

Place: Lurgan Baptist 23:1:2011

## FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

**Reading: Esther 2:1-23**

### 2. CHOOSING A QUEEN

Have you heard this statement ? “ *It a man’s world.*” In our family when a male has the cold or flu, they now say, “ *He’s got a man’s cold.*” The intention of course is to belittle us men. But this is not a man’s world. For when a man is born they say, “ *How is the mother ?*” When he is married they say, “ *Isn’t she a lovely bride ?*” When he dies they say, “ *how much did he leave her ?*” In the city of Boston a young man went into the book store and asked the clerk, “ *Have you a book called Man, the Master of Women ?*” The pretty salesgirl merely tossed her head and said, “ *You’ll have to look for that in the Fiction Department.*” In many ways, there is not a more powerful creature on earth than a woman. One man has noted,

**Women have more strength in their looks than we have in our laws, and more power by their tears, than we have by our arguments.**

There is truth in the age old maxim, “ *the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.*” That hand is the strong yet tender one of the mother, who not only bears the children but rears them as well. Abraham Lincoln said, “ *No man is poor who has had a godly mother.*” But as if raising a

household of children isn’t enough of a job, the married woman has at least one other career, that of a wife. If you want to know the wife you ought to be take an hour or two and read the book of Proverbs. Proverbs says,

“ *A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband,*” ( 12:4 )

“ *Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord.*” ( 18:22 )

“ *House and riches are the inheritance of fathers, and a prudent wife is from the Lord.*” ( 19:14 ) But the most detailed description of the ideal wife is found in ( Prov Ch 31 )

*History is full of remarkable women.* Courageous women, women, full of grace and truth. Within the pages of biblical history too, are chapters of feminine courage and character. Jochebed the mother of Moses. Hannah, the mother of Samuel. Rahab who hid the spies, Deborah who led the nation of Israel. There are so many others, Ruth, Elizabeth, Mary the mother of our Lord. Eunice and Lois, Priscilla, Lydia, Phoebe. All the way through Scripture these women keep emerging, most of them out of obscurity. *But each played a major part in God’s plan and left her mark on the world.* One of these, of course is the heroine of our story, Esther. Esther is living in obscurity with her cousin Mordecai in the land of Persia, in the city of Shushan. She does not have the foggiest idea of anything that is going on. She knows nothing of the events that are taking place in the royal palace. But behind the scenes God is at work. “ *God is preparing His heroes,*” said A.B. Simpson “ *And when the opportunity comes, He can fit them into their places in a moment, and the world*

*will wonder where they came from.*” Dr. Simpson might have added that God also prepares His heroines, for certainly Esther was divinely prepared for her role as the new Queen. You see, the Lord is never surprised by circumstances or at a loss for prepared servants. He had Joseph ready in Egypt ( Ps 105:17 ) Ezekiel and Daniel in Babylon and now Esther in Shushan. There are three words that sum up this chapter, **(1) Direction (2) Selection (3) Protection.** Notice,

### **(1) THE DIRECTION OF A THRONE**

Do you see how the Chapter begins ? “ *After these things,* ” ( 2:1 ) That does not precisely nail down the time. But nearly four years have passed ( 1:3, 2:16 ) since Vashti was deposed. King Ahasuerus had returned from war defeated, lonely and in need of affection, so his counselors advised him, “ *Let’s find every possible available beautiful young woman in the Persian Kingdom, throughout all the provinces and lets bring them here and you take your pick.* ” This was the direction, the guidance from the throne. Now this guidance was,

#### **(a) SYMPATHETIC:**

To the Kings needs. During much of the time between the deposing of Vashti and the deciding on a plan to replace her, King Ahasuerus was gone from the country fighting Greece. Ahasuerus had been warned not to war against Greece, but he ignored the warning and fought Greece anyway and experienced a disastrous defeat. It was upon his return home from his defeat by Greece that the effort

was then made to find a new queen. *Ahasuerus lost both a war and a wife because of foolish behavior.* Herodotus tells us that when he was marching towards Greece he said, “ *In this short life there is no man either among these or others so happy that he should not often and more than once be in such a position as to prefer death to life.* ” I mean here is a man whose foreign policy and personal life is in shreds. *Can you see him coming from war defeated, disillusioned, disappointed ?* He opens the door of his palace quarters. He walks in and throws down his sword. He falls into an easy chair, Its mighty quiet around here. He looks around and someone is missing. He remembers Vashti his Queen. She’s not there anymore. Now this king could have had a woman. In fact, he could have had any woman. That was no problem. He had harems full of women. He had concubines everywhere. *But it was not a woman that he needed, he needed a wife.* You know there is a difference between sex and love don’t you ? Sex is an event but love is a relationship.

