

## The Choosing Of The Queen: God's Queen!

Last week we looked at Esther 1:22- 10: 'The stage is set; Words; And torn between two worlds.' We have continued to see God's Sovereign hand orchestrating all things for His plan and purpose of delivering His people. Hundreds and hundreds of men on horseback riding for months, firstly, on the king's fool's errand of seeking to force all women to submit to their husbands, even as the curse upon womankind in Genesis 3 says, "Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you." It is in that lording and domineering sense!

Then the hunt for the new queen: this has come about from the dubious advice that he has received from his inner circle. And even if he had of felt some kind of remorse (which the ancient Jewish historian Josephus does allude to), but even if he did feel some kind of remorse, he could not take back, because the king's decree could not be repealed, even by the king himself!

And applying those things to ourselves, I explained how tremendously important our words can be. Because like this foolish decision, our words at times can have a devastating impact upon those who love! At times no matter what we do or say, something has been broken and it cannot be fixed. No we cannot take them back!

I also said that we should always give thanks to God and pray for the relatively stable governments that we have, even as bad as they are at times. But we should not simply acquiesce in the abominable decisions which they sometimes make, and particularly so when they are contrary to the Word of God and His Rule in our lives!

We saw also that unlike Daniel and his three friends, who when taken into exile by Nebuchadnezzar, though given new names and new food, respectfully would not sully themselves in that way. These young men held tightly to their testimony and their Jewish ancestry and the only God whom they worshipped. But Esther, at the insistence of Mordecai, concealed who she was really was. As the commentator explained, she lived easily in both worlds! With the danger for us being, that we might seek to do the same!

And finally, amidst all of the searching from one end of the kingdom to another, there just happened to be in Susa itself, right under the king's own nose, that one who would be queen. Not chance, not coincidence, but the orchestration of Almighty God in all things!

And so we pick up the narrative in Esther 2:8-18 'The Choosing Of The Queen: God's Queen!'

Esther Chapter 2:9 "The girl pleased him and won his favour." Now friends, not to make too much of a point of this, but as I explained last time, according to the Hebrew scholar, the word for "won" here, is not passive but is active in nature. So it was not simply the beauty of her humility, righteousness and demeanour that so impressed him (that may well have been part of the equation) but no, she actually worked toward garnishing his favour! Now if I conveyed last time that this was somehow a sleazy, or improper, or sinful thing, that was not my intention. I was simply making the point that Esther made the most of her situation.

But friends, I do want us to again see in v8 that it says. "Esther was also taken." These young women had no choice in the matter. And most likely, family and friends would have considered it a tremendous honour for them to be chosen, and quite a prestigious thing for them to have been taken. But "taken," they surely were! Now whether or not any objected of course we don't know. But one thing that again is evident is that Esther made the most of her situation. "Esther pleased him

and won his favour.” The picture that we get is that she was not a passive wallflower by any means, and I say that respectfully! And although what I say next is speculation, I do not believe that is a stretch by any means. That along with his instruction to keep her nationality secret, Mordecai also gave her guidance as well as to how to proceed in the situation in which she found herself, and to win favour. We do know that she followed closely all of the advice that her cousin Mordecai, who was as a father to her, gave her. Even to the point of concealing her identity. But we cannot say that she lied, or deliberately deceived anyone. It was only that she didn't openly reveal who she was. So I guess in all reality, it was deception by omission!

V 9 “The girl pleased him and won his favour. Immediately he provided her with beauty treatments and special food.” So Esther has gone to the head of the queue, of who knows how many young women. Remember, there were 127 provinces. Surely there was at least one drop dead gorgeous woman in each province. And yet if we were to even halve that number, we are still talking of 60 odd young women. So to be at the head of the queue was no small thing, and to have won the favour of Heggai as well, was of great advantage to her. As I mentioned last time, this whole process was going to take four years before it was brought to its conclusion, and Esther chosen as queen. No, young Esther's efforts had not gone unnoticed or unrewarded. To the front of the queue, special food given her, and then her 12 months of pampering had begun. “He assigned to her seven maids selected from the king's palace and moved her and her maids into the best place in the harem.” Now why seven I can only imagine is because it was one for each day. But what it means to be in the best part of the harem? I just do not know. But suffice it to say clearly, she was given preferential treatment!

So brothers and sisters, what do we glean from all of this? What do we learn? Well, what we do see is that amazing, that mysterious, even that unfathomable way, that God's Sovereign Hand works through, (and sometimes even despite) the best efforts and perhaps misadventures of His people! We've seen it before from Paul in Philippians 2:12-13 “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”

But can we say that Esther was in effect “working out her salvation?” Well in her obedience to Mordecai's instruction I believe she was.

