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Message: From Exiled Hebrew Orphan to Honored Persian Queen

Text: Esther 2:1-18

Introduction

A. It is a blessing to have a godly, loving mother. It is a definite advantage to be raised by such a mother, as well as such a father. As we continue our study of the book of Esther today, we are introduced to a young girl who lost that advantage at an early age. And yet she is not alone, for we will see the hand of her sovereign God orchestrating her life to her own advantage and to the advantage of all those for whom Christ died and rose again. (Do you share in the advantage of Christ's death and resurrection?)

B. Last week we looked in chapter 1 at the opening act of this drama. We noted that the Spirit-inspired author of the book left out any mention of God. Nor do we see any overt miracles, signs and wonders take place in this drama. Why?

1. God tells us in His Word that there were periods in biblical history when God remained silent, hidden, performing no overt miracles, no signs and wonders.

1 Samuel 3:1 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD before Eli. **And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent.**

Psalms 74:9 **We do not see our signs; There is no longer any prophet,** nor is there any among us who knows how long.

2. When God's people first received the book of Esther, they were already in such a period when there were no signs and wonders being performed. The last sign and wonder recorded in the Old Testament was several decades before the events in Esther when God closed the mouths of the lions with Daniel in their den. And God's people who first received the book of Esther were entering a period when after Malachi there would be no prophet sent by God for over 400 years until the emergence of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus.
3. Most of us here would agree that we are living in such a period of redemptive history. We see no signs and wonders. God once again appears hidden and silent to the natural eye and ear. Esther, perhaps more than any other Old Testament book, shows us that God can be trusted to be present and intervening in our lives and faithful to His covenant promises, even when He does not overtly intervene with observable miracles obvious to all.
4. We began to see last week in chapter 1 that though God's name is not once mentioned in this book, His hands are all over every event recorded in this book. The deposing of the Persian queen Vashti in chapter 1 now opens the way for the young Hebrew orphan Hadassah or Esther to be elevated as queen in her place, where God would use her to gain the ear of the Persian king and save His people from extinction, and thus, the lineage of

Abraham and David from which God's Messiah would be born.

C. Chapter 2 opens the second scene of this story, and can be divided into 3 episodes.

I. Episode 1: 2:1-4 Ahasuerus seeks a new queen.

Esther 2:1 **After these things** when the anger of King Ahasuerus had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her.² Then the king's attendants, who served him, said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king."³ "Let the king appoint overseers in all the provinces of his kingdom that they may gather every beautiful young virgin to the citadel of Susa, to the harem, into the custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let their cosmetics be given *them*."⁴ "Then let the young lady who pleases the king be queen in place of Vashti." And the matter pleased the king, and he did accordingly.

A. The deposing of Vashti in chapter 1 occurs in the 3rd year of the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes I) or 483 BC. But we see in chapter 2 the enthronement of Esther in her place happens in the king's 7th year or 479 BC. So what happened during those years that would cause Ahasuerus to all of a sudden start missing his queen and commit so many resources to building his harem?

Esther 1:1 Now it took place in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces,² in those days as King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne which *was* at the citadel in Susa,³ **in the third year of his reign** he gave a banquet for all his princes and attendants, the army *officers* of Persia and Media, the nobles and the princes of his provinces being in his presence.

Esther 2:16 So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus to his royal palace in the tenth month which is the month Tebeth, **in the seventh year of his reign**.

1. Remember that we suggested his 6 month rolling banquet for his princes, nobles, and military officers might have been to project his power and enlist support for his invasion of Greece, for which he began preparations that year and which took place in the 4th year of his reign in 480 BC. So up until 480 BC he was preoccupied with raising, equipping, supplying, and moving into place an enormous invasion force of perhaps 200,000 soldiers and 1,200 ships. (Show maps)
2. During this invasion the armies of the Greek city-states totaling only 7,000 men held off 3 Persian assaults at the high mountain pass of Thermopylae until a Greek traitor showed the Persians another route through the mountains. When the Greeks saw they were almost surrounded, 300 Spartans held off the Persian army long enough for the rest of the Greek army to escape to the island of Salamis, where the Greeks laid a trap for Ahasuersus and his navy, whose ships loaded with soldiers suffered a disastrous defeat. After executing the Phoenician admiral, the Phoenician and Egyptian navies deserted him, his general his army and returned to Susa to occupy himself with building projects

and consol himself with his harem.

3. Think about this - think about all the threads of activity over the years that led to the existence of the Greek army and navy that defeated the Persians - mothers nurturing their children, farmers and fishermen providing food, craftsmen providing weapons, tools, clothing, ships, etc., etc., etc. God was appointing and orchestrating all of this, as Christ's apostle Paul would 5 centuries later tell the Greeks in Athens ...

Acts 17:24 "The God who made the world and all things in it, ... ²⁵ ... **gives to all people life and breath and all things;** ²⁶ and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, **having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,** ²⁷ that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸ **for in Him we live and move and exist,**

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

4. And God was doing this so Esther would be raised up as queen to be used by God to deliver His people from extinction by the plotting of Haman (chapter 3). In delivering them from mortal extinction, the promised seed of Abraham, of David, from whom would come the Messiah Jesus would be preserved, and through the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus as Lord, the souls of every believer in history would be preserved for eternity in the presence of God's glory! O trust the Lord, all His people!

II. Episode 2: 2:5-11 Esther is taken to the royal harem.

- A. 2:5-7 Mordecai, from a family of Jewish exiles, becomes a father to the orphan Hadassah (myrtle), her Persian name being Esther (star).