My .... sex has no meaning outside the bonds of marriage. God has placed this beautiful gift within the confines of marriage. That’s why the Bible says, “ *Marriage is honourable in all and the bed undefiled.* ” ( Heb 13:4 ) ***Now let me state that there is nothing wrong with sex in and of itself.*** Do you recall that God pronounced all His creation “ *very good,* ” and this gift is a lovely expression of the mutual love between husband and wife. You see, this gift is to be reserved for the permanent, trusting, secure, relationship of marriage. ( 1 Cor 6:11-7:5 ) Young folk, the Lord forbids sex before marriage, ( 1 Cor 6:13 ) older folk the Lord forbids sex

outside of marriage ( Ex 20:14 ) People today speak of safe sex. ***The only safe sex is within the confines of the marriage bond.*** Indeed the Bible says, “ *Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.* ” ( Heb 13:5 ) David is an example of that. Because of his seduction of Bathsheba David lost his power, and from that day on he had trouble in his family and upheavals in his kingdom. This king does not need another woman. He’s got plenty of those. He needs a wife. But there is no welcome home. No kiss, no favourite meal, no sharing. So his advisors say, “ *Let’s call a beauty contest, plain and simple.* ” (a)

**(b) SELFISH:**

Look if you will at ( 2:11 ) “ *When the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti . . . Then said the king’s servants that ministered unto him, Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king* ” That which especially prompted the king’s servants to propose a plan for a new queen was the concern of the king’s servants for their own situation. *Was the King beginning to change his mind about Vashti ? Was he thinking of restoring her to Queen ?* If that happened the officers of his court had every reason to be alarmed. Vashti’s disgrace had been their doing, and her return to power would likely be followed by their own dismissal, or even execution. No wonder, they suggested a beauty contest. Selfish motivation prompted their advice. Do we not need to be careful about selfishness in sales ? Often those who advise you, do not have your good in mind but only their own personal gain. Many salesmen, fall into this category. Do we not need to be careful about selfishness in

service ? Do you recall what Paul says about Timothy ? “ *I have no man likeminded who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.* ” ( Phil 2:20-21 ) Oh, as Paul looked around Rome he found the general run of believers to be of that self-seeking spirit, that degrades the Lord Jesus to second place. Here are saints to be taught, no-one cares. Here are babes to be nurtured, no-one cares. Here are sinners to be saved, no-one cares. Here are sick ones to be visited, no-one cares. Or like Timothy do you have a servants attitude ? (a) (b)

**(c) SENSUAL:**

Look if you will at ( 2:2 ) In the Hebrew it is “ *young virgins fair to look on.* ” ( Rawlinson ) The emphasis is on outward looks. These ungodly advisers of the king were not thinking about true love but merely about looks. A pretty face and good figure were the primary qualifications. My .... “ *The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes.* ” ( 1 Jn 2:16 ) guided the advice here. The emphasis here is upon countenance not character. It is upon outward not inward beauty. Josephus, the Jewish historian tells us there were as many as 400 women were involved in this remarkable competition. They would have a year in which to enhance their beauty by pampering their bodies, and applying the art of costume and cosmetics. Each of them would spend a night with the king and then he would make his choice. This certainly appealed to the king’s sensual appetite. My ..... is this not the way the world thinks ? Could it be that this is the way we think ? In choosing a life’s partner are you more

concerned about the physical than the spiritual? *Are you more interested in countenance than character? Are you more concerned with her face than with her faith?* The Bible says “*That Esther was brought,*” ( 2:8 ) I wonder did she go reluctantly? I mean, why would she want to spend a year in a harem, culminating in a night with a heathen king, with the possibility of intermarriage outside her race and contrary to the Law of Moses? ( Ex 20:14 Deut 7:1-4 Neh 10:30 ) Yet God permitted it. (1)

## (2) THE SELECTION OF A QUEEN

For here there is brought before us a process that results in the selection of a queen. Did you notice that some new characters appear on the stage now ? Notice for example,

### (a) **ESTHER’S BACKGROUND: Mordecai:**

His name means “*little man,*” or “*worshipper of Mars.*” His family was taken into captivity in 597 B.C. And Mordecai was now living in Shushan, a capital of a powerful Gentile nation, instead of living in Palestine the home of the Jews. He had a cousin named Esther and her Mum and Dad were dead so he took her into his own home and reared her as his own daughter. *What a wonderful thing to do.* I think of those who have taken children into their own homes and adopted those children. My .... Esther was not born with a silver spoon in her mouth, yet she takes her places among the great women of the Bible. My .... are you discouraged because of your background ? Perhaps your parents are divorced, and your relatives are more interested in material gain than in

spiritual standing. They would rather gain the whole world and risk their souls. I mean, what chance have you to live for God, keep your mind and life pure ? Perhaps you’re saying, “*If only.*” “*If only my nose were a different shape. If only my Dad drove a Mercedes. If only my family were normal.*” Can you ever find in this book were Esther said, “*If only?*” My .... I don’t care what your background is, how dark your circumstances, how thin your wallet, how lacking your opportunities for earthly promotion. God says, “*them that honour me I will honour.*” ( 1 Sam 2:30 ) (a)