And I also believe that that is the application for us here, because again, as we have seen before, Paul is not saying that we are to work out how to be saved. He himself explained in Ephesians 2:8-9 That we are “saved by grace through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, so not by works so that no man may boast.”

So no, we are not working to gain our salvation, only Jesus can do that, and has done that. No what Paul means, is that we are to work hand in hand with God, (having been saved by grace through Jesus) to in effect become that which we already are in Christ. Yes working hand in hand with Him toward being a man or woman of God! Whether this is in the workplace, the retirement village, on the golf course, in the surf, at home, in all of our relationships, or in our worship of God in church. Yes working at being that man, woman or child of God, in every aspect of our life! And as we do “workout our salvation,” God is working His purposes through us.

And that's what we see happening before us in Esther. If it were not God's plan, Esther would have done all that she tried to do, but it would have been to no avail. She wouldn't have “won favour with Heggai.” She would have been just another beautiful young woman amongst many, perhaps even hundreds! We know that shamefully, King Solomon had a total of over 1000 wives and concubines.

So to believe that there were perhaps hundreds of young women from whom Esther would be chosen is not unreasonable. Yes the odds were against her. But praise God, that as with both coincidence and chance, odds have nothing to do with Him! And friends, did Esther and Mordecai know what God was going to do amidst all of these things? No, I don't believe so. I believe that at this point, Esther was simply looking to honour Mordecai as the only father that she has ever known. And she does so, as he was moved by God!

Brethren I've said it before, we do not know what impact for Christ our words and actions are going to have in someone else's life, in the hands of God. "The Spirit blows where He wills" the scripture says. But like Esther here, we have to make the most of all Providence from God, for His glory and Kingdom, as we put one foot in front of the other each day! Amen!

Now brothers and sisters, v10 really is a peculiar verse, because we never get an insight into Mordecai's mindset or motivation, for giving Esther this instruction. "Esther had not revealed her nationality or family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so." Forbidden is a very strong word. It means to order to desist. To prohibit. Yes he forbade her to speak of, or to reveal her Jewish heritage. But we are given no reason. We can speculate that he commanded her to secrecy because he thought her ancestry might exclude her from being selected. But we have no reason for doing that, because no such stipulations were made. The women only needed to be young, beautiful, and virgins! And friends, since we are given no reason, we can only come to one conclusion. Again, that he was moved by God!

We will see in coming weeks that contrary to his command to Esther, Mordecai did not conceal his own Jewish ancestry. But for Esther, there was another plan. God's Sovereign plan! In v12-14, we learn of the process through which each woman, (each contestant) would take in their preparation for their one night to please the king sexually. 12 months of beauty treatments! "Six months with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and cosmetics" or expensive spices. Now I'm sure that most women would love to be pampered in such a way for a week, or even a day, let alone a year. And Brethren the thing about this myrrh, in those days, it was often worth more than its weight in gold. In today's prices, one pound of myrrh, would be worth \$31,000. So no expense was spared!! And now Beloved may I suggest, that what we have before us in v11, is a real insight into the man, Mordecai, as a loving caring father! Look at the words. "Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her." I get this image in my mind of him pacing the boundary line of the palace, where the women were kept so that he could maybe just get a glimpse of that one, that he had raised as his own. Just to see that she was okay. Like those images in the old movies of the expectant fathers pacing back and forth outside the door, just waiting to hear the baby's cry. And let's again remember, it would be four years, until Esther would be chosen as Queen!

Beloved as you all know, the role, responsibility and love of a parent never ends. Yes as we all know, there is even a sense to which when our children are all grown up and leave home, we ache and worry about them even more. When we call them but they don't get back to us by a certain time, we think to ourselves, O I hope they're OK. When they are driving home for a visit we worry if they seem to be taking too long. O we know that the Bible tells us not to worry, and also to cast our cares and worries upon God because He loves us. Yes we know all of that, and perhaps most of the time for ourselves at least we can do it. But when it comes to our children, our faith doesn't seem to have very much stretch, does it?

But dear friends nonetheless, praise be to God, that we can indeed cast all of those things upon the Lord. Yes praise God that "all the hairs on our head are all numbered" by our Heavenly Father,

because He has counted every one of them. And when one falls to the ground, such is His intimate love for us, that He even knows that too! John 3:16 "For God so love the world that he gave his only son, that whosoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life." Yes dear friends the self-sacrificial love of a parent, when it's genuine, clearly reflects the heavenly Father's love for his children, His church, yes for us!

