girls of their innocence and ruins their lives. But lest we think we are better, let us remind ourselves that the porn industry in our country makes more than ABC, NBC, and CBS, the three major broadcasting networks combined. Sinful culture will always marginalize and use people, will ruin women to gratify the desires of men, and will see power trample the masses.

Yet dropped into the story are a Jew and his niece. They are among God’s chosen people, yet they live as Exiles in a far-away country, and their clan has lived here for multiple generations. Both of their names actually come from names of Persian gods, which is designed to be an indicator that they are not really practicing the faith of the True God, at least here as the story begins. And we know that neither they or their parents or grandparents obeyed the call to return to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile, choosing to remain among the scattered Jews in the Diaspora. Esther’s parents, of whom her dad is Mordecai’s uncle, passed away sometime early in her life. So Esther grew up as an orphan, yet, her cousin raised her as his own child and loves her deeply. The story, then, begins with two ordinary, unknown Jews serving this evil empire, just going about their lives. That is until Esther is among those who are swept up in the evil plan of the king to use these women for his pleasure and possibly find a queen.

The story also takes on a more difficult struggle as we really see what is going on. Esther finds favor with the eunuch who is the keeper of the virgin harem, and he gives extra attention to her care and spa treatment, and also pushes her to the front of the line. But this is no guarantee, Esther has to have her night. We know this is not God’s will for her, in terms of God’s design for sexuality. And she and Mordecai choose not to reveal their national and religious heritage, possibly from fear that this would end up in a worse tragedy for Esther if the king knew she was Jew. Nevertheless, the truth is that she had her night with the king, which is a violation of God’s Law. Yet we can also see that choosing not to do

this could have cost her life. Furthermore, the story does not stop to make the moral judgment on her in this moment, it is not the point of the text.

What we do have is a snapshot of the events and circumstances of her life that seemed random and meaningless. Yet, God in His sovereign providence ordered the events of her life, including the horror of the king's sexual conquest and her participation in it to accomplish her coronation as queen. It is here that we need to be reminded of a basic truth of Biblical interpretation, especially when we are reading narratives, the great stories we find in the Bible. ***Just because the Bible reports it, does not mean that God supports it.*** Read that again. These stories are filled with moments where individuals or the sum of God's people get caught up in things that are not God's best, or worse, are outright sin. Yet, through these stories God is still orchestrating the events of the lives of His people for His glory, their good, and to accomplish His eternal purpose. To live with faith in God is to live remembering this. We have guilt and pain from our past, some self-caused and other brought on by others. But on this day we can know that God loves us, knows our name, is for us, and is using all of the details of our seemingly ordinary lives to accomplish His eternal plan. Esther became queen, but as the story of chapter 2 begins there was no way she could have known that these events would end in this way. And she had no idea why this had happened at the moment. Yet, God did, and this is why this story is important and filled with hope for us.

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Luke 7	Luke 8	Luke 9	Luke 10	Luke 11	Luke 12	Luke 13

Reading from this past week: Esther 2:1-18

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Esther 2:1-19-3:15

Family Worship

Song - *Sovereign over Us*

https://youtu.be/FFO_87VBwNc

Gospel Project

Story: God Created the World

Big Picture Question: Why Did God create everything?

Answer: God created everything for His glory and our good.

Scripture: Genesis 1

New City Catechism

Question #36: What do we believe about the Holy Spirit?

Answer: That he is God, coeternal with the Father and the Son.

Verse: John 14:16-17

Scripture

Esther 2:1-18

Prayer

*Pray that God would help you trust the details of your life to His sovereign purpose.

*During the week of Labor Day, pray for the place of your work and for the people who work with you.