### (b) **ESTHER’S BEAUTY: Esther:**

Like Daniel, Esther had two names. The one Hebrew, the other not. The Hebrew name Hadassah means “*myrtle,*” the root of that means “*fragrance.*” Right now in Israel there is a hospital called the Hadassah Hospital named after Esther. There are some who believe that because the flower of the myrtle tree looks like a star, this is how you have the connection between the two. Here is Hadassah, fragrant. Esther, star, for she’s going to be God’s star. And what a beauty she was. The Bible says she “*was fair and beautiful,*” ( 2:7 ) The Hebrew words translated “*fair and beautiful,*” in our text mean she had a pretty face and figure. Josephus maintained that “*she surpassed all women in beauty,*” in the entire habitable world. My .... Satan is always using beautiful bodies to promote his work. How great has been the evil, the moral destruction, and the ruined lives that have come because of Satan’s use of beautiful bodies. But Satan is here outmaneuvered by God in the beautiful body business, for God uses a

beautiful body to defeat one of Satan's major plans for destroying the Jewish race. A young Methodist minister, later well known as Dr. William Sangster of Westminster, startled the Welsh town in which he ministered by holding a beauty competition. ***The condition of entry was different from what was usual, in that all the contestants had to be over seventy.*** His argument was that at seventeen you have the face that God gave you, but that at seventy you have the face that you have made for yourself. The Bible says that “ *Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain ( passing ) but a woman that feareth the Lord she shall be praised.* ” ( Prov 31:30 ) Do you realise that real genuine beauty is not something on the outside its something that God creates from the inside ?

Do you recall Peter's words ? Speaking to wives he says, “ *Whose adorning let it not that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel. But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.* ” ( 1 Pet 3:3-4 ) Now what's Peter saying ? He's telling a Christian wife not to major on minors. Now this does not mean that a wife should neglect herself. Some women think it is a mark of spirituality to look like an unmade bed. No, Christian women can dress smartly and modestly but remember external beauty is passing, internal beauty is permanent. “ *The hidden man of the heart,* ” refers to the personality of the wife who is revealing Christ in and through her life. Now Esther had both outward and inward beauty. Did you notice that in

( 2:10 ) she was a woman of self control ? She could keep a secret, she has self-control, she was not a blabbermouth. Thanks to tell all tabloids and hide nothing television shows nothing is restrained. Does it bother you to see all these blabbermouths on television ? Then you have the internet, and facebook and oftimes its just blabber, blabber, and more blabber. My .... are we marked by self-control ? Oh, there was (a) (b)

### ***(c) ESTHER'S BENEFITS: Hege:***

Look if you will at ( 2:9 ) Literally, “ *She lifted up grace before his eyes.* ” Isn't that lovely ? Though she was brought to the harem and participated in these things reluctantly, she did not display a sour attitude. *Was she beginning to sense God's hand in the situation ? Was she thinking that she was here for a purpose ?* What a difference between Esther and all the other women around her. Her inner qualities could not be ignored, in fact they captured the attention of the king's servant. Esther won his favour. The result ? Hege provided her with whatever she needed and more. Now, you men don't ever complain if your wife spends an hour or two in a beauty shop. Here's pampering and preparing that lasted for twelve solid months. Talk about being pampered. There would be Oil of Olay and Charlie Girl and whatever other girl they use. I had a friend some years ago who thought he would buy his wife some expensive perfume for Christmas. So he went into a perfume shop in Belfast and asked the girl for “ Channel no 5. ” I mean here they were put in a twelve month beauty spa. I ran across this in Charles Swindoll's book on Esther. “ There was a survey taken

which found that 15% of the women questioned tinted their hair, 22% wore false eyelashes, 38% periodically wore wigs or hairpieces, 80% wore rouge or some kind of facial cosmetics, 93% used nail polish, 98% wore some kind of eye make up, and 100% voted in favour of a resolution condemning any kind of false packaging.” Here we see that for twelve months there was a total beauty program. The Lord in His providence had brought Esther into favour with Hege the keeper of the women and he advanced her and her maids to the best place in the house of the women. ( 2:9 ) Do you remember Joseph ? Joseph found “ *favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.* ” ( Gen 39:21 ) and as a result “ *the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners that were in the prison.* ”( Gen 39:22 ) Do you remember Daniel ? “ *God had brought Daniel into favor and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.* ” ( Dan 1:9 )