I believe that's what we see before us here in Mordecai. Hey there, has anyone seen Esther? Have you spoken to her today? Do you know how she's going? She's OK isn't she? She's not been unwell? I haven't spoken to her for a while. Please let her know that I love her and have been thinking of her and praying for her! We all get that don't we? It never ends, the love of a parent for their child this side of the grave!

V15 "When the turn came for Esther, the girl Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Heggai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the king's harem suggested. And Esther won the favour of everyone who saw her." Brothers and sisters, this is an amazing statement for more than one reason. Firstly, because we have again this phrase, "Esther won the favour." And in this instance, I take it to mean that she was very proactive in being the kind of young woman, (who in her word and her manner of sincerity, the kind of girl that Mordecai raised her to be) that she couldn't help but be liked and loved by all who got to know her! She sought to reflect and honour all that he had taught her. She did all that Heggai advised her in.

Yes she made the most of the situation that she was in, and perhaps if we may read between the lines, most likely she never had a bad word to say about anyone! And this in a beauty pageant, with hundreds of girls no less, where there was no runner up! Yes it's an astounding statement, that "Esther won the favour of everyone who saw her." Heggai. The other eunuchs, the maids, all the other contestants and ultimately the king! But of course this was not only her, but God working in her and through her! V16 "She was taken to king Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign." Yes four years in the making. As Peter Marshall said some years ago, God is not in a hurry. He works in His time not to ours!

V17 "Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favour and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen in Vashti's place." Yes yet again we have this same phrase. "Esther won his favour." And yes she was very beautiful, but no doubt so were all the other women. So this must have gone far beyond just physical appearance, even for the king. For her to "win the favour of people," they had to get to know her, and she them. But as we all know, when we get to know people and they get to know us, it is not all chocolates and roses, because they do get to know us, warts and all. The longer we know people doesn't always endear them to us, and us to them. And again remember, this was a process which had taken four years. And yet according to the scribe, there was no one who had a bad word to say about Esther.

How many people do you know like that? May I suggest that they are few and far between. But again Beloved clearly, we must recognise, the Hand of God was in all of this. God working in her and through her. Even as He does with each of us, faults and all! Romans 8:28 "for God works all things for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose." Well the crown that Vashti despised is placed upon Esther's head. The king had indeed found, "one better than Vashti." Esther would not defy the king, she would acquiesce, she would comply, yes she would obey! Obey- Considered to be even a dirty word in most marriage vows today.

Yes Esther is crowned queen and in v18 there is yet another feast, four years after that one, which set all of these things in motion! But as I close this morning, in line with the commentators thinking, I want us to consider more closely those 12 months of preparations that the women had to go through for their personal encounter with the king. As the saying goes, they can be too much of a good thing. One day or even a week of being pampered yes. But a whole year? Surely this really was something that had to more be endured, than enjoyed. Yes they had to go through this preparation, they had to go through what really was a trial, for their one time meeting with the king, in the hope of being chosen! And for those hundreds of women there were no guarantees. They endured for the slim possibility that they would be the chosen one. But Ian Duguid puts it to us that as Christians, what are we prepared to endure for our King? It is very easy to claim our allegiance to the Saviour when everything is running smoothly. The job or the retirement is going well. Our marriage is solid, the bills are paid, the kids and the grandkids are healthy and the house is paid off. Life's good. Praise God!

But what about when things are not so good? Illness strikes, and the Lord takes your wife or your husband from you. Finances are a real struggle, and you just never seem to be able to make ends meet. There is not peace, but real difficulties within the home. There is even a marriage breakdown, or personally, you are struck by God with cancer or some other life threatening trial. The job is not going so well and the retirement is not turning out to be all that you hoped for! Oh you know all of the theology and all of the Bible truths about the love of God, and the forgiveness for sin that we have in Christ, and that heaven awaits us. But this is now, this is real, and heaven like God's love at times, feels a long way off. Are you still going to praise Him? And what about the personal realities of standing up for Jesus today in a world and society that not only rejects all that we stand for, but is actually outright opposed to Him and us?

Beloved again the question is, What are we prepared to endure for the King? But friends we endure, not in the hope of being chosen. No we endure because we have been chosen! Dear friends remember, that we endure because the hope that we have is living, because Jesus lives! 1 Peter 1:3 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Christ, who in his great mercy has given us new birth into a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Yes in Christ we will endure, not in the hope that we be chosen, but because we have been chosen! Amen!

Let's pray!