Esther 2:5 *Now* there was at the citadel in Susa a Jew whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite, ⁶ who had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the captives who had been exiled with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had exiled. ⁷ He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had no father or mother. Now the young lady was beautiful of form and face, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.

1. Dates of the Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian invasions and exiles leading up to this date in Persia.

606 BC Daniel and his 3 friends, royalty exiled

597 BC King Jeconiah, Ezekiel, upper classes exiled

586 BC Jerusalem walls and temple destroyed, further Jews exiled.

480 BC Persian army at Salamis defeated

2. Two names are given to the orphan girl, her Hebrew (Hadassah) and Persian (Esther) names, suggesting that she will have to make a choice as to with which people she will identify - the people of God and His kingdom, or the people of the kingdom of this world.

- B. 2:8-9 Esther is taken from her home to satisfy the appetite of a cruel, selfish, pagan king. Yet she gained favor with the king's eunuch, Hegai. While she would be provided for, she became mere property of a king she had never met, and would spend a year like caged chattel, though it be a gilded cage. But God was in control to deliver His people, even as he had been in control of Joseph's abduction for the same purpose.

Esther 2:8 So it came about when the command and decree of the king were heard and many young ladies were gathered to the citadel of Susa into the custody of Hegai, that Esther was taken to the king's palace into the custody of Hegai, who was in charge of the women.⁹ Now the young lady pleased him and found favor with him. So he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and food, gave her seven choice maids from the king's palace and transferred her and her maids to the best place in the harem.

- C. 2:10-11 Mordecai's attempt to protect Esther required she not practice Jewish distinctives required by God's law (kosher foods, Sabbath keeping, etc.), unlike Daniel and his 3 friends.

Esther 2:10 Esther did not make known her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make *them* known.¹¹ Every day Mordecai walked back and forth in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and how she fared.

Daniel 1:7 Then the commander of the officials assigned *new* names to them; and to Daniel he assigned *the name* Beltshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach and to Azariah Abed-nego.⁸ **But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank;** so he sought *permission* from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself.

1. There would come a time when both Mordecai and Esther would have to make a decision to put her life at risk for the sake of identifying with and delivering the people of God. When Esther told Mordecai that entering the king's presence without his invitation in order to plead for her people could cost her 1 life, Mordecai replied ...

Esther 4:13 Then Mordecai told *them* to reply to Esther, "Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews.¹⁴ "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?"

2. You and I are faced with that decision now. Jesus said ...

Mark 8:38 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

Luke 9:24 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it."

III. Episode 3: 2:12-18 Esther is chosen as Persia's queen.

- A. 2:12-14 Made objects of pleasure for a king who is all appetite, treated more like possessions than persons

Esther 2:12 Now when the turn of each young lady came to go in to King Ahasuerus, after the end of her twelve months under the regulations for the women-- for the days of their beautification were completed as follows: six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and the cosmetics for women--¹³ the young lady would go in to the king in this way: anything that she desired was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace.¹⁴ In the evening she would go in and in the morning she would return to the second harem, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not again go in to the king unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name.

1. Ahasaurus was all appetite, squandering wealth and exploiting women for his selfish pleasure. God keep us from consuming our lives and possessions on ourselves.
2. Each young virgin would meet the king for the first time in his bedroom where he would "deflower" her, then send her to his harem as his concubine, a second class wife. That was all the wedding she would get. And if he had not further use for her, she would live her life unloved and lonely. Note in Judges 19 that the Levite took a concubine for himself was her "husband."

Judges 19:1 ... there was a certain Levite staying in the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim, **who took a concubine for himself** from Bethlehem in Judah.² But **his concubine** played the harlot against him, and she went away from him to her father's house in Bethlehem in Judah, and was there for a period of four months.³ Then **her husband** arose and went after her to speak tenderly to her in order to bring her back,

3. Perhaps some of these women were happy to compete for the title and privileges of "queen of Persia," but for all but one, they would become concubines of their polygamist, uncaring husband in a gilded cage living pointless lives in isolation. Aren't you glad Christ is no such husband to his bride, the church, who looks not on outward appearance, but on the heart?!?

Ephesians 5:29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church,³⁰ because we are members of His body.

B. 2:15-18 Esther, the exiled Hebrew orphan girl, is chosen queen of Persia.

1. 2:15-16 Esther is taken to the king.

Esther 2:15 Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai who had taken her as his daughter, came to go in to the king, she did not request anything except what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the women, advised. And Esther found favor in the eyes of all who saw her.¹⁶ So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus to his royal palace in the tenth month which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

2. 2: 17-18 Esther is chosen as queen of Persia.

Esther 2:17 The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found favor and kindness with him more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.¹⁸ Then the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his princes and his servants; he also made a holiday for the provinces and gave gifts according to the king's bounty.

a. Esther had quite a wedding reception. But this was not her doing.

1 Samuel 2:7 "The LORD makes poor and rich; He brings low, **He also exalts.**⁸ "**He raises the poor from the dust, He lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with nobles, and inherit a seat of honor;**

b. Esther had done nothing heroic yet - only what was safest. That is why we say that the main character in the book of Esther is not Esther, Mordecai, or Ahasuerus. The main actor is never mentioned by name, but His hand is controlling everything. The main character in the book of Esther is the Lord. The book of Esther is not about girl power, it is about God's power!

c. Church, acknowledge, exalt, and trust Him as the unseen Lord yet main character in our lives, Who works all things well and all things for good to those who love Him!

Philippians 1:20 according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but *that* **with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body,** whether by life or by death.

Romans 14:7 For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself;⁸ for **if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord;** therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