We worry about knowing the right people and getting others to pull strings for us to get a job or a position or other help. But God’s people need not worry. If God wants you to get some position or opportunity, He can cause people you have never known before to suddenly befriend you and give you special favor in order to put you in positions which you had thought impossible to obtain. The Lord was working on Esther’s behalf for we see here,

#### ***(d) HER BEGINNING: Ahasuerus;***

Her role as Queen. Do you see what ( 2:17 ) says ? Do you get the picture ? Here’s a godly young Jewish lady.

Somehow in the providence of God, He allowed this pure Jewish girl to become the wife of a lustful Gentile pagan king, a worshipper of Zoroaster. *Do you realise that not only sweet things work together for our good, but severe things work together for our good ?* ( Rom 8:28 ) Bad things are never good but God uses them to work for our good. My .... there is a God in heaven who is arranging the circumstances of your life. You may be in circumstances you did not put yourself in. They are beyond your control, but there is a God in heaven who knows what He is doing. He is moving behind every circumstance of your life. He has a plan and a purpose. The Lord knows what He is doing. Trust Him. (1) (2)

### **(3) THE PROTECTION OF A KING**

Did you notice that all of the elements of a great story are in this book ? You have intensity, suspense, hostility and now intrigue. It’s all right here. Now when we come to the last paragraph of ( Ch 2 ) we have one of the pivotal points of the book. You should put the word “ *key,* ” beside this passage. For this whole book is going to turn on what you read now. Throughout the ancient Near East “ *the gate,* ” was the place where trials were conducted and justice was dispensed. ( Deut 21:19 2 Sam 19:8 Ruth 4:1 ) Mordecai was evidently in a position of honour and authority, and while in this position,

#### ***(a) A PLOT WAS REVEALED:***

For there were two men planning to assassinate the king. These two men, Bigthan and Teresh, “ *kept the door,* ”

that is they “ *guarded the entrance to the king’s sleeping compartment. This was a position of the highest possible trust.* ” ( Rawlinson ) Mordecai gets hold of the information, goes to Esther his adopted daughter. She in turn informs the king. They put the S.A.S. on the job. They discover its true and the two conspirators are hanged on a tree. It probably means “ *they were impaled on a stake.* ” The Bible says, “ *It was found out,* ” ( 2:23 ) That reminds us of an important Biblical principle that says, “ *Be sure your sin will find you out.* ” ( Num 32:23 ) Though a person carefully plots and plans his evil, sin simply cannot be forever hid. All wrong will sooner or later be discovered. (a)

**(b) A PERSON WAS REFUSED:**

Recognition. You would think that since Mordecai saved the king's life, he would be in line for a promotion to prime minister. But he is passed over, indeed Haman gets the promotion. ( 3:1 ) Just another example that deserving people often get overlooked and that righteousness often goes unrewarded. Do you remember Joseph ? He did a favor for a fellow prisoner, but when that prisoner was released from prison, he forgot about Joseph for two long years ( Gen 40:14, 23; 41:1 ) *Do you feel that you have been overlooked ?* Overlooked in the work place, among your family, in the church ? Have you committed those oversights to the Lord ? Allowing Him, to determine the timing of your reward. (a) (b)

**(c) A PARTICULAR WAS RECORDED:**

Mark it down. “ *And it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king.* ” ( 2:23 ) These chronicles were a historical diary of important government happenings. Do you recall later on when King Ahasuerus could not sleep and had some of these chronicles read to him which brought his attention to Mordecai at a most opportune time ? ( 6:1–3 ) “ *And it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king.* ” Does that not seem incidental ? What has this got to do with God ? What has it do with Esther ? What has it do with us ? Well, for the believer nothing is unimportant. The little things in life are just as important as the big things in life. Someone has said, “ ***God swings big doors on little hinges.*** ” Your whole life can change on one little thing. One little phone call. One little visit. One little text message. One little email. One little word. Your whole life can change. It certainly happened for me. The year was 1971. The place was Loughbrickland Misson Hall. The occasion was my first gospel mission. And on almost the last night of that mission a person called Derek Baxter came to hear me preach.

Leaving the meeting he said, “ *Its time you took the next step, and prepared yourself for ministry.* ” “ *The next step, the next step, the next step,* ” it haunted me. Thank God, I took “ *the next step,* ” and one little phrase changed the course of my life. What about your life ? Is the Lord moving another piece in the “ ***chess board,*** ” of your life to get you exactly where He wants you to be ?

